

Youth Action Network Newsletter

October 2007

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Hey Amy!

This newsletter is aimed at informing Austin's community of youth of issues such as school development and updates on efforts to solve problems that affect us. We want to encourage involvement in the community by inviting members to take action and represent!

In this issue, you can find out how exciting the Stand Up Rally was, what the Stand Up clubs are doing, new information on High School Redesign, updates on the Youth Council, and upcoming events such as the Community Conversations on the Achievement Gap.

Thanks Gang,
The YAN Squad

High School Redesign

Tyler Avey and Tex Russell

As you may well know, AISD has kicked off the new school year with a comprehensive high school redesign plan. This new school plan was developed and pushed into action by Dr. Pat Forgione, the district superintendent. He cites an alarming amount of dropouts and students not realizing their potential as the reasons why this reform is necessary.

So exactly what changes have the high schools made? Johnston, LBJ, Reagan, Travis have all implemented the "First Things First" program which utilizes Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs) student advisory, new teaching tools, block schedule, more extensive staff development, and a family advocacy program. The Smaller Learning Communities, will divide students into a groups based on their preferred career path.

The changes for Austin, Anderson, Bowie, Crockett, and McCallum high will include a Freshman Academy, student advisory, and targeted instructional improvement for underperforming students. These schools are planning to switch to Smaller Learning Communities, in the near future, besides McCallum where it has already been put in place.

Community Conversations on the Achievement Gap

Ruth Goodson and Matt Brodnax

AISD, The E3 Alliance, and Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY) are gathering community members from across Austin to discuss the ever-important issue of the Achievement Gap. There will be three sessions starting on October 18th, and anyone who can come to participate should!

Here's what will happen:

The 1st session, on October 18th, will be very relaxed. It will allow people to get to know each other, eat, and learn more about what the achievement gap is, and how it affects us. After that everyone will break into small groups of about ten, and discuss more intimately the issue at hand.

During the 2nd session, on October 25th, the same groups as before will get together, but this time they will be deciding collectively what the best plan of action to close the achievement gap is.

And finally, the 3rd session on November 1st, will

McCallum is also considering a Senior Year Project program.

Lanier and Akins will apply a Freshman Academy to their system along with block scheduling. Akins will use the SLCs including a New Tech High program. Lanier on the other hand, will implement an instructional program focused on English Language Learners.

AISD has clearly shown it's commitment to using innovation to combat the failures of the past system. Many students have voiced displeasure for the new implementations, complaining that Freshman year is too early to pick a career, and the academies will divide the school. This program has worked wonders in Kansas City and Houston, but will it work in Austin? There are still many questions that need to be answered.

Make your voices heard, contact Michelle Powers at mpowers@austinvoices.org and express your thoughts and feelings on this issue.

Stand Up Club Update

Maya Gaster

How are youth in Austin getting involved in improving their educational experiences? Austin Voices received a grant for the '06-'07 school year from the Bill and Melinda Gate's Foundation as a part of the Stand Up Campaign, to encourage youth to organize in order to combat issues in their high schools. In several Austin, Texas high schools including Reagan, Lanier, LBJ, LASA, Akins, and Johnston, Stand Up Clubs were created to serve this purpose. The Stand Up Rally, previously advertised in this newsletter, was held by Austin Voices in September as the kick-off event for the Clubs for this '07-'08 school year. In average, 15-20 students attend the Stand Up Clubs' weekly meetings during lunch at each school to discuss the issues they feel are important in their particular schools. For example, last year at Lanier High School, the students raised awareness about a teacher that was later fired for being racist in the classroom. At Reagan High School, the Stand Up Club organized a Unity Rally to promote positive relationships between different groups of students there and Johnston High School held a TAKS Rally to encourage diligence in studying for the TAKS test. This year's goals for Stand Up Clubs across Austin include improving student attendance, student-to-student and student-to-adult relations and dialogue, and college readiness.

get all the groups back together to report their findings. This is a chance for you to see AISD take the information given and implement it into Austin's schools!!

We would love to see you there. This is your chance to be heard and help change everyone's education for the better. So come see us at Reagan High School on October 18th from 6-8:30 (registration starts at 5:30) in the cafeteria!

There will be FREE food, beverages, and childcare available! Spanish translators will be there to help! If you would like to come or need more information call (512) 450-1880 or email Tim Eubanks at teubanks@austinvoices.org.

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!!!

Youth Council Update

Daisy Lanier

For those of you who didn't catch the last issue of the YAN, the city of Austin now has it's first ever Youth Council! Members of the community recognized the lack of youth representation in decisions based on education and other topics concerning youth, and selected representatives from Austin area schools to address these issues. The Youth Council just had a meeting this Monday, October 1st, and the results were promising. At our last meeting we started discussing the most pressing issues that need to be addressed in Austin schools, and started narrowing down topics based on votes. At the most recent meeting, the votes were tallied and three topics rose to the top. As a council, we intend to start work on improving and/or establishing a better relationship between youth and authority, tackling issues within the schools themselves, such as classroom issues with the quality of educators and lack of funding in some schools, as well as a lack of preparation for college and/or careers. We divided the council into three groups, to look more closely at who is involved in these issues currently. Overall, some combination of these entities are involved; the school board, the city, the county, and non-profit organizations. We decided that ideally, we would like to see more involvement and concern on all of these levels on these prominent issues that concern youth while trying to receive a quality education.



Austin Voices 2nd Annual Stand Up Rally

by Venny Nunez and Paul Dennis

On September 9th, Austin Voices hosted its Second Annual Stand-Up Rally at Fiesta Gardens. The rally began at 3 PM, and by the time it ended, the audience had been rocked by five talented artists, and many more poets and speakers. AISD superintendent Pat Forgione and councilwoman Donna Howard were in attendance, as well as the honorable judge John Vasquez. Austin Voices alumni Ariel Kay emceed the event, and it was put together in large by Daniel Garza, also known as C-Now.

Sweet Leaf Tea, American Youthworks, Communities in Schools, and a number of other groups sponsored the event. One of the most popular parts of the rally was the art booth, where many of the attendees were given recycled materials to create their own masterpieces. There were also many kids making murals on the sidewalk with chalk, which was absolutely astounding. The decorations and trim were put together by the hard-working members of the Austin Voices class and various volunteers from Garza High School.

The merchandising booth was also a rousing success, with the 2007 AV Student Planner selling like hotcakes. There were t-shirts, buttons, stickers, and various other items for sale as well. All proceeds went to Austin Voices for Education and Youth. Even though the heat was almost unbearable, the determined crowd stuck it out the whole way through. All of the artists and poets that strutted their stuff were greeted by uproarious cheers and applause, and the Rally was another great success!

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