Safe and Supportive Schools
Engagement | Safety | Environment

Community Spotlight – Michigan

"Meaningful Student Involvement" is the mantra of Michigan's S3 initiative on engaging students in their school reform effort. Survey data from the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (MiPHY) identified students ***wanting*** to increase their voice in their schools. They were heard! In August 2012, Michigan S3 partnered with the Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor, MI, to facilitate a two-day institute – **Student Engagement in School Reform** – where 6 high school teams of youth and school staff, along with Neutral Zone advisors and youth, conducted team building exercises and small group work to achieve the following goals:

- Understand and explore school reform and the role of students;
- Learn skills and organizational strategies that support development and initiation of student engagement;
- Establish a Youth Advisory Council [YAC] (students and adult advisors) at each school and make plans for implementing a participatory research project around a school reform issue that teams can implement back at their home school district.

"I'm so glad our school got this grant! If it wasn't for S3, I would have never had the chance to help my school get better."

-YAC Student

Each high school sent teams of 6-10 students and 2 school staff/adult advisors. The institute was a success! As a result of these efforts, students are not only involved in school reform, but are contributing to policy decisions, communicating positive school change to the community, and building positive relationships with adults. One of the Youth Advisory Councils took on staff wellness. They set up a walking club and other wellness activities (Zumba) and healthy eating initiatives for teachers. At first staff was resistant, but now they have great buy in and participation from all!

What do the data say?

- 97% of students who participated in the institute were excited to participate in a leadership role and were motivated to engage other students in school reform efforts.

What are the Next Steps?

A follow-up Youth Summit was held in February 2013 for the Youth Advisory Councils. The agenda was driven by the YACs and the Neutral Zone modeled youth-adult partnership best practice by ensuring youth facilitated many of the activities and sessions. The excitement is also spreading to other S3 schools… the team is planning another training this summer for an additional 6-8 schools, and will continue adding schools until all are trained.

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