

SCHOOLS

THAT

WORK

FOR US!

**You can't understand
our current society
without understanding
the roots of it.**

**It was not designed for us.
Because nothing in
this country was
designed for us.**

**We are brilliant, and
hard-working, and
creative, and focused,
and driven.**

**...So we decided to
invent a new system,
one that truly is designed
for us, and by us.**

What is Schools that Work For Us? How did it come about?

After 6 years of running campaigns on single issues that were affecting young people, like attendance or discipline, we decided that we had enough research, data, and experience to build a platform that would include all the pieces that young people have been talking about over the years.

We needed to see the whole picture, not just a slice of it. We also grew tired of “experts” thinking they were the only ones who had solutions. We stand strong in our truth that **young people have expertise** that must be cultivated, recognized and respected, and then acted upon if our educational system is truly going to improve.

What do we mean by a framework?

We mean a way of looking at and analyzing our educational system that begins with **knowing our country's history**, that literally puts **young people who have been marginalized at the center**, and that is **built on their lived experiences, analysis, and brilliance**.

The Schools that Work For Us framework is meant to be comprehensive. These themes were developed in 2018 when young people **compiled 6 years of Hearing Youth Voices research and data** that had been collected via surveys, interviews, and hundreds of youth meetings since 2012. We then organized the issue areas into categories and came up with these 8 themes.

From there, we launched a community series in which we shared the Schools that Work For Us framework with more than 150 people, to get feedback and more ideas. We also **talked to young people across the state to “test” the framework** and see if it reflected their experiences. We found that it did, especially with young people who attend majority-Black and Brown schools in cities in Connecticut. Therefore, **though the framework was originally developed in New London, it's relevancy extends across the state.** The framework is important to us because it provides a road-map for our work as we move forward. We're not going anywhere. We intend to work on the issues named here for many years, transforming schools in Connecticut so that they “work for us” too.

Once we invented the framework, and started to digest it, we realized that it can actually **be applied to organizations and other types of institutions, not just schools.** We've started to apply it to our own organization to hold ourselves accountable.

Lastly, it's not perfect. The majority of young people who built it are not undocumented, for example. Nor are they trans or gender non-conforming. We encourage and welcome young people in other places to build out your own lists of issues and solutions. We hope the framework and it's themes can help!

“It is our duty to fight for our FREEDOM, It is our duty to WIN! We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains!” —Assata Shakur

Introduction

Last summer we were all part of the Hearing Youth Voices intensive leadership development program. Part of the program was a series of political education workshops led by staff members Chelsea Cleveland and Yanitza Cubilette. These workshops dug into the history of our country. **We learned about the systems of white supremacy**, which is still all around us today, and something called “racial monopoly capitalism”- which basically means that **the U.S. became the powerful country that it is today because of the enslavement of African people and because of the stealing and killing of indigenous peoples' land.** And a relatively small number of people amassed a great deal of wealth and power in the process and used that power to keep creating more wealth, at the expense of the majority of us. **You can't understand our current society without understanding the roots of it.**

We also learned about sexism and Black queer feminism, disability justice, and many more important concepts. We are telling you this because all of this laid the groundwork for the Framework that we're about to show you. We got to a point last summer where we **understood the truth of our country's history**, and that helped us get to an important truth about our education system. **It was not designed for us.** I'm gonna say that once again. **It was not designed for us.** Because nothing in this country was designed for us. You may be asking, who's “us”? By “us” we mean - Black people, Brown people (non-Black Latino/Latinx, Asian, indigenous people); we mean poor people of all races; we mean immigrants; people who speak languages other than English; we mean Black & Brown women; we mean queer or LGBTQ people; we mean disabled people.

If you look at any measure of student “success” that the Board of Education uses, or the State Dept of Education uses, we are all behind. Test scores, graduation rates, college completion, attendance. Or we're ahead in the bad stuff- suspensions, expulsions, truancy, etc.

What we're here to say to you today is that there is nothing wrong with us. We are brilliant, and hard-working, and creative, and focused, and driven. But we are being set up. **We are being asked to “succeed” in a system that was not designed for us to succeed.**

So. Once we realized that, being the brilliant and creative people that we are, we decided to invent a new system, one that truly is designed **for us, and by us.**

We hope you enjoy it!

Theme 1

The Struggle

This theme has to do with the fact that many of us come from families that are poor or working class. Our families are working very hard to pay the bills and keep a roof over our heads and **sometimes school is not our priority**. This isn't because we're bad, or don't care, it's because there's a lot going on in our lives. When we're absent, or late, because of real-life things going on, we get punished, or judged.

A lot of school policies, practices, and expectations are built around middle class families- families that have 2 parents and are financially secure. That's not most of us.

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- **Teachers, staff, and admin not walking in our shoes**, not showing compassion when that's what we need; instead having a bias against us
- Attendance and tardy policies that punish students for being late or absent even if it's with good reason. ***Our very first campaign focused on this issue and has helped a lot. Students are now able to appeal credits lost due to absences and the school sends out warning letters when students are in danger of losing credits because of absences. We celebrate these improvements!
- Parent teacher conferences don't work for working parents who can't call out and don't have paid time off
- The SAT is given once at the school, then we have to go to Groton or Waterford to re-take it, which becomes a transportation issue
- We've heard examples of teachers giving extra credit if your parent comes to open house or parent meetings, which is unfair
- Transferring from out-of-state or country and not having credits accepted
- **Transportation is an issue, always.** It's even worse in rain and winter.
- Teachers and admin ask us things that are unfeasible- "Can't your parent bring you?" No. "Can't your parent drop you off clothes?" No. Our parents are working all the time and can't call out.

Solutions & Recommendations:

- **Training for teachers, admin, and staff to help them recognize their bias-** Students can lead some of these trainings!
- Analyze school policies and practices to see where bias shows up (for example, in tardy and attendance policies and practices; also in school uniform policies)
- Understanding, empathy, and caring from our teachers and school culture
- More teachers, admin, mental health counselors, and school staff who grew up poor or working class and understand our lives better
- **Culture change from one where we are punished to one where it's understood that we have demanding family and work responsibilities** outside of school and school isn't our only priority
- Financial literacy courses so we can learn how to do taxes, use a credit card, run a business, and learn how to build wealth for our families and communities
- Daycare at school
- More leeway and flexibility with assignments, tardiness, and absences
- Trade classes to support those of us who don't want to go to college and/or aren't ready, so that we can
- Bussing for everyone, even if you live close
- Better food options

Theme 2

Resources

This theme has to do with the way that schools are funded in our state. Because it is mostly based on property taxes, this means that rich communities have a lot of money for their schools and poor communities do not. This is a set-up from the start.

We demand a different, more equitable way of funding schools!

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- Lack of tutors, textbooks, technology, and other supplies
- Few accessible mental health counselors and the ones we have are over-worked
- **Not enough guidance counselors and the ones we have are over-worked**
- High teacher turn-over
- **Overcrowded classrooms!!** Which makes it really hard for both students and the teacher to focus and get anything done
- **Not enough supports for English Language Learner (ELL) students**
- Cuts to arts classes, music, anything considered “extra”
- Cockroaches in our school
- Long-term substitutes who are not certified or able to teach the course (example: long-term substitutes in Spanish who don’t speak Spanish)
- Poor food options
- Magnet school vs. “regular” high school
 - Science and Tech has a lot more resources and opportunities than New London High School
 - Science and Tech has less suspensions than NLHS; a lot of things that you get suspended for at NLHS you might just get talked to by the dean at Science and Tech

Solutions & Recommendations:

- FULL funding for our schools!
- **A new system of funding schools in CT that is equitable**
- More equality between magnet schools and “regular” schools as we transition to an all-magnet district. **We need to keep an eye on who is getting what opportunities!**

“We live in a country that is very deceiving.

They deceive us into believing equality is a reality.

They deceive us into believing that we should trust in the system

The system designed to keep the people in power sitting comfortable in their seats

and the people struggling, battling in their everyday lives on the bottom

right where they think they belong...” — Drea

Mental Health

This theme is about the fact that many of us struggle with anxiety, depression, anger, or other things. **The truth of the matter is that experiencing racism every day is traumatizing.** The truth of the matter is that, because of the systems of oppression in our society, our families are more likely to have incarcerated loved ones, to get evicted or have unstable housing, to live in fear of immigration, or to experience violence from police. All of those things lead to trauma. And sometimes that trauma looks like acting out in class, sometimes it looks like staying home, sometimes it looks like fighting with our peers.

We need help from people who truly care about us, not punishment.

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- Students' mental health is not considered a priority by the school system (at the local, state, and federal level)– **test scores are considered more important than our well-being**
- Students are not given the support needed to succeed
- Lack of accessible mental health supports, and those that exist are often overworked
- Students who are really struggling can end up expelled and put in an "alternative school"- these schools are often highly restrictive and are sometimes privatized, which means there's less accountability
- When students act out, they are punished, instead of someone taking the time to get to know them and dig deeper as to what might be going on
- When we talk about mental health, **we must also talk about disability.** Disability can look like many things; chronic pain, physical impairments, cognitive challenges, and emotional disabilities to name a few. Mental health is part of this world. Being labeled "Special Ed" (which is a harmful, ableist, and oppressive term) can help students gain more resources often held back from disabled students. But it can also hurt because you're policed more, not taken seriously, and treated like you're not capable of making decisions about your own needs. Often, Black and Brown students are put into these classes for "behavioral issues" and are not given extra support and care
- Learning disabilities go under-reported and are not taken seriously

Solutions & Recommendations:

- **Recognize that mental health is important and needs to be more of a priority in our schools**– school is more than just education
- We need Black and Brown mental health counselors and therapists, and multilingual counselors and therapists
 - If there's a shortage of Black, Brown, and multilingual therapists and mental health counselors in our community, **then we need to create job and college pipelines for youth from our community** to become mental health counselors and therapists
- More education to help lift the stigma around mental health:
 - There could be a whole for-credit class on mental health, as part of the health curriculum: What is it? What does it look like? And how to notice warning signs in yourself and others.
 - Parents and families also need this information and training
- **Someone has to be actually listening**– just because you have a degree doesn't mean you care. **Create ways for students to evaluate mental health professionals.** Students should participate in the hiring process too.
- Because of stigma, young people sometimes can't get a parent to sign on for therapy or they don't want to ask for permission. We need to overcome this obstacle and allow young people to see a therapist even without a parent signature.
- **Shift resources away from security guards and security cameras and toward mental health and restorative justice staff**
- Restorative justice- teachers can lead circles every day or every week in class to build trust and safe space
- We need a compassionate and caring school environment
- A chill room!!! **Create a safe space for people struggling in schools.** We learned that Waterford High School has a "zen room" - if they can do it, why can't we?
- Older youth(12th grade) mentoring younger youth(9th grade), more mentor/mentee programs within the school

"It's ironic to think about how much we learn about wars in school

while for some we're fighting our own internal war,

a constant battle,

When all I want is for someone to ask, what's the matter?

I don't know how to ask for help

in a system that believes "every man for himself." – Zeraiah

Freedom to Be & to Move

It is not a coincidence that the schools like ours', that have the most restrictive and high-control environments, have majority Black and Brown students. We live in a country that monitors and restricts Black and Brown people everywhere and at all times. This is rooted in our country being founded in slavery and genocide. **The antidote to this is schools that value and center Freedom for Black & Brown people.**

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- For years students have said, "they focus more on discipline than they do on education"
- **Constant presence of security guards and police in our school creates a prison-like environment**
- Too many students getting suspended/thrown out of class/sent to PRR
- **In-school suspension (ADP) is basically a waste of time.** It's not set up for anyone to really talk to us, ask us about our behavior, or connect in any way.
- Gates shut down in the hallways after school which means limited access to the school as soon as the bell rings
- Sometimes the bathrooms are locked during school hours!! We're told this is because there are not enough security guards on those days to monitor the bathrooms. Our question is: why do we need security guards to use the bathroom? We're told because students smoke in the bathroom. Doesn't that happen in Waterford, Groton, and other communities too? Why are their bathrooms not locked? **Could it be that they're seen as "kids just being kids," while we're seen as criminals for the very same behavior?**
- Can't have headphones even though they help us concentrate
- Can't have outside food even though that's a comfort that can help get us through the day
- We've heard many stories from ELL students being told by admin or teachers to stop speaking their language - that is unacceptable!
- Busses leave immediately after school, encouraging us to leave school right away and not stay after with a teacher
- Some students are on pass restriction, which means a security guard has to be called every time they ask to use the bathroom and the security guard has to walk them to the bathroom. This contributes to a prison-like environment.
- Some teachers are condescending and belittling to students
- We've also heard teachers say that if they don't write referrals for things like headphones and hoodies, they get in trouble from admin
- Once you get a reputation for "being bad" they don't let you change that
- The environment is even worse at some "alternative" schools, where students have to take their shoes off and get wanded-in in order to enter the building.

**"I live in a country that claims I am free,
Free to speak, Free to be,
All men were created equal
but we are not treated as such
And in this country, what they really mean is
the lighter I am the freer I'll be" — Taylin**

Solutions & Recommendations:

- Recruit building leadership that will create a culture of support and trust, not restriction and control
- **Invest in anti-Black racism* training for admin, teachers, and all staff.**
- **Shift limited resources away from policing, security guards, and security cameras and toward programs like restorative justice that can build relationships and trust** between students and staff
- Hold regular forums where students, teachers, and admin can address and resolve problems
- **Our schools have students that speak over 40 languages!** ELL students should feel celebrated and prideful about their languages, not shamed or marginalized.
- **Create a teacher-student working group** that can begin to create a more positive school culture. This working group should start off with participating in anti-racism training.
- Hold regular student empowerment days where students can be trained in how to get involved and develop as leaders
- We know of an awesome restorative justice program in Holyoke, Massachusetts (Pa'alante Restorative Justice Program) where they trained students in how to run circles, help resolve conflict, and offer support when their peers are going through something. They transformed the in-school suspension room to be a place where students are encouraged to reflect on their behavior and resolve conflict. We envision a program like that here in New London!
- Build a real structure for students to make decisions about school policies and practices. We celebrate students being part of the Board of Education but a)they don't have a vote; and b)it's not enough. These opportunities **need to be included in the school day and should be for-credit.** Why couldn't there be an "Equity in our School" course in which students get to analyze school data and design improvements? Student expertise needs to be recognized and taken seriously.
- Create opportunities for students and teachers to evaluate administrators' efforts at building positive school culture.
- **Create opportunities for students to participate in hiring school staff and admin.**

*Anti-Blackness is denying value to Blackness and systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues. Anti-Black Racism is the unique discrimination, violence and harms imposed on and impacting Black people specifically. Definition originally from: <https://policy.m4bl.org/glossary/>

**BIG shout out to an organization in Florida called the Dream Defenders. The Freedom Papers, which they released in June 2018 and we read during the summer program, definitely inspired the way we thought about this theme. Thank you Dream Defenders! <3

Theme 5

Full Safety

To us, Full safety means safety beyond just physical safety. **It means emotional safety, how a space feels, how much trust there is.** In a lot of our talks last summer we realized that safety felt more like an unfamiliar concept as most of us don't feel like we have access to it in our day-to-day lives. **The things that are supposed to help us feel "safe" usually are doing the opposite or are doing nothing at all.**

We had a lot of conversations in summer 2018 about sexual harassment. Many of our female youth leaders expressed constant harassment from their male peers. No one had a positive story about trusting an adult enough to ask them for help, and then that adult taking action. We also had a lot of conversations about police, security guards, and security cameras in schools. These are the things that are supposedly there to keep students "safe." But many of us don't feel safer because of these things.

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- **Don't know the process and/or there is no process for reporting sexual harassment, racist, or sexist incidents from teachers or staff**
- Many young women experience frequent sexual harassment from their male peers and don't know what to do about it
- Security cameras everywhere in the building *do not* help students to feel safer
- When teachers and admin discriminate or treat students unfairly, students don't know who to talk to about it and/or what can be done about it
- Constant presence of security guards and police officer do not make many students feel safer
- Transportation- in some communities, young people ride city buses and not school buses; city buses sometimes don't feel like safe environments
- Bullying between students is not always handled effectively

Solutions & Recommendations:

- Sexual harassment training for ALL youth and staff!!!!
- **An effective grievance reporting system when things go wrong:** this past year alone we dealt with a racist, sexist teacher and several sexual assault cases. Students and families need an effective grievance system that they have trust in, otherwise we won't use it because it is not accessible. Teachers also need to be able to use this system, or have their own that doesn't involve the process of addressing that staff directly if they are in a superior position to them. This system must include a process to hold staff accountable.
- The Dress Code is sexist and needs to be revised. It is a policy that leads to young women feeling observed, harassed, and monitored on a daily basis. Black and Brown young women in particular report being "dress-coded" more frequently than their white female peers. HYV has youth-led research from 2013 that shows this pattern.
- The same way we are calling for anti-racism training for all staff, **we need trainings about what sexism is for all staff, and for youth too**
- **Classes for young women and gender non-conforming students about sexism and how they can protect themselves and be powerful and for boys and young men to teach them how to change their behavior to challenge sexism
- **We really need Black and Brown therapists who can relate to the lived experiences of Black and Brown youth
- **"Advisory" is an existing time in the school day that could be used as a time to process and relationship-build
- **When a crisis or trauma does happen, we need more spaces to talk about what is happening. These spaces can't be fake. Stop saying "we're here for you" when there's nothing behind it.
- **All administrators who knew what was going on to be held accountable

"Safety has never been something guaranteed"

Fought or should I say fight, because this has been a 400+ year struggle

that seems to have no end in sight.

"The land of the free but I've never seen the light. Where's our freedom?"

— Shaneva

**these recommendations come from student meetings that Hearing Youth Voices held in response to the May 2019 sexual assault cases



Theme 6

Teaching and Learning

This theme has to do with everything that happens in the classroom. *Who we're learning from, how we're learning, what we're learning, where we're learning, etc.*

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- **Majority white, middle class teaching staff makes it hard for us to relate and connect**
- Many courses feel irrelevant to our lives- we're often bored and don't see the point!
- Racist curriculum only teaches about white history and white perspectives
- English Language Learner (ELL) students are not receiving the services they need
- **There is too much focus on standardized testing**, which does not measure intelligence, creativity, or anything else important
- Many courses don't honor the fact that we all have different learning styles- some of us are visual, some are audio, some of us learn better hands-on, etc.
- Most classes have too many worksheets and not enough creativity and art, this can lead to us acting out because we are bored
- Many of us are not being prepared for college or a real career
- **Many of our classes have 28 students in them, which is too many** for real learning to happen
- By now it's pretty proven that the SAT, ACT, and all standardized tests have a racial and class bias; why is our system still built around them?
- We have TOO MANY SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS!!!! We also have long-term substitutes who are not prepared and/or certified to teach the course (a long-term sub in Spanish who does not speak Spanish)
- Many of us do not have good relationships with many of our teachers
- Some of us are not offered Honors or AP classes by our guidance counselors, even though we might want them. Even if all our grades aren't good, if we have a subject we really like, we should have the option of taking an advanced course in that subject.
- Not enough art, drama, theater courses
- Online learning doesn't really help you learn - and yet that's what is often given to students who are already behind
- **Not enough Black and Brown teachers and staff; those we do have, don't stay.**
- Not enough teachers and staff who speak Spanish or Creole
- Guidance counselors are over-worked & there aren't enough of them
- Some classes are too easy! This can also lead to us getting bored and acting out
- Teachers yelling, students rebelling.

Solutions & Recommendations:

- **Funding for a "Grow Your Own Teacher" program** such as the Portland Teaching Program that helps Black and Latino students who graduate from NLHS with scholarships for college. They then commit to coming back and teaching in New London Public Schools for at least 5 years. This solves 2 problems at once- it's good jobs for youth from our community and means we have more teachers who are from our community!
- **Curriculum needs to change.** We had 2 big wins this past year in this area! The creation of an Ethnic Studies class at New London High School and the passing of **HB7082: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Black and Latino Studies in Public School Curriculum** which will require all high schools in the state to offer a Black and Latino Studies elective course. And yet, this is still just the beginning. The long-term goal is for a racially diverse teaching staff to teach an explicitly anti-racist curriculum in all subjects.
- **Invest in anti-racism and anti-Black racism training for admin, teachers, and staff**
- We know this change has to come at the state and federal level, but **less focus on standardized testing and more focus on our education and our well-being as a whole**
- **Focus on teacher retention, especially teacher of color retention.** When teachers leave, especially teachers of color, alarm bells should go off. Create an opportunity for them to feel safe enough to truthfully say why they are leaving.
- Create a way for students to have input on what courses are offered in the future
- **NO ROWS in class, why can't we talk to each other and have real conversations?**
- **Opportunities to do internships outside of school for credit**
- **Our schools have students that speak over 40 languages!;** ELL students should feel celebrated and proud about their languages, not shamed or marginalized. Create ways for languages other than English to be respected, shared, and admired by staff and students
 - Fun, interesting, and complex learning!
 - Offer more electives and course options
 - Music and art and creativity in the classroom!!!!

Relationships

This theme has to do with levels of trust and quality of relationships between youth and adults in school. **There are a lot of negative relationships between youth and teachers and we need to change that.** Students get sent out of class and suspended a lot. We get disciplined for a lot of things that could be avoided if better communication and more trust existed in the first place. Also, we are youth and we make mistakes. **We need adults to help guide us when we make mistakes, not just punish us.** There is A LOT of racism in the way discipline happens in schools too: nationally and here in New London, Black and Brown students get suspended and expelled at much higher rates than white students. **We can't build relationships without being honest about what gets in the way**— racism, classism, and other biases that our majority-white, middle class teachers often hold.

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- **Students just being suspended with no real guide through their actions; suspensions are step 1 in the school-to-prison-pipeline**
 - Students continually getting in trouble; not enough staff taking time to talk to the student about what might be going on in their home life
 - In-school suspension is a waste of time when it could be a chance to build a relationship if designed differently
 - Teachers yelling, students rebelling.
 - Language is a real barrier to English Language Learner students feeling comfortable in school— **not enough staff speak the languages that students are most comfortable in**
 - A lot of time is spent pressing us about having headphones, or putting our heads down on our desk, or having our hoodie on. Why? What is the point of this?
 - **Missing class time for dress code or other “violations” makes no sense;** this is an example of “they care more about discipline than they do education”
 - Not getting the support you need to succeed— **not all adults at school truly believe in us, which is wrong**
 - When adults cross a line and are disrespectful, there's nothing we can do about it, we have no way to hold them accountable; but we're held accountable all the time
 - We're told that a lot of staff have been trained in restorative justice but we don't see restorative justice happening at the high school - why not?

Solutions & Recommendations:

- We need a shift from: **Culture of policing** → **Culture of relationships; this shift needs to start from the top and includes training for staff and shifting resources**
- **Invest in anti-racism, anti-bias training for all admin, teachers, and staff;** our majority white, middle class school staff needs to unlearn biases that they have
- **Accountability for those admin, teachers, and staff who don't want to change**
- Restorative justice, which would include:
 - Teachers leading circles in classrooms daily or once/week to build relationships and trust
 - Circles to resolve conflict between students or between students and teachers; Instead of in-school suspension, for example, you get a restorative circle
- Stop giving excuses. Recruit and retain Black and Brown teachers and multilingual teachers. **Build college and job pipelines so that youth from our community can go to college and come back to work here in our district**
- **Shift resources so that classroom size can be reduced;** fewer students in the class creates a better environment for everyone
- Create opportunities for students' perspective to be heard; often our side of the story is never heard or taken into account
- **We heard from teachers that they need a “Zen room” too;** a safe space where teachers can de-stress during the day
- Spend the first week or weeks of school focusing entirely on building relationships and trust, circles are a great tool for this; include opportunities for teachers and students to talk 1:1 to really get to know each other

Theme 8

Collective Power

Youth don't have the power to make decisions about things that affect us and that's wrong. **It's our education, we should have a say in how it's run, how it's working, and decisions that get made.** Our schools don't have opportunities for us to be involved in making real decisions about how our schools are run. That needs to change! We need COLLECTIVE POWER amongst us to be able to make these things happen! We cannot win or make big shifts alone.

Issues happening now / What this looks like in our schools:

- **Students have no real say in their education, no opportunities to make decisions about our education**

Solutions & Recommendations:

- **Create real opportunities for students to make decisions about our education, which would teach leadership and so many important skills.**
 - Important Announcement! This is hard work. Students need to be compensated- via stipends, wages, or scholarships- OR these opportunities need to be built into the school day and should be for-credit. We can't ask students who are already over-worked and stressed to just do more without getting anything in return.
 - Create opportunities for **students to learn how to read and understand the school budget**, and then **make decisions about where resources should be focused**
 - These opportunities could be built into the school day via courses. Why couldn't there be an "Equity in our School" course in which students get to analyze school data and design improvements?
 - Create opportunities for students to train admin, teachers, and staff; in case you couldn't tell already, students have A LOT to say about what they need from their teachers, admin, and school environment. **Create opportunities for students to lead adults, you won't regret it!**
 - **Create student seats on all the hiring committees- students should participate in the hiring of all teachers, admin, and staff**

A final note about Collective Power– **our organization is built on the theory that systems don't change without pressure from the outside.** Our role and our purpose is to be that pressure. You might not always like us, you might not always agree with our tactics, we will likely make you uncomfortable at some point. **But we're pretty sure that nothing is going to change if we don't stand up and fight.**

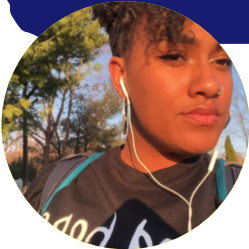
On that note, we'll leave you with this quote from Frederick Douglass:

“Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

The Inventors of the Schools that Work For Us Framework & the Authors of this Report are:

Andhrose Bazil, Taylin Santiago, Aaliyah Figueroa, Twok Burrel, Eliza Brown, Zeraiah Ramos, Shane Brooks Fletcher, Shawn Brooks Fletcher, Azzure Brown, Tareonna Alger Rodriguez, Mariana Fermin, Shaneva Edwards, Shykarah Fareus & Adult staff Yanitza Cubilette, Maya Sheppard, chelsea cleveland, & Laura Burfoot.

Hey! My name is Taylin Santiago. I am a senior at New London High School and I have been with Hearing Youth voices since 2017! I envision a future where oppression doesn't exist and my people are at peace ☺



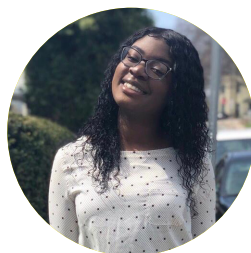
My name is Eliza, I go by She Her Her's and I am a senior at New London High School! Liberation to me is breathing without feeling held back.



Shane G Brooks He/Him/his. Science and Technology Magnet High School. I've been with Hearing Youth Voices for two years now and I love the impact that we made in the State. Liberation looks like African Americans getting Reparations in the prison system and the system racism being dismantled. I would like college to be free, and money should be involved to with this process. We get to this process by everyone from different races and ethnic groups to be on one accord. To work together and bring about change. Everyone has the power to dismantle an unjust situation.

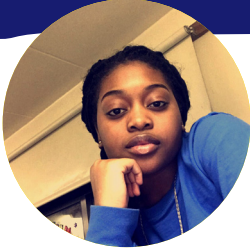


Zeraiah L. Ramos She/Her pronouns Science and Technology Magnet High School of Southeastern Connecticut. Been with HYV since March 2018. Liberation is where all people of life can walk through the earth with an ability to undeniably be who they want to be and remain happy in doing so.



Shaneva Edwards, she/her/hers Science and Technology Magnet High School. Been with HYV for 2 years. To be free means to educate yourself and release your mind from the fetters of ignorance.

My name is Andhrose Bazil, she/her/hers pronouns, I attend Providence College, I've been in Hearing Youth Voices for 2 years now. My vision for the future is that Black and Brown people are free to be their true selves, and there is no more police brutality. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are not afraid of showing their true selves, because there will not be anyone judging them. There is no more gun violence, kids feel safe in their schools, and girls are able to feel and be safe whenever they leave their homes.



Hi, I'm Azzure' Brown but most people know me by Azzy, I go by she, her, and hers pronouns and this is my second year with Hearing Youth Voices. I believe that for anyone in this world attempting to escape society and its norms, you just need the acceptance of what YOUR mind and YOUR heart needs. This life won't always be easy but knowing yourself truly helps to ease the trouble.



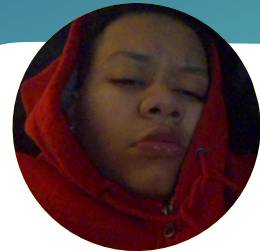
Twok Burrel, He/him/his pronouns, currently attending Arts at the Capitol Theater magnet high school. Been with HYV for 5 years. I envision to see all students of color around the world being better informed about where they come from and a better understanding of what it truly means to be a human of color.



Shawn B. Fletcher - He Him His
I have been with Hearing youth voices for almost 2 years now. For the future, I see myself as President of the United States in 2050. I also envision Hearing Youth Voices as a national organization in every state. Additionally, I envision Hearing Youth Voices having an office space in New London Public Schools and being facilitators for all the disciplinary actions for students. Liberation is the freedom to be move and act. I view liberation as Reparations for Black people. However, we won't get liberated until a system White Supremacy ends.



Hi, my name is Aaliyah Figueroa, born and raised in New London, CT. My goal is to give back to my city and make an impact on my community. It starts with us.



My name is Tareonna Alger-Rodriguez and I use she/her pronouns. I am currently a senior at New London High School and have been with Hearing Youth Voices for a little over a year now. What I envision for the future is education that will go beyond our classrooms, allowing everyone to liberate themselves and others.

BIG shout outs to Step Up New London, Students for Educational Justice, Make the Road CT, St Francis House, and Granite State Organizing Project/Young Organizers United for helping us hone and refine the framework.

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