

Overview

Philadelphia Student Union is a youth led organization that was established in 1995.

Mission

“The Philadelphia Student Union exists to build the power of young people to demand a high quality education in the Philadelphia public school system. We are a youth led organization and we make positive changes in the short term by learning how to organize to build power. We also work toward becoming life-long learners and leaders who can bring diverse groups of people together to address the problems that our communities face.” – PSU website



Constituency

- Primarily African American youth, ages 13-25
- LGBTQ
- Formerly incarcerated

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Philadelphia

- **Multigenerational Poverty**
35.8% of children under 18 live below the poverty line, with rates highest in African American districts.
- **Housing**
Including a lack of access to quality housing and issues of gentrification.
- **Neighborhood Safety**
Including exposure to gun violence and peer-to-peer violence.
- **Unemployment**
Among both parents and youth.
- **Lack of Access to Quality Food**
- **Limited Access to High Quality Education & Poor Physical Condition of Schools**
- **Poor Quality & Inaccessible Daycare & Pre-K**

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Philadelphia

13.8%

of African American babies were **low birth weight**, compared to 10.9% of all births.¹



Despite steady declines among children 0-5 with **elevated blood lead levels** (5 mg/dl), African American children make up close to half (44%) of the cases.¹

74.9%

of children (19-35 months) have completed the recommended **vaccination** schedule.¹



18.7% of births are to African American mothers who received late (after 3rd trimester) or no **prenatal care**.¹

20.5%

of children ages 5-18 have a BMI ≥ the 95th percentile for their age and gender group. Black girls and Latino boys were disproportionately more likely to be **obese**. Predominantly Black planning districts have some of the highest obesity prevalence.¹



The child **asthma hospitalization** rate for all children under 18 is 1,001 per 100,000, more than doubling from 2000 to 2010, and was highest among African American children (1,430 per 100,000).¹

PSU Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Schools Not Prisons**—public education campaign that shifted funding from prison/jails to keeping children in schools (early childhood education—universal preschool; school wellness—school nurse and counselor).

“Ensuring that each school will have a full-time nurse and a full-time counselor...is a big deal because in 2013 Philadelphia lost two children; one 11-year-old because of an asthma attack in his school when there was no nurse, and then another little boy who collapsed on the playground...so being able to have a full-time nurse at school is a big deal.” – Hiram Rivera

- **Restorative Justice (including elementary school justice)**—amended school discipline codes, including a moratorium on all suspensions for kindergarteners.
- **Specialized Youth Training for School Police**—to prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system.

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

• School Reform

Calling for more education resources to schools with the highest need, such as more teachers, counselors, nurses; school police accountability.

• Criminal Justice System Reform

Including the elimination of cash bail, which disproportionately affects poorer individuals.



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

- **Youth Voices in Media for Social Change**—Through the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter) and their independent youth radio show On Blast, PSU centers the voices of young people who are impacted by local policy decisions:

“On Blast is an organizing tool for the Philadelphia Student Union. We know that students have deep analysis about their schools and communities. We know that young people's voices need to be heard before real structural change can take place in our public schools. At On Blast, we choose subject matter that amplifies the voices of those not being heard—especially young people—and those who are routinely hurt and misrepresented by the dominant media. We are using media to organize for the human right to a high quality public education for all students.” – On Blast website

Allies Working on Children’s Health

- Youth United for Change (Philadelphia, PA) <https://www.youthunitedforchange.org/>
- Get Hype Philly! (Philadelphia, PA) <http://gethypephilly.org/>
- Alliance for Education of Justice (Washington, DC) <https://www.facebook.com/4EdJustice/>
- Journey for Justice Coalition (Chicago, IL) <https://www.j4jalliance.com/>
- Dignity in Schools (Nationwide) <http://www.dignityinschools.org/>
- The Movement for Black Lives, Education Policy (Nationwide) <https://policy.m4bl.org/>



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