

As seen in



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NOTEBOOK

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High school students speak on the ideal teacher

By: Hoa Moc, Jessica Robinson, Monique Lee, Felicia Fullard, Arleatha Newton, Sarah Simms, Daniel Alicea, and Vicky Gonzalez with Paul Downie, Tina Enagbare and Catie Cavanaugh

From June 30th until August 8th, 2003, the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia (UCCP) at Temple University sponsored a six-week Summer Academy entitled "Youth

VOICES in Education."

Eighty youth

from across

Philadelphia, with

the support of over a dozen college

students, worked to identify and address issues that directly impact their experiences in schools.

"What can be done to improve Philadelphia High Schools for students, families and communities?"

As a part of a survey we designed and conducted during the summer of 2003 to answer this question, we asked 239 youth from a total of 55 Philadelphia high schools what the ideal teacher is. Our survey results showed that:

- 85% said the ideal teacher must be knowledgeable about the subject they are teaching.

- 84% said he or she must have all the degrees that are needed for the subject they are teaching.

- 80% said the ideal teacher must prepare students with the education they need for the future.

Some of the characteristics that students say they want teachers to have are: organization, patience, and a willingness to create lesson plans that are new and exciting.

Some students say that they have considered dropping out because of a lack of some of these qualities. Of the students we surveyed who considered dropping out, two-thirds said it was because school was boring; 24% said it was because teachers weren't supportive.

As we were analyzing our survey data, many VOICES participants expressed their own frustrations with teachers. Most of us agreed that many of our teachers are disorganized. Other frustrations include boring in-class activities and times when teachers ignore students.

With these frustrations in mind, we came up with our own list of ideal qualities that we want in a teacher.

We are looking for a higher level of dedication, where teachers see teaching as more than just a job.

Some VOICES participants don't just want to learn from their teachers, they want them to be their friends. They want them to be people that they can come and talk to.

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**IMPROVING
TEACHER
QUALITY**



Summer Academy participants from the American Street Youth Opportunity Center speak out at a Youth VOICES forum held in August at Temple University. Students voiced opinions on educational issues, including teacher quality, school safety and inadequate extra-curricular opportunities. Pictured, from left: Christina Santiago, Jessica Santiago, Luis Pagan, Abiacer Leon.

High school students speak on the ideal teacher *(continued)*

“The worst thing a teacher can do is not care,” says Gary Browne, a senior at Benjamin Franklin High School.

Our peers in the VOICES program held a brainstorming session to generate ideas for improving teacher performance. Proposals included:

- Organizing opportunities for students and teachers to come together to talk about problems in schools,
- Allowing students to communicate with teachers about the ways they would like to be taught,
- Requiring that teachers take a qualifying exam on their material at the beginning of every school year,
- Having a group of students present issues they are having with teachers at a meeting of the School Reform Commission,
- Organizing students to facilitate workshops for teachers that will encourage each group to learn from the other, and
- Keeping a record of complaints about individual teachers.

We recognize that there are many different strategies for building the coalitions necessary to see some of our ideas put into action.

Recently, we have been focusing on making movies that can be used as catalysts for creating change. Our films portray the challenges youth face in their schools and communities. Over the past year, we have made movies about peer pressure, gang conflict, inadequate school environments and the pressures that lead high school students to consider dropping out.

We plan to use our films to start a dialogue between students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members. We believe our movies are important because they show what is real.

“Teachers and principals need to see our films because, as it is, they don’t know us,” explains Browne. “They don’t live in our neighborhoods. Until they know us and what we really need, they are not going to be able to teach us.”

We know that students often feel like they can’t make a change on their own. We believe that students need to create alliances with people in power. Our ideas will never be heard as long as we allow adults to silence our perspective. At the same time, our experience in VOICES has taught us that collaborating with adults who support our objectives increases our potential for success.

*To get involved with VOICES or to see their films,
contact Catie Cavanaugh at catiec@temple.edu or 215-204-6185.*
