

HEALTH HAPPENS IN YOUTH MEDIA

Academic Performance Index, Peacebuilding, Environmental Awareness and Kayaking the Salton Sea

Issue 14: April 25, 2013

[Youth Media for Building Health Communities](#): Each week in the 14 BHC places, young people knit together experiences at school, at work, at home and in their neighborhoods to tell stories about how health happens.



The Academic Performance Index, a formula for measuring school success, is under revision. This debate — between standardized testing, grades, “will to learn,” and other aspects of student learning — creates an opportunity for educators across the state to weigh in. *“I don’t mind taking tests. But If I had a better teacher for pre-calculus I would have done better.”* Youth in Richmond are putting the pressure on teacher performance, while educators propose a more nuanced formula. [Richmond Pulse](#).

Advocates are pushing for the new Academic Performance Index to address a variety of measures, absences and suspension rates, student physical fitness and graduation rates - rather than just test scores. Students from the East Bay speak up about their schools, and the value of testing. *“A friend of mine last year filled in her scantron for the STAR tests with pictures of hearts, Christmas trees and whatever else came to mind.”* [Youth Radio](#).

An annual Report Card gives a letter ranking to the largest school districts in California. The highest grade of any listed Sacramento school district was a D+. The report concluded that schools *“need to place a stronger focus on improving outcomes for their low-income students and students of color.”* [Access Sacramento](#).

Members of Fresno’s public school board heard from students, parents, teachers and their allies during a school discipline workshop this spring. Youth reporters from The Know spoke with supporters and filmed the rally afterward, which amassed 200 people. The message was resounding: restorative justice is the answer to keeping students in school, and learning. *“Restorative justice is a system that allows students to have a voice.”* [The Know](#).

While suspension rates have increased across the board for all racial groups, students of color are still more likely to be suspending than their white peers. *“Positive intervention is a win-win for students and schools. They address student needs, create safe learning environments and lead to increased graduation rates.”* Read reflections on this data from youth and advocates, and their suggestions for change. [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

Hundreds of students and parents showed up for the launch of the “Every Student Matters” (ESM) campaign at Cesar Chavez Park in Long Beach. It began with the collection of over 1,700 surveys from Long Beach school students around school climate. But the real information comes straight from the mouths of young people, who

spoke about restorative justice, as well as the counter-productiveness of trivial suspensions. *“No one had sat down with me until the final discipline action where I was told I may have to go to Saturday school and go to court to pay a fine.”* [Voicewaves](#).

Just one suspension can increase a teen’s likelihood of dropping out of high school by 16%. In particular, the rate African American middle school students who have been suspended at least once has doubled since the 1970s, suggesting that secondary school discipline may have developed a racial bias. *“Schools across the United States would most likely benefit greatly from trying to keep even their most difficult students in school rather than suspending them.”* [Access Sacramento](#).

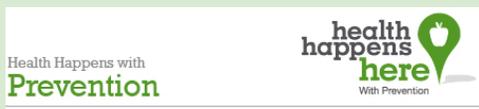
Richmond students reflect on the teachers who changed their lives. *“He taught me how to be an independent person and challenged me in ways that helped me develop the strong work ethic I have today.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).

Joshua Clayton flunked grades in elementary school, but in 10th grade, something happened. He got inspired to make art, succeed in classes, and had dreams about working at Pixar. *“I was just four credits away from a diploma when my mom sent me out of state to live with my grandma. I never graduated.”* Now Joshua juggles between working and getting a GED. [Youth Radio](#).

Students with Aja Project use photography to explore how school influences their social, physical and mental health. Their photo essays identify key health influences, highlighting issues such as having more nature on campus, the benefits of diversity, and the importance of coaches to youth development. [Speak City Heights](#).

Keeping up with a high school senior curriculum leaves little time for the complicated process of applying for college financial aid. Then there are the fees: applications for fee waivers, an application to appeal a denied fee waiver. A high school senior’s encounter with the FAFSA leaves her bitter about her prospects. *“Should students be reviewed and looked into closely, to know what they truly work for, or should they simply be given aid because of the financial need shown in their application?”* [The Know](#).

Since the Sandy Hook shootings in December, many have suggested requiring teachers to report students they consider to be potentially dangerous. Mental health advocates disagree on whether school is the right place for youth to share their mental struggles. *“In a ‘utopian’ world, yes, I would love to say that educators can be there, identifying with the right resources if people are at risk... I just don’t think we’re there yet.”* [Youth Radio](#).



Should we question an early amendment of the United States Constitution? A young person in Oakland has an opinion: *“America needs to get up and start becoming the change that people all around the world see it as. It*

needs to live up to its name.” [Oakland Globe](#).

A man recollects his actions after a fatal mistake. *“This didn’t need to happen.”* This Public Service Announcement on gun violence was created by students at the Media Arts Center’s [Teen Producers Project](#).

As the final installment in its Season for Nonviolence series, Voicewaves profiles the Homeland Cultural Center, the sole Long Beach Parks & Recreation center that centers on cultural and multi-ethnic arts and programming. *“It has saved a number of people. Because people go into gangs and illegal activity that get them in trouble because they have nothing else to do. Here, you don’t feel disrespected. You feel part of a family.”* [Voicewaves](#).

Katebah Al-Olefi, 14, a student at Life Academy in Oakland, was inspired to do something in response to incidences of violence upon her classmates and their families. *“Let’s not stop the violence. Let’s build peace.”* [Oakland Globe](#).

Enforcement issues and education barriers are the biggest problems facing the undocumented community in Long Beach, according to community leaders at a forum on immigration reform last week. *“I’ve seen my students hit a wall. They’re ready to succeed, to advance.”* [Voicewaves](#).

Some wearing both ‘Obama 2012’ t-shirts and carrying signs reading *“No human being is ‘illegal’”* and *“Stop the raids, Obama: Please don’t separate me from my parents,”* protesters gathered March 23rd for the March for Immigration Reform in Coachella. See the slideshow with music on [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Young people who have gotten into trouble with the law face new setbacks when they apply for jobs and are asked whether they have ever committed a crime. “Ban the Box” laws in some states forbid employers from asking about an applicant’s criminal record in the initial interview. *“You can’t really hold a person’s past against them because the person could be different.”* [Youth Radio](#).

Creating safe places for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning youth within communities of color was the aim of a recent forum in Boyle Heights. *“Policy improvements either at the local or national level cannot happen without the active support of our community.”* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

You don’t have to be gay or even a victim of discrimination to sympathize with someone being judged unfairly for something they have no control over. This story comes from a reporter who sees parallels between her immigrant family and her gay friends. *“The fight for marriage equality and gay rights is not just about gay people gaining the right to sign a legal document of matrimony. It’s about fighting for things that are much bigger — the right to love, free expression and an end to discrimination in all its forms.”* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Mid-City CAN, a community-based youth leadership organization, wants to harness the power of young people to spread the word: trending healthy behaviors, social networking, and social media combine to form a powerful

force in making change. *“Invest in young people as activists on health issues and you may get a quadruple bottom line: a single investment that brings four times the impact.”* [Speak City Heights](#).

A Center for Disease Control (CDC) study shows that American youth are still eating too much fast food, and in particular that young-adult African American populations have growing obesity rates. A young man in Oakland grew up on fast food, with a busy, single mother. He tries harder these days to eat healthfully but struggles to find time, or a ride, to the store. *“If I smoke weed and get the munchies, I’m not going to be thinking about what’s the healthiest choice I can make.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).



Creek Week, a community-driven clean up of Sacramento’s urban waterways attracted hundreds of motivated volunteers. *“Showing the community the urban watersheds, what we do to them, and how beautiful they should be.”* [Access Sacramento](#).

Do young people neglect the environment because we are more distracted than previous generations? Do computers keep us from noticing and appreciating nature? *“Fresno’s geography cannot be changed but what Fresno’s community is doing can be improved.”* [The Know](#).

“Without water, there is no life. Wasting water is wasting life.” This artful PSA was submitted to the Waste No Water film festival by the [Teen Producers Project](#) at the Media Arts Center San Diego.

We don’t always associate health with transportation, but there is a powerful connection to be made. Pollution, stress from not being able to get places, unsafe bike paths, dimly lit or no sidewalks — these are all ways that transportation can affect our health. *“We spend a lot of time and energy opening a health care clinic but then the people who need health care the most cannot get there.”* [WeCed](#).

Los Angeles Mayoral candidate Wendy Greuel met with Boyle Heights Beat youth reporters at the Hollenbeck Police Station on Saturday to discuss issues that are important to her campaign as well as to the Boyle Heights community. Among the topics discussed were education, police officers, housing, and pollution. *“You can’t have a world-class city, without a world-class education,”* Greuel told the young reporters. [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

Jael Myrick’s appointment to the Richmond City Council brought a fitting end to a city election cycle dominated by insider politics and affiliations. The charismatic 27 year-old secured his seat while staying above the fray of Richmond’s combative politics — in fact, he is aligned with neither of the two political camps. *“I’ve never had a need for cliques.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).

The Salton Sea, California's largest lake, is the product of high flooding from the Colorado River flowing into the Imperial Valley in 1907. Now it is known more for dead fish and bad odor than the emerald waters that once drew multitudes of tourists to its shores. A young reporter goes kayaking with elected officials who are working to save the sea and improve the smell for nearby residents. *"After being pushed into the water with my paddle, kayak rocking side to side, I felt a rush of excitement."* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).



This wouldn't be a newsletter of youth voices if everything they said fit neatly into our agenda. On that note... Sal Algaba is a plumber, but he didn't always know that was what he wanted to do. It took years before he found his way into the trade. He says, *"You have to start at fast food places or retail. Yes it's hard work and yes it's demanding work, physically and mentally at times, but that's how you learn responsibility."* [Youth Radio](#).

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