



# SYA CAT

Sacramento Youth Alliance  
Community Action Team

An initiative of the Alliance for  
Education Solutions

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sacramento Youth Town Hall, October 14, 2017

### A Report to The Sacramento City Council

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#### OVERVIEW

On October 14, 2017, youth from across Sacramento gathered at the Robertson Community Center to stand up, speak out and connect to one another on issues affecting them at the 2nd Sacramento Youth Town Hall. This youth-led event was organized by [Sacramento Youth Alliance Community Action Team](#) (SYA CAT), an initiative of [The Alliance for Education Solutions](#) and a member of the national [Opportunity Youth United Network](#), and facilitated by SYA and college students from [the Cross Cultural Leadership Center at Chico State](#).

This diverse group of over fifty young people participated in youth-led conversations about the programs that have shaped them, and the additional resources and supports needed in these programs and in their communities to be successful in the future. Concurrently, the group of adult allies who accompanied the youth to the event held separate conversations about how best to support and empower youth across the city through the services they provide.

Young people then joined Mayor Darrell Steinberg and City Councilmembers Jay Schenirer and Eric Guerra in a speaking circle. Prompted by the small group discussions, they shared their stories, challenges, and suggestions on how to ensure Sacramento meets the needs of all its young people.

#### THE STATUS OF YOUTH IN SACRAMENTO

The first activity consisted of an icebreaker which asked the youth to express their opinions on the status of youth in Sacramento. Young people were open and passionate about sharing their views and had powerful insights and experiences to share with one another.

Participants were asked to be **“Be Here be now, Speak with Good Purpose, Be Courageous and Brave!”** They were then given a series of statements and chose a corner of the room where they either “Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed” with each statement.

## Statements:

- I am proud to be from Sacramento.
- I have access to the resources that will help me be successful.
- I have strong positive role models in my community.
- Sacramento City Council values my opinion as a youth in this community.
- I come from a neighborhood where there is no violence.
- I feel safe in my community.

## Takeaways:

- Most young people agreed they are proud to be from Sacramento although a handful disagreed.
- About half of the youth agreed they have access to the resources they needed in their communities.

Those who disagreed felt

their schools and communities were not asking young people what they needed, but were instead making decisions based on adult determinations of what youth needs were.

- Almost all the young people agreed they did have positive role models in their communities, most of whom were the adults running programs they were a part of. However, many said there were not enough programs or adult mentors for all their peers and that more were needed.
- **Almost all youth disagreed or strongly disagreed that issues affecting them have been prioritized by City Council. They also said they felt the city did not do a very good job communicating with young people the work they were doing or opportunities to get engaged or involved.** (Most youth heard about the Town Hall through social media or through programs that had been notified.) **Also, most youth felt adults would listen well at events, such as the Town Hall, but rarely followed up on what they heard or on what youth suggested.**
- Most youth disagreed that they lived in a neighborhood where there was not violence. Almost all youth had seen or experienced violence in their communities. Youth felt better communication is needed between police and young people.
- Most youth did not feel they came from safe communities.



*"I KNOW WE HEAR A LOT THAT WE ARE THE FUTURE;  
BUT I THINK WE ARE MORE THAT THE FUTURE;  
WE CAN DO STUFF RIGHT NOW, WE'RE THE PRESENT!"*

Nayzak Wali-Ali,  
Sacramento Youth Commission Member

## YOUTH-LED CONVERSATIONS

Small group discussions encouraged youth to develop creative solutions to issues affecting themselves and their communities. Six issue areas were discussed:

## 1. Gang Violence/Culture of Violence

Youth in this group focused on increasing opportunity for current and potential gang members and discussed ways to offer support for communities most affected by a culture of violence.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Gangs and the culture of violence stem from lack of opportunity, the need for a community to fulfill a sense of belonging, and a lack of social, economic, and educational support for those affected.
- Suggested solutions:
  - Addressing this issue will require different strategies including: mentorship, school programs, extracurricular opportunities, and a citywide effort to support communities most affected by gang violence.
  - Adults need to work with affected youth to determine what types of programs youth want and need in communities with gang issues.
  - Police and youth need to work together to build positive rather than antagonistic relationships.

## 2. Transportation

Youth in this group discussed the importance of safety, security, and availability of affordable transportation for their peers and families.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Transportation needs to be better supported financially by the city, such as providing free Regional Transit passes to students receiving free and reduced lunch.
  - This issue needs to be addressed not only by government, but by schools and the community at large.
  - Accessible and safe transportation will help youth be successful in their education and professional lives.
- Suggested solutions
  - Free bus passes for youth.
  - Special buses for students only.

## 3. Homeless and Foster Youth

Youth in this group emphasized the need for safe and nonjudgmental places homeless and foster youth can utilize.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Homeless and foster youth can contribute to our Sacramento community, but also need support of peers and adult allies.
  - Homeless and foster youth need safe spaces to go.
- Suggested solutions:

- Having a central space youth could go would provide a sense of community and safety for homeless and foster youth who need it.
- This center should be a comfortable, inviting space and provide mentors and career and personal development opportunities.

## 4. School Programs

Youth in this group discussed the need for pre-existing school programs to be expanded and replicated to other schools with less resources.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Students need support throughout the entirety of the educational process and into the afterschool hours.
- Suggested solutions:
  - Tailoring programs to meet students' needs at all stages of development will increase educational effectiveness, and a sense of community.
  - Students also require attentive teachers, active mentors, and supportive peers to be successful, which should always be emphasized in school and afterschool programs. (Positive and supportive relationships between young people and the adults who work in schools and afterschool programs are essential for youth to thrive.)

## 5. Job Skills

Youth in this group focused on the need for workforce development skills to provide youth opportunities to explore careers in an inclusive way.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Youth need access to resources like job shadowing, interview and resume-building development, and internships.
  - These programs not only set youth up for success, but increase the sense of community and encourages economic development.
- Suggested solutions:
  - Internships or job shadowing programs should be developed with the help of youth themselves.
  - Mentorship programs that keep youth accountable for their grades and professional development are effective and should be expanded with the help of those youth already in the programs.

## 6. Education

Youth in this group focused on expanding inclusivity in their learning environments and increasing teacher diversity.

- Discussion Takeaways:
  - Teachers need to better understand the lives and cultural background of their students and the communities they come from.

- Suggested solutions:
  - Schools should require teachers and students take part in cultural inclusivity training which would lead to more inclusivity within the classroom (i.e. lessons and activities) but also between peers.
  - Trainings would increase connection between teachers, students and their families and celebrate the diversity of Sacramento.
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## OUTCOMES

After participating in small group conversations, youth had a chance to directly address Mayor Steinberg, and Councilmembers Guerra and Schenirer and voice their vision for how to improve the lives of youth in Sacramento. These conversations yielded many directives for city officials including ideas for program and resource development as the Citywide Youth Development Campaign Plan is considered and implemented.

## Suggestions from Youth Participants:

- *“What we need is a way to highlight the talent of youth in Sacramento, and I suggest a youth arts and music festival to showcase what it is going on in Sacramento youth culture.”*
- *“Getting around the city is really hard and really expensive. Look around today; so many kids who said they would come are not here. I think it’s because it’s so hard to get here. We need bus passes or some other way for transportation to be affordable as not all of us can afford to pay for buses...and in a lot of our communities’ bus stops are in unsafe places or we have to take several busses all across the city to get where we need to go.”*
- *“I don’t feel safe on public transportation, and I think there are a lot of kids who feel that way. Maybe like there are special buses for seniors we need special buses for kids.”*
- *“I feel like we’ve talked to adults so many times, and they always say they will listen to us, and then we never hear back from them or see the outcomes of what we talked about.”*
- *“So many of our schools don’t have teachers and have only substitutes who don’t care about the students. We need teachers who stay!”*



“THE WALK AWAY IS HOW DO WE INVOLVE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?”

HOW DO WE SEE THEM AS RESOURCES RATHER THAN AS PROBLEMS?”

HOW DO WE SEE THEM AS ASSETS THAT CAN HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY?”

Councilmember Jay Schenirer

## NEXT STEPS

Based on the suggestions of the youth participants Councilmember Schenirer committed to working with City Council on behalf of the youth to ensure the issues raised at the Town Hall were turned into concrete policy changes. These commitments include:

- **Create a Sacramento arts and music festival for youth;**
- **Create specific positions for youth in the City that are not bound by union rules;**
- **Create a Youth Advisory council for transportation;**
- **Work on free transportation for youth and start with youth on free and reduced lunch;**
- **Strengthen the Youth Commission;**
- **Create a bike share for youth; and**
- **Create a youth position on the City Council.**

The Sacramento Youth Alliance Community Action Team and attendees of the Youth Town Hall are committed to pursuing these goals, in accordance with developments occurring with the Citywide Youth Development Plan to form a Youth Division. Together with youth and adult allies, SYA CAT will continue its local grassroots advocacy efforts to secure resources ensuring all young people in Sacramento have access to the same high-quality services and opportunities to thrive in adulthood.