

## HEALTH HAPPENS IN YOUTH MEDIA

**School bus cuts, Latino graduation rates soar, living with a mom with diabetes, and trash as art**

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[Youth Media for Building Healthy 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.



Four pieces of legislation are on the table which, if passed, would revamp the state's education system. Districts would see increased funding, suspension reform, and more school counselors. Community leaders are drumming up support for the bills, but ultimately state legislators will decide. Youth and community members in Long Beach share what they think on [Voicewaves](#).

Young people in Richmond, a city with high levels of poverty and crime, face a lot on a day-to-day basis. A De Anza High School student describes the school health center as a place where young people can get information and moral support. "*The health center has been our place to vent and let out all our worries.*" [Richmond Pulse](#).

If the purpose of discipline is to "scare them straight," the tactic of suspension has failed. Research shows that even one suspension during freshman year increases the student's chance of dropping out or being expelled. Explore the infographic on [Youth Radio](#).

The Feed to Achieve Act (Senate Bill 663) would fund free breakfast and lunch at schools, by adding private donations to public funds. After state delegate Ray Canterbury's (R-West Virginia) responded to the bill by saying, "It would be a good idea...if kids work for their lunches," [The Know](#) asked young people what they thought of his suggestion.

High school student Guadalupe Castro has worked since he was ten years old, helping his family clean floors in the evenings after school. Young people who work and go to school say their education suffers, a unfortunate fact for students who feel compelled to help their families out. "*I would get home tired, like really tired, and I would finish half my homework. Then while I was doing homework, I would fall asleep out of exhaustion.*" [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

Next fall, when school buses will be cut from Long Beach school budgets, public transportation will be the only way to school for many middle and high school students, even while the number of city bus lines serving Long Beach residents has shrunk, due to budget cuts. Buses fly by one after the other, each one too full to pick up more passengers, and students arriving late go to detention. "*Every now and then I have to take the bus, which never fails to get me to school late.*" [Voicewaves](#).

In an emergency board meeting, the Merced High School District voted to reinstate morning bus service for students who live within five miles of their schools, after these routes were cut last year. 'Walk Your Talk,' a coalition of concerned parents, students and community members, put pressure on the school board to make this change. See the new routes on [We'Ced](#).

Teachers can cite any one of a long list of reasons for suspending students. Somewhere in that list is: "disruption of school activities or willfully defying the authority of school personnel." That rule, long criticized as being overly broad and resulting in unwarranted suspensions, has been eliminated from the L.A. Unified School District's list of justified suspensions, [Youth Radio](#) reports. What do students think about harsh punishments for minor offenses? Watch [The Detention Chronicles](#).

This generation of students have marked an achievement for Latinos in the United States. Seven in 10 Hispanic students who graduated from high school in 2012 continued onto college. At the same time, an analysis found that the dropout rate among Latinos fell by half in the last ten years. "*You become an example to follow. I take it as a blessing.*" [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

School staff and parents with children in Fresno public schools wonder if enough is being done to protect their kids against a tragedy like the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings. Fresno high schools have several campus safety officials on duty, but an Edison High student thinks warning signs are being ignored. [The Know](#).

Librarians in Sacramento may soon face unemployment. A recent school board meeting confirmed disturbing news: some districts are reducing or discontinuing school services, and library services could be one of those. Foothill High School's library staff are concerned for students. "*I honestly believe that the school district is looking to save money, and in the long-run they are cutting off their nose to spite their face.*" [Access Sacramento](#).

Producer and Black-Eyed Peas musician Will.i.am holds Boyle Heights close to his heart: it's the neighborhood where he was raised, where only 16 percent of residents over the last 25 years graduated, and only three percent have a bachelor's degree. The i.am.College program is aiming to send 95 percent of enrollees to college, by cultivating a desire to learn through international travel and technological competence. "*It's all about building the human capital in Boyle Heights.*" [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

District school board members voted on May 8 to implement restorative justice practices in several Fresno schools. Members of SUCCESS (Students United to Create a Climate of Engagement, Support and Safety) having been promoting restorative justice, and can be partly credited with the decision. Watch the resolution, the vote, and remarks from SUCCESS youth -- and see what the future holds for restorative justice in Fresno, on [The Know](#).

Childhood obesity is a leading health problem in many American communities. People often blame fast-food restaurants such as McDonalds for unhealthy eating habits. Why do parents continue to feed their children high sugar, high fat food? A Fresno youth agrees with legislators proposing a soda tax, that even if parents aren't feeding their kids responsibly, that laws can play a role in child health. *"We have laws against leaving a loaded weapon with our children, why should food be any different?"* [The Know](#).

It has been over a year since Long Beach Unified School District cut health classes out of high schools. *"Soon after health classes were cut, there was a small rise in STD rates, such as Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and early Syphilis, in Long Beach among teens."* [Voicewaves](#).

When someone in your family is diagnosed, diabetes doesn't just require a few lifestyle "changes" — it calls for a whole new lifestyle. *"Us being healthier and eating together provides a really strong support group for my mom."* [Access Sacramento](#).

Healthcare reform could mean that young people growing up today in the Eastern Coachella Valley – the unincorporated rural communities of southern Riverside County — don't need to go without health insurance anymore. A reporter looks at the ways that the Affordable Care Act could save families from driving a hundred miles across the border, to the City of Mexicali, to get care from a doctor. *"As a child, I thought those trips to Mexicali to visit the doctor were the only way – it was just what people did — until later on in my youth, when my father got a job."* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Many teens share the perception that healthy food costs more and tastes bland. This view is especially strong in Long Beach, where fast food joints line the streets directly across from schools. But there are easy ways to make your eating healthier, and it doesn't have to be difficult, expensive, or bland. *"To make it a little healthier, one can order a drink like horchata instead of ordering a soda."* [Voicewaves](#).

Claudia Guevara was recently sworn in as a member of the Mecca Community Council, continuing her family's tradition of making a difference in the unincorporated community they call home. Joining the Council gives her a chance to advise the Riverside County Board of Supervisors on a wide variety of community concerns. *"Since people already tell me about the problems they see in Mecca, now they can go to the council and express them there, knowing that we are there to listen to them."* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Long Beach police raided an impromptu homeless encampment — people seeking shelter from the rain — outside the courthouse, giving out citations and a warning that the next time there would be arrests. Homeless persons interviewed said it was no coincidence that they were evicted the day before the city was hosting the Grand Prix, and that the uptick in raids during this time has happened in prior years, to hide the city's significant homelessness problem. *"They lined us up and told us we were all criminals."* [Voicewaves](#).

A thirteen year-old new resident of Mountain View Estates, a new mobile home park that replaced the uninhabitable Duroville, says he's happy that he can now play on a soccer field and swings near his house. *"I couldn't do that at Duroville because of the dogs running around and biting us."* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Los Angeles voters will soon vote on three competing medical marijuana ballot measures. The debate centers on whether or not "pot shops" remain operational, and to what extent they are regulated and taxed. *"The criminal enforcement of drug laws [is] expensive, and money could be better spent elsewhere."* The debate thrives in Boyle Heights, around its own pot dispensary, 4THC. [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

Walk Sacramento is an advocacy group working to make the city more safe for pedestrians. Last year, a resident was killed at the intersection of 58th and Fruitridge, and community members are strategizing how to get a crosswalk and a traffic light installed soon. *"What community members are looking for is a full traffic signal at the intersection to provide safe crossing."* [Access Sacramento](#).

Youth at Granada High School in Planada, California, produced a rap audio slideshow about their community in Merced County. *"A small little village just holding tight."* [Venice Arts](#)

Building Healthy Communities Long Beach showcased a collection of art made with trash. Local artists used stuff they found on the street in their neighborhood to create a unique show. "What you find in the community can tell a lot about the residents." [Voicewaves](#).

An urban garden that blossomed on an empty lot behind a medical center in Boyle Heights, Proyecto Jardín hides in the midst of freeways and city noise. The *jardín* offers a chance for community members to learn about and work in alternative food systems, by growing their own organic produce. *"Growing food at Proyecto Jardín is about growing collective action...food is a communal experience from seed to tortilla."* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).



**This wouldn't be a newsletter of youth voices if everything they said fit neatly into our agenda. On that note...** The Challenger division of Coachella Little League aims to teach mentally and physically disabled youth that playing sports is possible. Over twenty young people, ages 11 to 23, are in the program, with disabilities including autism, Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy. The division started in 2010 and is the only one in the Coachella Valley. *"For these kids, this is their Friday night, getting together on a Friday night with their friends outside of school and they play baseball."* [Coachella Unincorporated](http://coachellaunincorporated.com).

Visit <http://ymbhc.wordpress.com/> for more youth perspectives on community health.