



Youth Courts and their Educational Value: An Examination of Youth Courts in Chester, Pennsylvania

March 2013

Prepared by Research for Action



Michael H. Norton  Eva Gold, Ph.D.  Renata Peralta

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for the Stoneleigh Foundation
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Authors

Michael H. Norton
Eva Gold, Ph.D.
Renata Peralta

About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public at the local, state, and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

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Youth Courts and their Educational Value: An Examination of Youth Courts in Chester, Pennsylvania *Executive Summary*

March 2013

Youth courts are becoming increasingly common across the country. Whether run by the legal community, community agencies, or within school settings, all youth courts share two common features: 1) youth who commit minor offenses appear before their peers and receive sentences from other youth; and, 2) youth design sentences with the goal of repairing the harm done to individual victims and the broader community

From 2009 through 2012, the Stoneleigh Foundation supported the creation and sustainability of youth courts in Chester Upland School District (CUSD) through the work of Stoneleigh Fellow Gregg Volz. In 2011, the Foundation commissioned Research for Action (RFA) to conduct a study of CUSD youth courts during the 2011-12 school year. This executive summary presents a brief review of the context surrounding youth courts in Chester; general findings related to students' participation in youth courts; and a set of lessons learned for youth court implementation and future research.

The Context for CUSD Youth Courts

CUSD youth courts were developed in Chester, Pennsylvania, a city which has persistently ranked among the state's most socio-economically distressed for many years. The CUSD has spent the past decade in a constant state of crisis, with student proficiency in math and English far below the state average, and graduation rates far below that of most districts across the state. In 2011-12, state education budget cuts resulted in teacher layoffs and personnel transfers across the district, which destabilized school supports for youth courts. Despite these adverse conditions, the youth courts continued with the support of dedicated students, teachers, and administrators in the CUSD, along with substantial support and advocacy from the Stoneleigh Foundation and other legal, higher education, and community partners.

Youth Court Participants' Long Term Outcomes

While the study was initially intended to assess the effect that youth court participation had on participants, three key challenges restricted RFA's ability to conduct these analyses: selection bias, inconsistent participation records, and limited interviews with participants. However, this study reveals that the long-term academic performance of youth court volunteers, students who serve on the courts, and respondents (students who have committed low-level offenses), was significantly stronger than that of their peers in the following ways:

- Significantly more volunteers graduated than non-volunteers (79% vs. 47%);
- Significantly fewer volunteers dropped out of school than non-volunteers (6% vs. 21%);
- Significantly more respondents than non-respondents graduate (71% v. 49%); and,
- Significantly fewer respondents dropped out of school than non-respondents (10% v. 21%).

Promising Influences of Youth Courts for Volunteers

This study also identified a number of ways that volunteers benefited from their participation in youth courts. Youth court participation reinforced three key noncognitive factors that are critical to academic success:

1. **Academic behaviors.** Academic behaviors are indicators of good student behavior. Youth court participation reinforced three important academic behaviors: attendance, participation, and being organized.
2. **Academic mindset.** An academic mindset is directly related to a student’s persistence with school work, which, by extension, contributes to their academic success. Youth court participation encouraged four features of positive academic mindsets: a sense of belonging to an academic community, perceived growth in academic capacity through effort, perceived possibility of success, and students’ recognition of the value of hard work.
3. **Social skills.** Social skills linked to academic performance include interpersonal skills, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. Youth court participation cultivated these skills.

Promising Signs for Respondents

Participation in youth court hearings was also associated with positive signs for respondents. While our data on respondents was too thin to conduct a comprehensive set of analyses, our findings do suggest that participation in youth court hearings may have the potential to exert positive peer pressure on respondents leading them to make adjustments to their behavior. Specific findings include:

1. **Reduced recidivism:**
 - Fewer respondents committed multiple disciplinary infractions after their youth court hearings than referred students who did not attend youth court hearings (26% v. 33%).
 - Fewer respondents received multiple suspensions after their youth court hearings than referred students who did not attend youth court hearings (22% v. 29%).
 - A substantial majority of respondents did not commit multiple disciplinary infractions after their youth court hearings (75%).
2. **Positive peer pressure:**
 - Both youth court advisors and volunteers cited the power that positive peer pressure exerted on respondents to be contributing members of their school communities and to “clean up their act.” Through peer pressure, volunteers were helping respondents stay attached to their school communities.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned could be important to future youth court implementation, as well as to research that aims to show the effects on youth of participation in youth courts.

Lessons about Program Implementation and Context

- **Inside/outside partnership and district collaboration:** Partnerships with the Stoneleigh Foundation and other external entities provided invaluable supports to CUSD youth courts, and similar partnerships could be extremely valuable to future youth courts. Collaboration within CUSD ensured that youth courts had a place in the school, and provided researchers with access to the courts and to student data.
- **Integrating youth courts into a larger system of restorative practices:** CUSD youth courts were “added on” to a punitive disciplinary policy. A disciplinary system guided by restorative practices would allow the entire school community to engage in a process designed to foster mutual responsibility and accountability for a positive school climate.
- **Program fidelity:** Developing an agreed-upon set of fidelity of implementation indicators for school-based youth courts would provide a basis for the expansion of the model and the development of rigorous research designs to assess their effectiveness.

Lessons for Research

- **Research over multiple years across multiple youth court sites:** Research conducted across multiple sites over time could provide more robust insights into the key features of youth courts, and their effect on participants. A mixed-method design would ensure a better understanding of the relationship between youth court implementation and the outcomes for participants.
- **Protocols and responsible parties for program-level data determined at the time of program start up:** Having access to consistent and complete data is critical to the credibility of research findings. Optimally, those collecting or supervising the collection of data would receive training ahead of the opening of the youth courts.
- **Respondent exit questionnaire:** An intake questionnaire for students committing “level 1 offenses” and referred to youth court followed by a respondent exit questionnaire could provide key insights into respondents’ motivations to attend youth courts and their experiences in the hearings.
- **A broad group of informants:** Conducting interviews or focus groups with a sample of youth court volunteers, respondents and other stakeholders could provide key insights into the effect youth courts may have on participants and would help identify appropriate outcomes to assess.



Youth Courts and their Educational Value: An Examination of Youth Courts in Chester, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

Youth courts, also known as teen, peer and student courts, are becoming increasingly common across the country. Seventy-eight youth courts were registered with the National Youth Court Data Base in 1994; by 2010 that number had expanded to 1,050 youth courts in operation in 49 states and the District of Columbia.¹ The central feature of this model involves youth issuing sentences to their peers who have committed minor offenses.

Youth courts are run by a variety of agencies, including juvenile courts, juvenile probation departments, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, and schools.² Regardless of their setting, their primary function is to determine a fair and restorative sentence for offenders who have engaged in low-level offenses such as, vandalism, curfew or traffic violations, or problem behaviors, such as possessing marijuana, drinking alcohol, or trespassing, school uniform or cell phone violations in school, disrespect of teachers or peers, and breaking of school equipment.³ A primary goal of these courts is to divert youth from traditional juvenile justice or school-based disciplinary systems by providing an alternative to punitive disciplinary procedures.⁴

Research on youth courts has largely focused on those connected to the juvenile justice system and has examined whether participation helps young offenders avoid recidivism,⁵ or prevent youth offenders from entering the juvenile and/or criminal justice systems.⁶ Research on school-based youth courts, which make up about 36% of all youth courts,⁷ is more limited, in large part because they are a relatively new phenomena.⁸ However, school-based youth courts' emphasis on sentences that are restorative appear to be gaining momentum, as punitive behavioral policies in schools have shown little

¹National Association of Youth Courts, Facts and Stats, http://www.youthcourt.net/?page_id=24

² Ibid

³ Ibid; Also see Appendix D for a complete list of low level school-based violations heard by youth courts.

⁴ Center for Court Innovation, Youth Court Research Roundtable Briefing Paper, July 18, 2012.

⁵ See for example, Butts, J.A., Buck, J., & Coggeshall, M.B. (2002). The impact of teen courts on young offenders. [Electronic version.] Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. Available at <http://urban.org/publications/410457.html>; Forgays, D.K. (2008). Three years of teen court offender outcomes. *Adolescence*, 43, 473-484; and Garrison, A.H. (2001). An evaluation of a Delaware teen court. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 52, 11-21.

⁶ See for example, McDowell Group (2010). Alaska Youth Courts: Evaluation and Impact Assessment, Final Report. Prepared for Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Division of Juvenile Justice. Available at http://www.globalyouthjustice.org/uploads/Alaska_Youth_Courts_Evaluation.pdf; Schneider, J.M. (2008). Youth Courts: An empirical update and analysis of future organizational and research needs. Washington, D.C.: Hamilton Fish Institute, the George Washington University;

⁷ National Association for Youth Courts. Available at http://www.youthcourt.net/?page_id=24

⁸ Only in recent years, has interest increased in school based youth courts. However, anecdotally, we have heard stories of youth courts in schools 30 some years ago, from adults who participated in them as youth.

evidence of curbing either minor infractions or serious anti-social behaviors.⁹ Restorative practices challenge offenders to acknowledge the consequences of their acts, and focus on rebuilding individual and/or community relationships. Youth courts, which emphasize sentences such as oral or written apologies, community service, and jury duty on youth courts, are aligned with restorative practices.¹⁰ Table 1 outlines several terms that are commonly used when discussing youth courts, and are present throughout this report.

Table 1. Key Terms for Youth Courts

Types of Youth Courts	School-Based Youth Courts: Students are referred to youth courts by a schools’ climate manager after committing a disciplinary infraction. “After-school” courts are extra-curricular activities and convene outside of the school day. “In-class” courts are embedded in the curriculum of a course and convene during class time.
	Juvenile Justice Youth Courts: Youth are referred by a judge or local law enforcement officials. Juvenile justice youth courts convene in a community or court setting, and are generally organized by an external agency in collaboration with the local juvenile justice system.
School-Based Youth Court Key Terms	Volunteer: Students who choose to participate on an after-school court, or are selected to enroll in a course with youth courts embedded in the curriculum. Volunteers assume all of the courts’ roles and perform all the key functions of the court itself.
	Respondent: Students “offenders” who commit low level disciplinary infractions and appear before the youth court.
	Disposition: The “sentence” volunteers issue to respondents designed to repair harm done to the school community.
Disciplinary Approaches	Restorative Practices: Proactively building relationships and a sense of community to address transgressions and prevent future wrong doing. Requires active involvement from the community in addressing wrong-doing and how to repair harm.
	Zero Tolerance: The application of automatic punishments for disciplinary infractions to prevent further offenses (typically detention and suspension).

Importance of this Study

The Stoneleigh Foundation of Philadelphia has historically focused its strategic investments on improving outcomes for youth involved or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Stoneleigh began its support for youth courts by providing a fellowship award from 2009 to 2011 to public interest lawyer Gregory Volz to continue his development of school-based youth courts in Chester city, and to promote a youth court movement in Pennsylvania. Recognizing how harmful and counterproductive zero tolerance policies are to youth, Stoneleigh viewed school-based youth courts as an effective and efficient intervention to prevent delinquency and to foster school engagement—perhaps even to improve educational outcomes.

In the 2011-12 school year, the Stoneleigh Foundation commissioned Research for Action (RFA) to conduct a study of Chester Upland School District (CUSD) youth courts. This research is important as

⁹ See for example, American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools?: An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852-862; Skiba. R. (2000). Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice. Indiana Education Policy Center, 7-8.

¹⁰ See Appendix D for a detailed description of the CUSD youth court model: student roles and responsibilities, venues of operation, operating procedures, and training.

there is still little documentation of the effects of school-based youth courts. And while most of the research on youth courts has been concerned with outcomes for offenders, this study expands upon a handful of studies that explore the benefits of youth courts for the students who serve in court roles.¹¹ This report also examines contextual supports and challenges to implementation of school-based youth courts. Finally, we suggest ways in which the challenges to implementation and research might be mitigated.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the research questions this report addresses and how RFA conducted the research. The second provides a description of the youth court model in CUSD, and examines the contextual factors that affected the development and running of the youth courts. Chapter 3 examines the participants and the influence that participation in youth court had on them. The final chapter provides lessons learned for implementation and research on youth courts in the future.

¹¹ See for example, Hirschinger-Blank, N., Simons, L., Volz, G.L., Thompson, R., Finely, L., Clearly, J. , 2009. A Pilot Assessment of a School-Based Youth Court in a Resource-Poor African American Urban School District: Lessons Learned from Youth Court Volunteers, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 60 (2), 31-47 and Volz, G., Trevaskis, D.K. & Miller, R. 2012. Youth Courts: Lawyers Helping Students Make Better Decisions. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change*. Volume 15, Number 2, pp. 199-231.

Chapter I: Research Questions & Methodology

Research Questions & Data Sources

The guiding research questions for this study were addressed with a combination of administrative data from CUSD,¹² youth court program data, a student survey designed and administered for this study,¹³ and qualitative data that was gathered throughout the study period. In addition, RFA conducted a review of the literature on youth courts, important supports for educational achievement, and media articles covering Chester in years 2011-12. Table 2 provides a list of the guiding research questions for the study, along with a summary of the data collection activities associated with each question.

Table 2. Research Questions & Data Collection

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Data Collected
What contextual factors supported and inhibited youth court implementation in Chester?	Interviews	1 Principal 5 Climate Managers 4 Youth Court Advisors 2 Alumni Volunteers
	Focus groups	3 Summer Facilitators 2 Alumni Volunteers 6 Current Volunteers
	Observations	6 Youth Court Hearings 2 Youth Court Trainings
	Email correspondence	7 Youth Court Advisors
	Document review	7 Youth Court Documents 69 News Articles about Chester 18 Research Studies on youth courts and/or supports for academic achievement
What influences do youth courts have on volunteers and respondents?	CUSD Administrative High School Records: (2007 – 2012)	Demographics Academic Performance Attendance Disciplinary Records
	Youth Court Records (2007 - 12)	Referrals Hearings Training
	Student Survey	Winter 2011-12 - 755 Total Students

¹²The majority of administrative data was from Chester High School, which has had youth courts longer than any of the other CUSD schools.

¹³ For survey questions and responses, please see Appendix B.

		- 114 Volunteers - 71 Respondents Spring 2012 - 740 Total Students - 112 Volunteers - 52 Respondents
	Interviews	1 Principal 5 Climate Managers 4 Youth Court Advisors 2 Alumni Volunteers
	Focus Groups	3 Summer Facilitators 2 Alumni Volunteers 6 Current Volunteers
	Document Review	18 Research Studies on youth courts and/or supports for academic achievement
What are the most important lessons learned about the context for school-based youth court implementation and for future research on the impact of youth courts?	Synthesis of analysis of data collected	

More detail on the study methodology can be found in Appendix A.

A Note about Limitations

This study was initially guided by another set of research questions designed to assess the effect youth court participation had on participants. However, as RFA’s research activities progressed, we encountered a number of challenges that restricted our ability to estimate the effect of youth court participation on students’ engagement, attendance, behavior and academic performance. Those limitations included:

Selection bias. Students are not randomly assigned to participate in youth courts. Rather, they are either placed into the intervention, or they volunteer. (See Appendix D for greater detail on how the selection process occurs.) As a result, it was impossible to know if differences between participants and the students we compared them to were due to initial differences, or to participation in the intervention itself. Selection bias is an inherent problem for researchers evaluating most youth courts.

Inconsistent participation records. From year to year, student participation was not uniformly recorded, which made it very difficult to assess the impact of sustained involvement in the youth courts, or to assess “thresholds” of participation that may result in observable changes in volunteers’ attitudes or orientation to school.

Weak linkages between academic outcomes and intervention goals. The outcomes assessed, particularly those related to academic performance, did not necessarily align with the goals of the

intervention itself. The intervention for respondents can be fleeting, as their experiences with the youth court process may be no more than a 30-45 minute hearing, followed by a two-to-four week window to fulfill their disposition. Indeed, it is hard to discern from available data what percentage of CUSD respondents completed their dispositions.

Survey design and administration was adjusted to accommodate challenging conditions in the CUSD high schools. The CUSD administrators responsible for disciplining students (school climate managers), did not have the capacity to support the administration of a student questionnaire to students committing disciplinary offenses at their schools. Therefore, it was not possible to develop a targeted questionnaire for students who committed referable offenses that solicited their motivations for choosing youth courts and their subsequent experiences in the hearings. As a result, the student survey became a survey for all students at CUSD that was applicable to the entire student population, not just those students committing disciplinary infractions. This adjustment ultimately limited the utility of the survey.

Limited interviews with teachers and students. This study was focused on traditional academic performance and behavior of youth court participants. Due to financial and time constraints, we conducted a limited number of interviews with teachers, and did not interview respondents. This proved to be a constraint to the development of reliable impacts for volunteers and respondents. Speaking with teachers about the way in which youth courts were integrated into a classroom curriculum would have provided valuable insight into the expectations teachers had for their students' learning and development in these courses. In addition, speaking with respondents about their experience in a youth court hearing could have provided some insight into some of the "difficult-to-explain" respondent results that we observed in our analyses of the CUSD administrative records. Ultimately, these constraints limited the qualitative interviewing that may have provided important context for understanding the outcomes data.

Despite these limitations, our study of the CUSD's youth courts uncovered a number of findings that have implications for future youth court implementation. In the chapters that follow, we outline these findings and explore their implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Youth Courts in Chester Upland: Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation

To understand the context of youth courts’ development and operational capacity in the CUSD, it is important to consider how life in the city of Chester informs the everyday experience of the students who attend the CUSD.

The rollout and implementation of youth courts occurred in a city that has persistently ranked among the most socio-economically distressed cities in Pennsylvania. Chester is well below the state average on key indicators of economic and educational health, as seen in Table 3.¹⁴

Table 3. The City of Chester in Context

	Chester	Pennsylvania
Total population (2010)	33,972	12,702,379
% African-American	75%	11%
% Female-headed households	59%	12%
% High school diploma	77%	88%
% Bachelor's degree	9%	27%
% Unemployed	9%	5%
% Homeownership rate	40%	71%
Median household income	\$27,661	\$51,651
% Residents in poverty	32%	13%

The demographics of the CUSD reflect the city in which it is located. Moreover, as can be seen in Table 4, student proficiency in math and English is much lower than the state average, and the percentage of students graduating in four years in the CUSD was roughly half that of students across the state. After the 2011-12 school year, the CUSD entered its 10th consecutive year with an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) ranking of Corrective Action II.¹⁵

¹⁴ http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

¹⁵ <http://paayp.emetric.net/Home/About#q10>

Table 4. CUSD in Context: 2011-12 School Year

	CUSD	Pennsylvania
Total enrollment	3,944	1,807,822
Instructional expense per student ¹⁶	\$7,861	\$7,694
% African-American	92%	22%
% Special education	22%	15%
% Free and reduced lunch	62%	30%
Average daily attendance rate	87%	94%
% Proficient in math	33%	74%
% Proficient in English	29%	71%
Four-year graduation rate	42%	83%

The CUSD Youth Court Model

In this context, Mr. Volz partnered with a CUSD High School teacher, Ray Thompson, who had a small federal dropout-reduction grant. Together, and in consultation with Chester High School students, they began working to establish youth courts as a disciplinary intervention to reduce suspensions.

Launched in 2007, CUSD youth courts operated as an extracurricular afterschool activity; they also operated “in-class,” where youth court training and hearings were embedded in the social studies and/or civics curriculum. Regardless of the venue, all CUSD youth courts are peer courts where youth serve in all court roles, while adults play a supportive and guiding role. Youth courts hear offenses that are generally school-based, low-level infractions, and prior to a youth court hearing, respondents acknowledge their transgression. The emphasis of the hearings focuses on repairing relationships and giving back to the community.¹⁷ Table 5 defines the key roles that volunteers assume on the youth courts. These represent a ladder of responsibility that volunteers can climb from jury to judge.

¹⁶ The most up to date per pupil instructional expenses were available for the 2009-10 school year.

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/financial_data_elements/7672

¹⁷ See Appendix D for a detailed list of the types of infractions heard by youth courts, years in which youth courts operated at different CUSD schools, and for a description of training.

Table 5. Roles and Responsibilities of Youth Court Volunteers

Judge	The judge is responsible for: calling the session to order, enforcing the rules of the court, and maintaining order, and acting as a jury member during deliberation.
Bailiff	The bailiff is responsible for: reading the rules of court, the referral written by the teacher, escorting respondents into and out of court during deliberation, and working with the respondent at the end of the court session to do paperwork.
Student Advocate	The student advocate is similar to a lawyer and is responsible for: talking with the respondent about his/her case prior to scheduling a hearing, drafting an argument in support of the respondent and making opening and closing statements at the hearing in defense of the respondent.
Jury Member	The jury is responsible for: understanding the facts of the case by questioning the respondent, deliberating, and choosing appropriate consequences. The jury foreman delivers the agreed-upon disposition.

All CUSD youth courts followed a similar procedure. Table 6 provides an overview of the main youth court procedures.

Table 6. Youth Court Procedures

Referral	A teacher or other school staff will write up a student for an infraction, and send the write-up to the school’s climate manager. Climate managers, sometimes in consultation with the principal or a youth court advisor, determine which students are referred to youth court.
Intake	A student clerk, or adult advisor, locates referred students and conducts an intake interview and assigns a hearing date and time. Students must acknowledge wrongdoing during the intake process.
Hearing	Hearings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial consultation between the youth advocate with the respondent. • Reading of the referral, representing the administration’s “side of the story.” • An opening statement by the advocate representing the respondent’s “side of the story.” • The jury questions the respondent to learn more about the offense itself and the respondent’s motivations/reasons for what he/she did. • The judge provides the respondent with the opportunity to add anything that was left unsaid during the hearing.
Closing Statement	The youth advocate makes a closing statement and the bailiff accompanies the respondent out of the room.
Deliberation	The jury deliberates to develop an appropriate disposition and timeframe (usually two weeks) for its completion. The jurors attempt to align the disposition with the seriousness of the offense and to determine dispositions that will repair relationships within the school, and/or benefit the student.

Disposition	After the disposition is determined, the respondent returns and the jury foreman reads the disposition. The judge clarifies that the respondent understands the disposition and timeline. Court adjourns.
Monitoring	The bailiff or advisor conducts an exit interview. The advisor and/or youth advocate follows up to ensure completion of disposition. When dispositions are not completed, the student are to be referred back to the climate manager, who would then administer the usual school discipline – a detention or suspension.

Important Contextual Challenges to Youth Court Implementation

The challenges faced by Chester and the CUSD created a less-than-optimal environment for the implementation of youth courts. Among the most significant challenges were:

Significant budget cuts. In the 2011-12 school year, the year of this study, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett instituted educational budget cuts that resulted in the consolidation of two magnet high schools into a single school, teacher and administrator lay-offs, and reassignments for teachers across a reduced number of schools.¹⁸

Staffing reductions and instability. The displacement and reassignment of teachers brought about by the budget cuts created instability for both in-class and afterschool youth courts. Experienced teachers who had led youth court classes were among those displaced, and the key youth court faculty advisor at Chester High School was reassigned to the newly consolidated magnet high school. As a result, at the start of the 2011-12 school year, Chester High School was left without an afterschool youth court advisor or any teachers with experience integrating youth courts into their course curriculums.

Zero tolerance discipline policy. The CUSD youth courts operated alongside a zero tolerance disciplinary system. The lack of integration into the broader disciplinary system created two key mutually reinforcing challenges for youth courts:

- Teachers and students at CUSD generally were not aware of youth courts' existence at their schools. While youth court volunteers confirmed that teachers who were aware of youth courts were generally supportive, they also acknowledged that teachers and other students had a general lack of information about how youth courts worked. One climate manager suggested that youth courts would be stronger if staff received trainings related to youth court capacity and procedures.
- Youth courts had limited capacity to serve the volume of disciplinary infractions being committed in the high schools and referred by school climate managers, or to follow up with students referred to the court. In 2010-11, the most active year for youth courts in the CUSD, 103 cases were heard by the afterschool court at Chester High School, which was approximately 20 percent of the more than 500 students who were referred to the youth court by climate managers.¹⁹ There was often no follow-up by school climate managers or youth court members

¹⁸ See for example: Kopp, J (2011, October 13). Chester Upland must replace acting superintendent. *The Delaware County Daily Times*. Retrieved from

<http://www.delcotimes.com/articles/2011/10/13/news/doc4e9656a9d796a200015407.txt>; Hardy, D. (2012, January 4) Chester Upland teachers to work without pay. *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from http://articles.philly.com/2012-01-04/news/30589187_1_support-staff-charter-schools-assistant-superintendent;

¹⁹ Youth court volunteers and adult advisors for the youth court attributed the expansion of student referrals to the youth court in 2010-11 to efforts by the District to keep down suspensions, particularly among their special education population; roughly 50% of students referred to the youth court in 2010-11 were special education students.

to determine why referred students did not attend their hearings, and subsequently these students did not face any consequences for their initial disciplinary infraction nor for skipping a youth court hearing. Among those students who did attend their youth court hearings, there was very limited capacity for youth court volunteers and advisors to follow up with respondents to ensure completion of their dispositions; according to available data, roughly 20% of respondents completed their dispositions.

Important Contextual Supports for Youth Courts

The implementation of youth courts in the context of the CUSD required a strategy that was geared to address the inherent challenges detailed above. Key elements of this strategy included:

The Stoneleigh Foundation provided key support for youth court development and sustainability in the CUSD. With the support of his Stoneleigh Fellowship from 2009 to 2011, Mr. Volz developed a sustained partnership with a CUSD teacher, Mr. Thompson, and together they developed youth courts as a strategy to reduce suspensions and drop out. Local partnerships were developed to help sustain them. In addition, Mr. Volz advocated for the CUSD courts through his activities at the regional and state levels. After three years of support for Mr. Volz's efforts, the Foundation commissioned this study of youth courts in the summer of 2011, establishing CUSD as an important pilot site for evidence about the educational and behavioral influences of youth courts on volunteers and respondents.

District-level supports were an indispensable component in developing and sustaining youth courts in the CUSD. Mr. Volz developed working relationships with top administrators in the CUSD, along with school principals and a handful of teachers across the district. Through his connections with CUSD administrators and teachers, Mr. Volz advocated for youth courts at the district and school administrative levels, and worked closely with selected teachers to maintain afterschool youth courts and embed youth courts in social studies and civics curriculums. Over time, a small corps of teachers, climate managers, and principals emerged to support the ongoing implementation and development of youth courts.

Local community partners provided much-needed resources to train youth court participants, staff the youth courts with advisors, and provide youth court participants with resources and opportunities. The Foehl and Eyre Law Firm provided a local office for Mr. Volz during his Fellowship, and helped him to recruit local attorneys and judges who participated in youth court training, namely for the summer academy. The Unity Center, a Delaware County-based nonprofit, incurred the costs for a teacher advisor of the afterschool youth court when the CUSD ran short on funding. EducationWorks also provided an AmeriCorps volunteer to offer on-site support in running the courts. Local higher education institutions (Swarthmore, Widener, and Villanova) provided student volunteers and law student interns who worked with the program. The Unity Center also provided incentives for students to volunteer in the youth courts, such as laptops and iPods. In addition, the Center sponsored trips for fun and team-building. Finally, a professor from Widener worked with Mr. Volz to conduct an early research study²⁰ which examined early signs of youth courts' effects for volunteers and respondents.

²⁰ Hirschinger, Blank, Simons, L., Volz, G.L., Thompson, R., Finely, L, and Cleary, J (2009).

Mr. Volz’s advocacy at the regional and state level generated additional support for youth courts in the CUSD and, more broadly, in Pennsylvania. His advocacy has contributed to greater understanding and visibility of youth courts, and the youth courts in the CUSD in particular. For instance, in May 2011, the Pennsylvania Bar Association unanimously passed a resolution that called for the establishment of a statewide Youth Court Advisory Board.²¹ In spring 2012, Councilman Curtis Jones of Philadelphia observed a CUSD youth court, and in June 2012 he sponsored City Council hearings on youth courts.²² In fall 2012, Philadelphia City Council established a “Youth Court Working Group” to explore the potential for youth courts to be integrated into the School District of Philadelphia’s disciplinary system.²³ Finally, Mr. Volz advised York County in the start-up of a school-based youth court, and supported attempts in Allegheny and Chester Counties to establish youth courts.

²¹ Resolution can be found at: <http://www.pabar.org/pdf/Youth%20Courts%20Res-Final.pdf>

²² Transcript of Philadelphia City Council hearing on public safety, June 19, 2012, can be found at: <http://legislation.phila.gov/transcripts/Public%20Hearings/safety/2012/ps061912.pdf>

²³ Transcript of Philadelphia City Council meeting where adopted Councilman Jones’ report on youth courts can be found at: <http://legislation.phila.gov/transcripts/Stated%20Meetings/2012/sm102512.pdf>

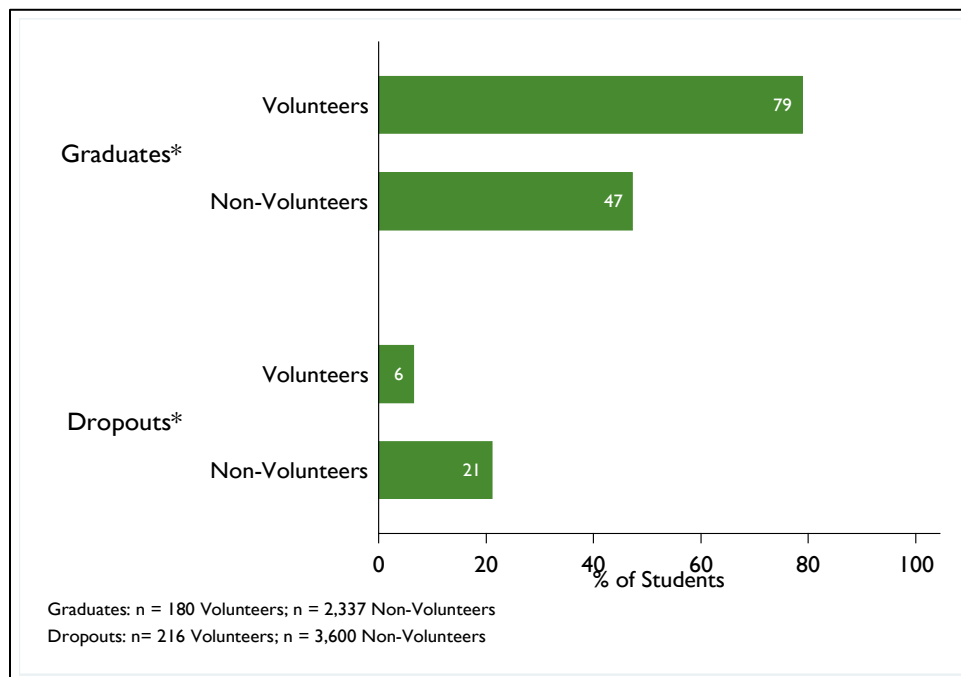
Chapter 3: Comparing the Academic Performance of Youth Court Participants and Non-Participants

This chapter begins with an overview of the long term academic performance of youth court participants. The section that follows examines the promising ways youth courts may influence volunteer academic performance, and then examines the promising influences youth courts may have on respondents.

Long-Term Academic Performance

As noted above, selection bias prohibits a rigorous examination of the degree to which youth courts affect the academic performance of participants. However, our analyses do reveal that the long-term academic performance of youth court volunteers and respondents was significantly stronger than that of their peers who did not participate. Figures 1 and 2 present the percentage of volunteers and respondents who have either graduated or dropped out of CUSD high schools.²⁴

Figure 1. Comparison of Volunteer and Non-Volunteer Graduates and Dropouts



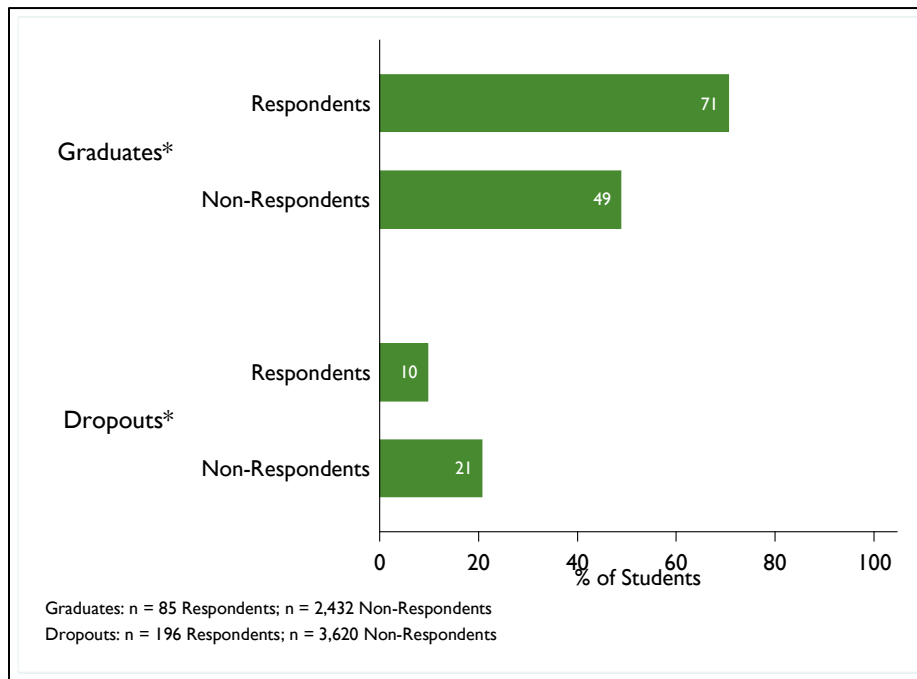
* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

²⁴ Graduation was only calculated for those students whose first year in a CUSD high school was the 2008-09 school year or prior. In this way, only students who could have been enrolled in a CUSD high school for at least four years were included in the graduation calculation. Students were counted as graduates if they ever graduated from CUSD, no matter how many years they'd been enrolled in high school.

Figure 1 shows:

- A significantly greater percentage of volunteers than non-volunteers graduated (79% vs. 47%).
- A significantly lower percentage of volunteers than other public high school students in the CUSD dropped out of school (6% vs. 21%).

Figure 2. Respondent Graduates and Dropouts



* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Figure 2 shows:

- A significantly greater percentage of respondents graduated than non-respondents (71% v. 49%)
- A significantly lower percentage of respondents than non-respondents dropped out of school (10% v. 21%).

Our analyses cannot point to evidence for a causal link between youth court participation and these positive, long-term academic outcomes; however, our research did uncover a number of promising ways in which youth court participation may support volunteers' and respondents' achievement of these positive outcomes.

Promising Ways Youth Courts Influence Volunteers

Youth courts provide volunteers with a setting that reinforced three important noncognitive factors that have been well documented as important to academic success: academic behaviors, academic mindset, and social skills.

Academic behaviors are perhaps the most important among noncognitive factors affecting school performance. Attending classes, completing class assignments and participating in classroom activities, for example, are how students “develop and demonstrate their content knowledge and academic skills.”²⁵ Academic mindsets, a concept rooted in psychological research and research on social and emotional learning, are important because they are linked to perseverance, a quality which can lead to better academic behaviors and school performance.²⁶ Finally, social skills, or positive social behaviors, connotes that students can conduct themselves in ways that demonstrate their ability to make responsible decisions. These skills, such as strong self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills mean that students have the tools to be able to make judgments that can help them avoid negative behaviors, and to engage in problem-solving that can help them overcome obstacles. Social skills often interact with other noncognitive factors to positively affect school performance.²⁷ These noncognitive areas are identified by Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, and Beechum as “malleable” factors, which suggests that the right learning context can strengthen their development.²⁸ In the section that follows we describe how aspects of youth court may have contributed to the growth of each of these noncognitive factors among participants.

Development of Noncognitive Factors Important to Academic Performance

I. Academic Behaviors

Farrington, et al. describe academic behaviors as “those behaviors commonly associated with being a good student.”²⁹ We found three important academic behaviors were reinforced by participation in youth courts: attendance, participation and being organized.

A. Attendance

Attendance is perhaps the single most important academic behavior for academic success. It has a strong influence on grades, is highly predictive of course failure, and low attendance is recognized precursor to student dropout.³⁰ While volunteers told us that they came to school because their families had impressed on them the importance of attending, they also indicated that their participation in extra-curricular activities, such as youth court, also motivated attendance.

As Figure 3 shows, the cumulative average daily attendance for youth court volunteers is significantly greater than for non-volunteers.

²⁵ Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D. & Beechum, N.O., 2012. *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: the Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review*, Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. (p. 15) See also, Allensworth, E. & Easton, J. 2007. *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

²⁶ Farrington et al. (p.28)

²⁷ Farrington et al. (p.48)

²⁸ Farrington et al. (p.5)

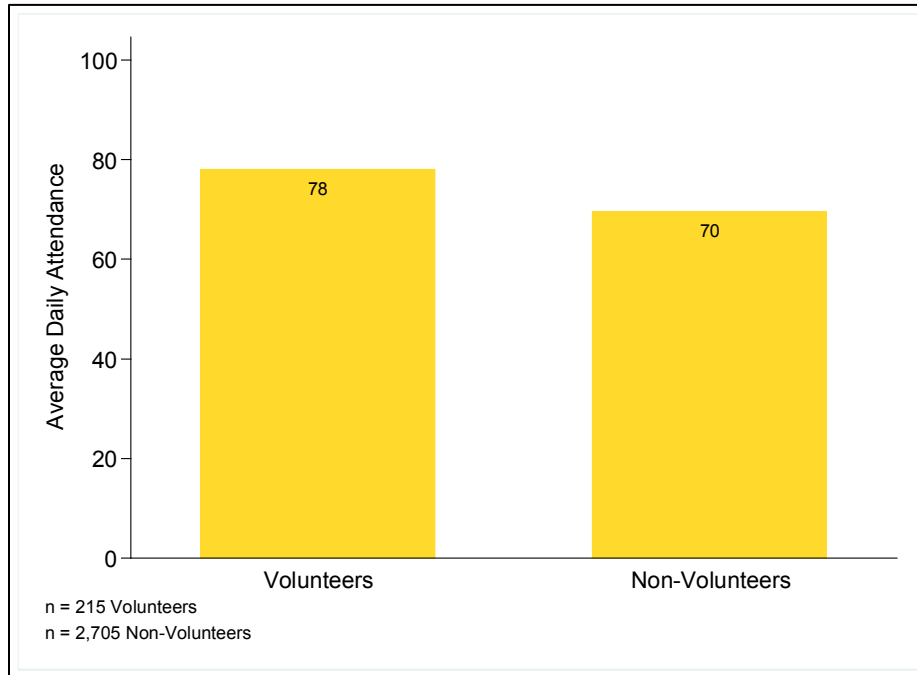
²⁹ Farrington et al. (p. 8)

³⁰ Allensworth & Easton, 2007.

Neild, R., Stoner-Eby, Furstenberg. (2008). Connecting Entrance and Departure: The Transition to Ninth Grade and High School Dropout. *Education and Urban Society*, 40(5), 543-569.

Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., Mac Iver, D. (2007). Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235.

Figure 3. Volunteer Cumulative Attendance*



* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

B. Participation

Participation can be defined by a student’s engagement or contribution in a classroom setting. Through their participation, students can demonstrate their mastery of material. Youth court encouraged the development of skills related to participation. For example, in the student survey, 46% of volunteers responded that one of the skills they developed through youth courts was “active listening.” Students engaged in active listening indicate engagement with the teacher or speaker through clarifying or probing questions. Additionally, 38% of volunteers believed that youth court aided them with public speaking and analyzing arguments, both of which are participation skills. Youth court advisors also reported that youth court participation supported these skills. For example, one youth court advisor explained that the volunteers “are learning to speak on their feet. They are learning to speak publicly in front of others, and they are learning to follow complex fact patterns.”

C. Being Organized

When students are organized, they arrive at class with the assignments and supplies needed, indicating a readiness to learn.³¹ Youth courts were a setting which encouraged volunteers to learn good organization skills. An in-class youth court teacher described the kinds of organization skills that youth courts demanded of volunteers:

³¹ Farrington et al. (p.8)

As I saw more cases, I realized how important youth court was to the growth of its members . . . a great deal of organization is needed. Students were required to keep respondent paperwork and referrals organized to ensure the successful operation of the court. ³²

Whether in-class or part of the after-school youth court, volunteers were required to assist in maintaining court records, and other types of documentation of proceedings. Without such organization, the youth courts could not run.

II. Academic Mindset

Another important noncognitive factor is the development of an academic mindset – “beliefs, attitudes, or ways of perceiving oneself in relation to learning and intellectual work that support academic performance.”³³ These attributes can contribute to students’ persistence in doing their work, regardless of distractions or obstacles.³⁴ From their review of the literature on noncognitive factors, Farrington et al. identified four characteristics of positive mindsets: a sense of belonging to the academic community; a sense of growth in ability and competence with effort; the sense of being able to succeed; and the notion that the work has value to the student. Interviews with students, the student survey, and interviews with adults familiar with youth courts suggested that youth courts create a context in which these kinds of mindsets develop.

A. Sense of Belonging

Farrington, et al. connect a sense of belonging to interactions with others that provide students with a sense that they are legitimate members of the school. This feeling of membership connects them to a community of learners.³⁵ Youth court provided volunteers with peer-to-peer interactions that become friendships, and adult-to-student interactions that become mentoring relationships. Both types of relationships contributed to volunteers identifying the school community as their own.

A youth court advisor, speaking about friendships among youth court participants, commented:

I know that last year, the students at Chester High, they were like a group of friends. And I think that they had become a group of friends because, partly, of youth court. So that was their social group in addition to being the people that they worked with in youth court. And this year that’s also true.

In addition, relationships with adults developed through participation in the youth court translated into mentoring relationships that reinforced academic development. As one volunteer explained, “We had good mentors there. [They] kept us focused on our academics. My grades actually improved during youth court, the whole process of four years.”

Participation in extracurricular activities such as youth courts can also be an indication that students feel attached to their school. On the student survey, students were asked to indicate all the extracurricular activities they participated in from the following list: athletic teams, performing arts,

³² Volz, G. Trebaskis, D.K. & Miller, R. (2012). Youth Courts: Lawyers Helping Students Make Better Decisions. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change*. Volume 15, Number 2. pp. 199-231.

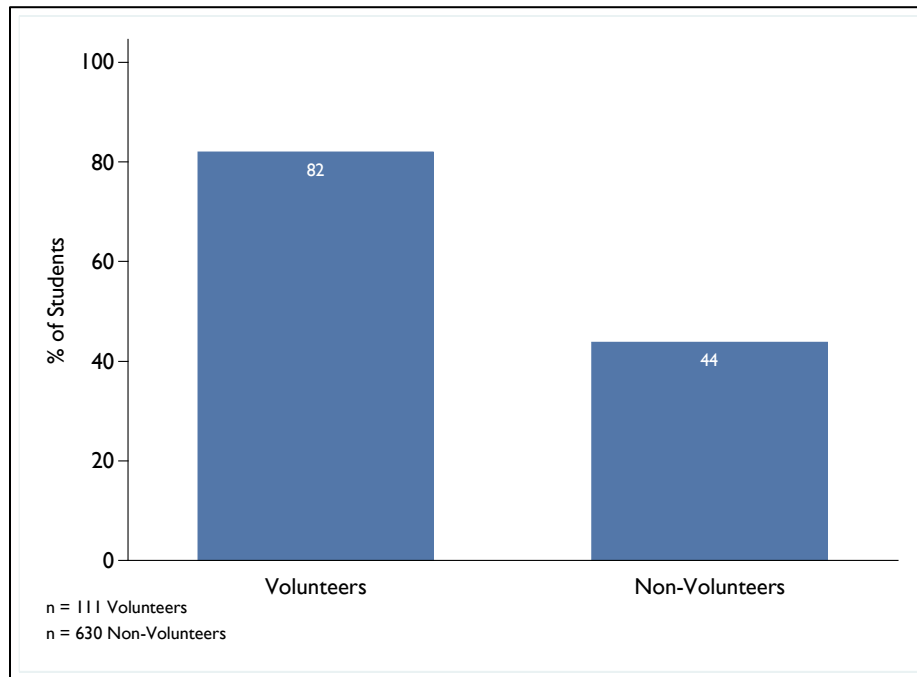
³³ Farrington, et al. 2012, p. 28.

³⁴ Ibid, p.9

³⁵ Ibid, p.10

academic clubs, student government, community service/volunteer clubs, JROTC, or other school clubs. Figure 4 shows that the percentage of volunteers who reported participating in at least one of these extracurricular activities was significantly higher than that of non-volunteers.³⁶

Figure 4. Volunteer Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities*



* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

While participation in any extracurricular activity might indicate a sense of attachment to school, participation in youth courts, in particular, is relevant to a sense of being part of an academic enterprise. Volunteers believed that youth court participation made them important members of the school community because they were helping to keep respondents engaged with school and their academic work. One volunteer explained the kind of changes he saw respondents making: “[After youth court] students started to improve in the classroom, learn their lessons. They actually started acting right. They didn’t want to just get suspended and go home.”

B. Sense of Growth in Ability and Competence, and Sense of Being Able to Succeed

In Chapter 2, we described the ladder of responsibility that youth court volunteers could climb. Advancing on this ladder indicates that a volunteer had made the effort to become a knowledgeable and competent youth court member. One youth court advisor saw the level of responsibility and growing sense of competence among volunteers reflected in their emergence as school leaders. He put it this way: “I think that it [youth court] definitely cultivates leadership, and gives them a sense of being

³⁶ Youth court participation was excluded from this list of “extra-curricular” activities. By definition, all afterschool youth court participants do participate in extra-curricular activities. Figure 4 represents those volunteers who participate in additional extra-curricular activities.

leaders in the school, because they are making decisions that affect other students, and that's a lot of responsibility, and they know it."

In addition, participants received external confirmation of their competence and success. Youth court advisor and attorney Mr. Volz reported, for example, that he brought political and legal "guests" to observe youth court, and that these guests often were visibly impressed with the hearings. The accolades the volunteers received confirmed their growing sense of competence. Finally, Mr. Volz would ask volunteers to testify about youth court in high-status meetings such as at the Pennsylvania Bar Association, or Philadelphia City Council hearings. In interviews, volunteers mentioned these opportunities as important to them and ones that reinforced their accomplishments. As one volunteer explained: "When I step into that youth court room [in front of] a whole bunch of judges and lawyers, it's the real thing. The [television] shows, they are somewhat like it but they are actors, I have seen the real thing. This is worth it."

C. Value of Work to the Student

One of the CUSD climate managers, a school administrator responsible for discipline, commented that while it is "hard to get our students passionate about things in school, youth courts encourage the development of students' passion to do something that feels productive." Interviews with volunteers indicated that participation in youth court was valued by them because they believed they were helping their peers, and because they wanted to learn about the law or criminal justice system. One core volunteer who initially had been a respondent explained that he thought that his increased familiarity with the law through youth court had helped him improve his behavior and be a leader and good citizen: "It [youth court] got me more involved with the law and helped me understand the law because to follow the law, you must know the law ... It improved my attitude toward law, my school, and my community. It helped me be more of a leader."

Volunteers also expressed the value of their work in helping students. Two volunteers explained: "The primary goal is to help the students make better decisions...to help them develop themselves." Another said: "I just basically joined it [youth court] to help my fellow peers at least have respect for other people."

III. Social Skills

Farrington et al. point out that longitudinal research has shown evidence that "socio-emotional adjustment in school" is predictive of achievement test scores, regardless of school level.³⁷ Social skills linked to academic performance include interpersonal skills, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility. Our data indicated that youth court provided a context for the strengthening of all these areas.

A. Interpersonal Skills

The process of holding a youth court hearing and deliberating a disposition requires strong interpersonal skills among volunteers. To be successful, volunteers had to learn to manage conflict in

³⁷ Teo, A., Carlson, E., Mathieu, P.J., Egeland, B. & Stroufe L.A. (1996) A prospective longitudinal study of psychosocial predictors of achievement. *Journal of School Psychology, 34*, 285-306, cited in Farrington, et al. 2012 p. 48.

ways that indicated respect for each other and the youth court process. One core volunteer described the challenges of working with peers: “Because there was always conflict in thoughts, because everyone had strong character...we had to get together and actually learn how to think as one instead of single.”

Another volunteer emphasized the importance of learning respect: “Some people talk over each other. That’s not respectful. So over time it builds up. We all respect each other over time. It took a little while but it worked.”

A youth court advisor echoed the value of youth court as a setting for learning the interpersonal skills of managing conflict and respect: “I would say it also helps in learning to work together, and cooperate, because that’s always really tricky. That’s always a big challenge, especially at the beginning, and often remains so.”

In the student survey, 41% of volunteers reported youth court participation had helped them learn team work, while another indicator that they had learned the kinds of interpersonal skills it takes to work together for a shared purpose.

B. Empathy

Our research indicates that the restorative approach of youth courts in which respondents tell their story contributes to the cultivation of empathy among those charged with “listening,” i.e., among volunteers. In the quote that follows, a volunteer explains the responsibility to “listen” and how listening is connected to a disciplinary approach that aims to change negative behavior:

“Administrators really wouldn’t listen to their [respondents’] side of the story. So, if they can turn to us, then that would be our job – to listen to their side of the story, but at the same time open up their eyes to what they did wrong.”

The process of deliberation also encouraged the development of empathy. One volunteer explained the deliberation phenomena this way:

RFA researcher: How do youth courts affect you?

Jury member: It’s easier to figure out a problem... so we get to see it from our perspective and theirs.

C. Responsibility

Youth court participation motivated volunteers through positive peer pressure to be exemplars for students coming before the youth courts as respondents. One volunteer described the reflectiveness that came with the responsibility of sitting in judgment of a peer: “I didn’t want to sit in a jury box and ask, ‘why aren’t your grades up?’ and in the back of my mind, I’m like, ‘why aren’t my grades up?’ So I think we have to practice what we preach when it comes to youth court.” Another volunteer described how seeing the behaviors of peers led him to reassess and take greater responsibility for his own behavior. He recounted:

It [youth court] taught me how I should act in school. Instead of being lazy or a goofball, I should really take my education seriously. ... I had seen how other kids ... did not want to learn. I just started looking at myself and saying, 'Oh, I think I was like that too, and I should change. Education is important.

This young person went on to add, “I have to be strong, and improve and improve and be a leader and show them [respondents] the right way to act.”

We have suggested in this section of the report that voluntary participation in youth courts may create a context for learning academic skills and developing noncognitive factors linked to improved academic success. In the next section of this chapter, we examine the positive influence youth courts may have for respondents.

Promising Signs for Respondents: Reduced Recidivism and Diversion from Suspension, Positive Peer Pressure

Youth court respondents are students who commit low-level disciplinary offenses and subsequently attend a youth court hearing. Preliminary analyses of respondents’ disciplinary records showed that a significantly greater percentage of respondents than non-respondents committed multiple disciplinary infractions (23% v. 7%) and received multiple suspensions (16% v. 6%) during their first year in school.³⁸ These statistics suggest that these students are not getting off to a good start in their high school careers. For respondents, their initial referral to a youth court hearing represents a “positive” alternative to suspension, which has been shown to be a risk factor for dropout, late graduation, and generally doing poorly in school as a result of missed class time.³⁹ Reductions in respondents’ disciplinary infractions, i.e., avoiding recidivism, are a primary goal for all youth courts.

In this section we present some promising signs that youth court participation is associated with reduced recidivism and contributes to positive experiences for respondents.

Reduced Recidivism

Figure 5 presents the percentage of respondents and “referrals” (students who were referred to a youth court but never attended a hearing), who committed multiple disciplinary infractions and received multiple suspensions after their initial referral to a youth court. The comparison between respondents and referrals provides a useful set of quasi-equivalent comparison groups. Both respondents and referrals committed disciplinary infractions that resulted in their referral to a youth court hearing, and both respondents and referrals chose the youth court option over the traditional disciplinary system sanction. In this sense, these two groups both represent students who had committed some roughly equivalent disciplinary infraction and decided that a youth court hearing would be better than the alternative. At the same time, referrals who did not attend their hearings, either by choice or for another reason, did not experience the youth court hearing; thus, these students represent a population of students who had committed similar disciplinary offenses to respondents, but did not receive the intervention. While these two groups share some similarities, differences in recidivism between these

³⁸ See Appendix A for detailed comparisons between respondents and non-respondents.

³⁹ Neild, R., Stoner-Eby, Furstenberg. (2008). Connecting Entrance and Departure: The Transition to Ninth Grade and High School Dropout. *Education and Urban Society*, 40(5), 543-569.

Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., Mac Iver, D. (2007). Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235.

two groups cannot be causally attributed to youth court participation due to the selection biases associated with an inconsistent referral process and students' self-selection to attend hearings.

Figure 5. Respondent Recidivism

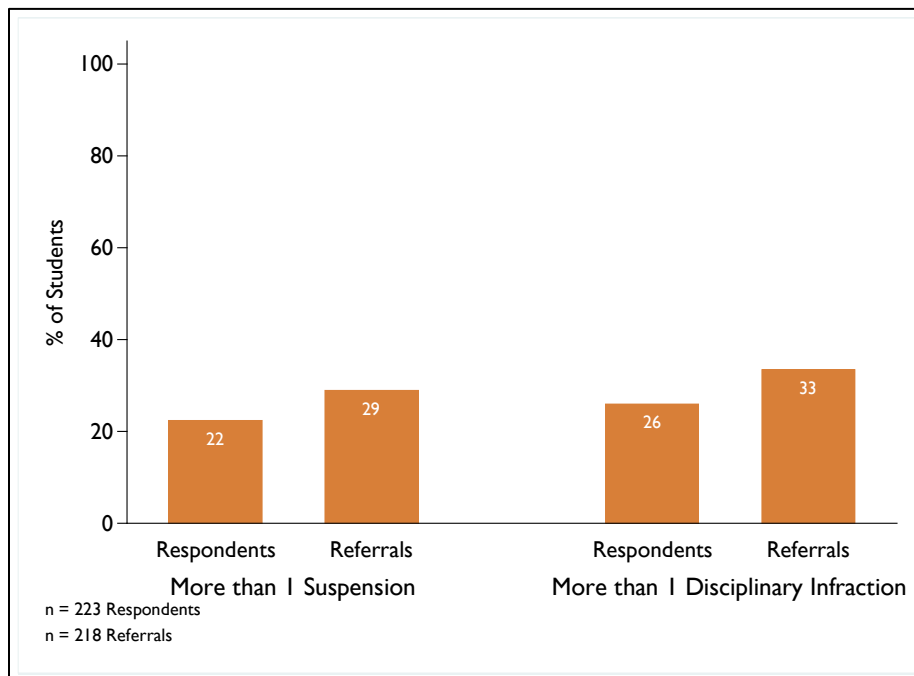


Figure 5 shows:

- A lower percentage of respondents received more than one suspension after their youth court hearings than referred students who did not attend their youth court hearings (22% v. 29%).
- A lower percentage of respondents committed a disciplinary infraction after their youth court hearings than referred students who did not attend their youth court hearings (26% v. 33%).

Overall, only a relatively small percentage of respondents (26%) committed more than one disciplinary infraction after their youth court hearing; that is, nearly 75% of respondents did not commit multiple offenses after their hearings. While the differences between respondents and referrals were not statistically significant, and respondents' behavior after their referral to youth courts cannot be attributed to participation in youth courts, prior research has found that reducing suspensions, and keeping students in school, can positively contribute to students' academic performance.⁴⁰

Positive Peer Pressure

Both adults and students reported that the power of the youth court experience resided in the collective peer pressure exerted on respondents to be contributing members of their school communities and to clean up their act. One volunteer described the changes he saw in his peers following their hearing:

⁴⁰ Gregory, A., Skiba, R.J., and Noguera, P.A (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(59), 60.

“Students started to improve in the classroom, learn their lessons. They actually started acting right. They didn’t want to just get suspended and go home. Students started getting more hope for their future and everything.”

A climate manager explained how she saw peer pressure contributing to improving respondents’ behavior:

This is what I love about student court. Sometimes, the parents are not going to get through to the child. Definitely they [students] don’t want to hear from the administrator, nor the teachers. But that peer interaction – they can sit and say “well that class is boring, that’s why”, and then their fellow students will say “well, yeah, but you know you have to learn and” ... and sometimes that’s the speech they would adhere to. So those are the benefits of student court to me ... For the most part, they are willing to listen to their age group.

Peer pressure often has negative connotations, but in the case of youth courts, peer relationships and peer pressure are cited as a positive force by connecting respondents to their peers and thus helping them maintain a sense of school attachment.

Summary

The findings presented in this section point to some promising signs that participation in youth courts is associated with stronger academic performance among volunteers and respondents. Youth courts are settings in which noncognitive factors related to school success – academic behaviors, positive mindsets, and social skills – are developed. Youth courts are also an intervention that provides an alternative to suspension, which research has shown can lead to negative student outcomes, such as student dropout. Perhaps most importantly, this study suggests that youth courts, with their peer jury and emphasis on restorative dispositions, may contribute to a reduction in recidivism. Nonetheless, given the limitations of the research design and the challenges presented by the inherent selection bias, we caution that the study falls short of providing causal links between youth court and student outcomes.

Chapter 4: Lessons Learned

While this study focused on the educational and behavioral value of youth courts, in the course of the study, RFA learned a number of lessons that will be important as similar programs are implemented, and as research that aims to show the effects on youth of participation in youth courts is conducted.

Lessons about Context and Program Implementation

Key metrics of youth court implementation fidelity are needed to support consistent programming and subsequent research. Future researchers and practitioners must come to an agreement on which key elements of youth courts signify that the program model is being implemented with integrity. Developing an agreed-upon set of fidelity of implementation indicators for school-based youth courts will provide fruitful ground for the expansion of the model and the development of rigorous research designs to assess their effectiveness.

The cultivation of strong inside-outside partnerships, as well as collaboration within a district, is beneficial to the development of new youth courts. Partnerships with organizations external to districts could be important in the development of future youth courts. In Chester, the Stoneleigh Foundation, the legal and higher education communities, and local nonprofits, were all important partners to the district and school administrators in the start-up and sustaining of CUSD youth courts. Outside partnerships helped reduce costs, and brought expertise and needed person-power into the schools. They also supported students through access to expanded personal and professional networks, along with unique learning opportunities. Inside collaboration among the district and schools was also important. Collaboration between students, teachers and administrators within CUSD insured that youth courts had a place in the school. The district and school administrators were also crucial to the research, providing researchers with access to the courts, those connected to the courts, and to student data.

Integrating youth courts into a school-wide disciplinary system may contribute to enhanced impact for the intervention overall. Our analyses suggest that youth courts were limited in part because they were not integrated into a restorative school-wide disciplinary policy. Rather, CUSD youth courts were “added on” to a de-facto zero tolerance disciplinary policy where virtually all levels of offenses—from truancy to seriously disruptive behavior—were treated with similar consequences, usually suspension. Under these circumstances many students and teachers were unfamiliar with youth court, its purpose and how it worked. Integrating youth courts into a larger system of restorative practices would allow everyone to be part of a process designed to strengthen relationships between students and faculty to foster a sense of mutual responsibility and accountability for a positive school climate.

Lessons for Research

Research Design

A one year, one site study only provides a “snapshot” of an initiative. Future research over multiple years across multiple youth court sites, either within the same school district or across multiple districts, will provide more robust insights into the key features of youth courts, and the effect participation has on participants.

Robust qualitative data collection is necessary to maximize the formative value of future research. Future research of the effect of youth court participation on student volunteers and respondents would benefit from a research design that emphasizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection to better understand the relationship between youth court implementation and the outcomes accrued by participants.

Data Collection

Researchers must partner directly with school districts supporting youth courts; a working relationship with the CUSD administration was an indispensable support for this study. At a minimum, researchers will need student-level records related to key metrics: student enrollment, demographics, attendance, behavior, and academic performance measures.

Youth court participation record keeping must be uniform and consistent. Protocols and responsible parties for data collection at the program level should be established at the time a youth court is established, and should be consistent across different schools and districts. Optimally, those collecting or supervising the collection of data should receive training ahead of the opening of the youth courts. At a minimum, collecting the data presented in Table 5 for every hearing could support future youth court implementation and effectiveness studies.

Table 5 .Youth Court Data Collection

Youth Court Record Keeping: Respondents	Youth Court Record Keeping: Volunteers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student ID of referred student 2. Referring Offense 3. Date of Referring Offense 4. Date of Hearing 5. Disposition Issued 6. Disposition Completion (Y/N) 7. Date of Disposition Completion 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student ID of volunteers 2. Dates of Hearings Attended 3. Roles Assumed at Hearings Attended 4. Duration of Service 5. Training Attended <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Training Dates b. Type of Training c. Amount of Training Received

Student questionnaires should be tailored for students committing disciplinary infractions. Developing a targeted intake questionnaire for students committing level 1 offenses, followed by an exit questionnaire for respondents who went through a youth court hearing could provide key insights into students’ motivations to attend youth courts and their experiences in the hearings.

Every effort should be made to speak with at least a sample of key stakeholders involved with youth courts. Stakeholders include student volunteers and respondents, youth court advisors, climate managers, teachers teaching courses with embedded youth courts, external partners and parents. Interviews or focus groups with these stakeholders would provide key insights into the effect youth courts may have on volunteers and respondents and identify appropriate outcomes to assess.

Data Analysis

The identification of fidelity of implementation metrics should guide analyses of youth court effectiveness. A clear sense of how the intervention should be optimally implemented will provide researchers with a conceptual roadmap to identify what outcomes for youth court participants should be assessed.

Researchers should continue to develop and utilize robust indicators of non-cognitive factors contributing to academic performance. Each of the measures of noncognitive factors that we developed in this study should be explored in greater depth. Ultimately, with more complete data, further analyses can determine whether and to what degree these factors influence academic achievement.

Appendix A. Methodology

Student Survey Development

The student survey was developed to assess students' attitudes about academic achievement, behavior, plans for the future, and perceptions of youth courts as a viable alternative to the traditional disciplinary system at their schools. The pre-and post-student surveys were developed with input from interviews with alumni youth court volunteers and advisors, while also drawing from a number of existing, validated student surveys related to student disciplinary systems and youth courts in particular.⁴¹ Administration of the pre-test took place in winter 2011-12, and the post-test was administered in early May, at both the Allied Health/Science and Discovery (AHSD) and Chester High Schools. Seven hundred forty-five (745) students completed the pre-test and 737 students completed the post-test, for overall response rates of roughly 43% on both the pre and post-tests.

Data Analyses

Every effort was made to draw on multiple data sources to address each of the research questions guiding this study. Interviews with youth court advisors, current and alumni volunteers, along with observations of youth court proceedings, and the literature review provided insight into the general functioning of the youth courts. All interviews, focus groups and observations were thematically coded with respect to issues related to student academic performance, school attachment and behavior to provide context for the different ways participation in youth courts influenced volunteers and respondents. Our analyses also identified salient patterns across interviews and observations, which provided the basis for targeted analyses of the influence of youth court on volunteers and respondents, along with the contextual factors affecting youth court implementation. The educational literature on noncognitive factors provided a framework for understanding the ways in which youth courts were influencing participants.

Student self-selection into the youth courts, as volunteers and respondents, made it difficult to identify viable comparison groups of students against which we could assess any effect of youth court participation on students experience in school. Given this limitation, to assess the influences of youth court participation on volunteers and respondents, we developed a two-stage comparative analysis designed to contextualize youth court participants' experience in school within the broader CUSD student population. The first stage offered an initial snapshot of youth court participants' demographics, along with their academic performance, school attachment, and behavior at the end of their first year in high school. These initial analyses described how youth court participants were similar to, and how they are unique among the broader CUSD student population.

The second stage of our comparative analyses assessed students' cumulative academic performance, school attachment, and behavior during the remainder of their CUSD high school careers. These analyses were designed to assess differences between youth court participants and non-participants at the end of the 2011-12 school year. Table 1A presents the main comparative analyses presented in this report.⁴²

⁴¹ Butts, J., Buck, J., and Coggeshall, M. (2002). *The Impact of Youth Courts on Young Offenders*. Washington DC: Urban Institute. <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/23041>; <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/survey/default.htm>; <http://research.blackyouthproject.com/survey/byp/>

⁴² Detailed tables of all stage 1 and stage 2 comparisons between youth court participants and non-participants are presented in Appendix C.

Table IA. Comparative Analyses: Metrics, Comparison Populations, and Measurement

Metric	Comparison Populations⁴³	Measurement
Graduation	Volunteers v. Non-Volunteers	Only calculated for students whose first year in a CUSD high school was 2008-09 or earlier.
	Respondents v. Non-Respondents	Students were counted as graduates if they ever graduated from a CUSD high school.
Dropout	Volunteers v. Non-Volunteers	Identified using withdrawal codes from the CUSD administrative records which have been identified as reliable indicators of student dropout in prior studies. ⁴⁴
	Respondents v. Non-Respondents	Dropout Codes include: “Quit after required age,” “Incapacitated,” “Correctional Institution,” “Armed Services,” “Runaway,” “Expelled,” “Truant 10 consecutive days,” and “Student no longer attends.”
Attendance	Volunteers v. Non-Volunteers	The total number of days a student attended divided by the total number of days a student was enrolled in a CUSD high school.
Behavior	Respondents v. Referrals	The percentage of students who committed multiple disciplinary offenses and the percentage of students who received multiple suspensions after their initial referral to a youth court.

Literature Review

Literature reviewed for this study included research on youth courts to date, as well as literature on youth and civic development in the context of youth courts. This research, referenced in this study and the accompanying bibliography, contributed to our understanding of the CUSD youth court model, and to the kinds of effects researchers had identified as resulting from participation in youth courts. In addition, we looked to studies from the field of education on factors that contribute to educational achievement that might be relevant to a setting such as youth courts. In this area, we found recent work by researchers from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research to be most useful. Their work reviewed the literature on noncognitive factors that contribute to academic achievement. We found that these noncognitive factors matched closely with what we had observed, and what interviewees and the student survey reported, about the benefits for volunteers of participation in youth courts. We used this literature to frame the section of this report in Chapter 3 that discusses the promising signs of youth courts for influencing academic performance of volunteers.

⁴³ ‘Non-Volunteers’ refers to students who never volunteered in a youth court proceeding.

‘Non-Respondents’ refers to student who never appeared before a youth court after committing a disciplinary infraction.

‘Referrals’ refer to students who were referred to a youth court hearing but who never attended their hearing.

⁴⁴ Neild and Balfanz, 2006. Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia’s Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005. http://www.csos.jhu.edu/new/Neild_Balfanz_o6.pdf.

Appendix B. Descriptive Comparisons: Youth Court Participants v. Non-Participants

This appendix includes the following:

1. The full set of results from the two-stage descriptive analyses that compared the performance of youth court participants to non-participants. Each of the tables presented in this appendix provides comparisons between youth court participants to non-participants.
 - Volunteers v. non-Volunteers
 - Respondents v. non-Respondents

Table 1B. Youth Court Participant Demographics

	Volunteers	Respondents	Non-Participants
% Male*	41%	50%	50%
% African American	91%	92%	92%
% Special Education*	17%	18%	25%

* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Table 2B. Youth Court Volunteers after One Year in High School: Academic Performance, End of Year Status, Attendance, Behavior

		Volunteers	Non-Volunteers
Academic Performance	End of Year GPA*	2.05	1.67
	% More than 1 F*	15%	17%
End of Year Status	% Promoted*	79%	44%
	% Transferred*	4%	12%
	% Retained*	14%	32%
	% Graduated	1%	3%
	% Dropped Out*	2%	9%
Attendance	% Days Attended*	81%	73%
	% Days Late	11%	11%
Behavior	% More than 1 Suspension	9%	6%
	% More than 1 Disciplinary Infraction	10%	8%
Total Students		235	4,504

* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Table 3B. Youth Court Volunteers' Cumulative Performance after 1 Year in High School: Graduation Status, Academic Performance, Attendance, Behavior

		Volunteers	Non-Volunteers
Graduation Status	% Graduates*	79%	47%
	% Dropouts*	6%	21%
Academic Performance	Cumulative GPA*	2.3	1.8
	% More than 1 F*	29%	36%
	% Never Retained*	53%	23%
Attendance	% Days Attended*	78%	70%
	% Days Late	14%	13%
Behavior	% More than 1 Suspension	14%	13%
	% More than 1 Disciplinary Infraction	16%	15%
Total Students		215	2,705

* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Table 4B. Youth Court Respondents after One Year in High School: Academic Performance, End of Year Status, Attendance, Behavior

		Respondents	Non-Respondents
Academic Performance	GPA	1.89	1.69
	% More than 1 F*	31%	16%
End of Year Status	% Promoted*	55%	45%
	% Transferred*	5%	12%
	% Retained*	38%	31%
	% Graduated	1%	3%
	% Dropped Out*	2%	9%
Attendance	% Days Attended*	80%	73%
	% Days Late*	17%	10%
Behavior	% More than 1 Suspension*	16%	6%
	% More than 1 Disciplinary Infraction*	23%	7%
Total Students		223	4,516

* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Table 5B. Youth Court Respondents' Cumulative Performance after 1 Year in High School: Graduation Status, Academic Performance, Attendance, Behavior

		Respondents	Non-Respondents
Graduation Status	% Graduates*	71%	49%
	% Dropouts*	10%	21%
Academic Performance	Cumulative GPA	1.8	1.8
	% More than 1 F*	44%	34%
	% Never Retained	22%	24%
Attendance	% Days Attended*	75%	70%
	% Days Late*	18%	13%
Behavior	% More than 1 Suspension*	31%	12%
	% More than 1 Disciplinary Infraction*	38%	14%
Total Students		176	2,744

* Group differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Appendix C. Student Survey Results

This appendix includes the following:

Responses to the student survey that compare the responses of volunteers and respondents to non-youth court participants.

- Pre-Test & Post-Test

Table 1C. Student Survey Questions & Responses for Volunteers, Respondents, and Non-Youth Court Students: Pre-Test

	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Total Students	114	71	570
Student Engagement & Integration	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
During this school year, have you participated in any of the following activities sponsored by your school?	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
a. Athletic teams	33%	33%	22%
b. Performing arts (band, choir, drama)	6%	4%	3%
c. Academic clubs (e.g. debate, honor society, Spanish club, math club)	11%	1%	5%
d. Student government	15%	4%	3%
e. Community service or volunteer clubs (e.g. key club, peer mediators)	19%	6%	12%
f. JROTC	6%	11%	5%
g. Other school clubs or school activities	23%	7%	13%
School Culture	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
I make positive contributions to my school community	71%	62%	67%
I get along well with teachers	83%	81%	85%
In class, I often feel "put down" by my teachers	11%	16%	11%
In class, I often feel "put down" by Other Students	16%	5%	14%
Most of the teachers, counselors, school leaders and other adults I see at school every day know my name or who I am	76%	78%	72%
I believe I have enough influence at my school to impact decisions made by adults	54%	73%	63%
There are adults at my school that I can trust	49%	51%	59%
I have friends at my school that I can trust	82%	75%	82%

Student Motivation	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
I go to school because the subjects I'm taking are interesting and challenging	43%	68%	55%
I go to school because education is important to getting a job later on	92%	99%	96%
I go to school because I play on a team or belong to a club	20%	22%	16%
I go to school because I'm learning skills that I will need for a job	75%	75%	78%
I go to school because I want to go to college after I graduate	88%	96%	93%
I go to school because my parents make me	52%	46%	57%
Plans for the Future	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
Thinking about the future, do you think you will:	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
a. Graduate from high school	90%	91%	95%
b. Attend school after high school	82%	72%	79%
c. Graduate from a 4-year college	72%	70%	71%
d. Join the armed services	8%	5%	7%
e. Have a good job	91%	91%	92%
School Discipline	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
Thinking about your school this year, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Everyone knows what the school rules are	57%	73%	67%
The school rules are fair	35%	31%	38%
The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are	32%	46%	55%
The school rules are strictly enforced	36%	49%	49%
If a school rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow	53%	75%	65%
Discipline in my school is fair	27%	30%	39%
The school rules make the school safer	37%	38%	48%
The school rules make it a better learning environment	32%	38%	45%
The school rules are too strict	34%	43%	39%
How many times did the following things happen	(% Checked)	(% Checked)	(% Checked)
a. I got in trouble for not following school rules	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	44%	15%	43%

1-2 times	35%	47%	36%
3+ times	14%	33%	18%
b. I was late for school	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	10%	10%	19%
1-2 times	37%	37%	36%
3+ times	48%	51%	42%
c. I cut or skipped class	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	46%	33%	48%
1-2 times	25%	35%	24%
3+ times	22%	30%	24%
d. I was absent from school	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	14%	14%	17%
1-2 times	42%	48%	38%
3+ times	37%	32%	42%
e. I received a detention	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	76%	60%	80%
1-2 times	13%	25%	12%
3+ times	4%	11%	4%
f. I was suspended	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	68%	38%	69%
1-2 times	21%	43%	23%
3+ times	4%	14%	4%
g. I was disruptive in class	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	55%	32%	53%
1-2 times	25%	28%	26%
3+ times	12%	36%	17%
h. I got in a fight	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	85%	63%	81%
1-2 times	10%	27%	12%
3+ times	5%	6%	3%
When you last got in trouble at school, did you feel the school staff's reaction was:	(% Checked)	(% Checked)	(% Checked)

	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Harsh	23%	25%	14%
Fair	27%	31%	31%
Too Lenient	4%	9%	3%
No Opinion	21%	26%	32%
Did you know that you were breaking a school rule when you did it?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	31%	43%	35%
Did you understand what happened in the disciplinary process?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	41%	58%	43%
Did you feel you were able to tell your side of the story in that disciplinary process?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	22%	35%	31%

Table 2C. Student Survey Questions & Responses for Volunteers, Respondents, and Non-Youth Court Students: Post Test

Total Students	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	112	52	576
School Culture	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your current school and teachers?	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
I make positive contributions to my school community	77%	62%	68%
I get along well with teachers	86%	81%	84%
In class, I often feel "put down" by my teachers	19%	17%	12%
In class, I often feel "put down" by other Students	18%	6%	13%
Most of the teachers, counselors, school leaders and other adults I see at school every day know my name or who I am	81%	83%	76%
I believe I have enough influence at my school to impact decisions made by adults	62%	65%	63%
There are adults at my school that I can trust	68%	54%	63%
I have friends at my school that I can trust	86%	87%	79%
Student Motivation	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about why you go to school?	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
I go to school because I think the subjects I'm taking are interesting and challenging	50%	60%	58%
I go to school because education is important to getting a job later on	94%	94%	97%
I go to school because I play on a team or belong to a club	30%	19%	20%
I go to school because I'm learning skills that I will need for a job	75%	79%	83%
I go to school because I want to go to college after I graduate	90%	94%	92%
I go to school because my parents make me	54%	44%	54%
Plans for the Future	(% Checked)	(% Checked)	(% Checked)
Which of the following career fields interest you? (please check all that apply)	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
a. Legal	24%	13%	10%
b. Health/Medical	37%	42%	44%

c. Education	21%	12%	15%
d. Computers & Technology	21%	17%	23%
e. Criminal Justice	22%	19%	14%
f. Military/Armed Services	7%	10%	9%
g. Business	30%	38%	36%
h. Arts & Communications	30%	19%	23%
i. Other	37%	46%	46%
School Discipline & Student Behavior	(% Agree)	(% Agree)	(% Agree)
Thinking about your school this year, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
a. everyone knows what the school rules are	68%	83%	69%
b. the school rules are fair	36%	27%	42%
c. the punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are	38%	33%	47%
d. the school rules are strictly enforced	45%	46%	43%
e. if a school rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow	55%	62%	64%
f. discipline in my school is fair	32%	31%	40%
g. the school rules make the school safer	47%	40%	47%
h. the school rules make it a better learning environment	49%	42%	44%
i. the school rules are too strict	39%	52%	35%
How many times did the following things happen since the start of school?	(% Checked)	(% Checked)	(% Checked)
a. I got in trouble for not following school rules	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	24%	12%	21%
1-2 times	32%	48%	36%
3+ times	24%	35%	23%
b. I was late for school	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	9%	6%	9%
1-2 times	22%	25%	20%
3+ times	51%	65%	51%
b. I cut or skipped classes	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	26%	15%	24%
1-2 times	28%	40%	26%

3+ times	29%	40%	30%
c. I was absent from school	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	13%	15%	8%
1-2 times	21%	27%	23%
3+ times	46%	54%	49%
e. I received a detention	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	54%	58%	58%
1-2 times	18%	19%	15%
3+ times	10%	19%	6%
f. I was suspended	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	39%	21%	40%
1-2 times	26%	44%	30%
3+ times	16%	31%	9%
g. I was disruptive in class	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	35%	23%	36%
1-2 times	27%	33%	24%
3+ times	21%	40%	20%
h. I got in a fight	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Never	54%	62%	56%
1-2 times	18%	25%	21%
3+ times	9%	8%	3%
Have you ever gotten in trouble in High School	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	60%	87%	62%
<i>If 'yes', please answer the following five questions.</i>			
Did you feel about the school staff's reaction was:	(% Checked)	(% Checked)	(% Checked)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
Harsh	23%	25%	14%
Fair	30%	33%	31%
Too lenient	3%	2%	3%
No opinion	27%	35%	31%

Did you know that you were breaking a school rule when you did it?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	41%	52%	38%
Did you understand what happened in the disciplinary process?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	37%	67%	44%
Did you feel you were able to tell your side of the story in that disciplinary process?	(% Yes)	(% Yes)	(% Yes)
	Volunteers	Respondents	Non YC Students
	31%	44%	34%
In which of the following ways have you participated in a youth court? (please check all that apply)	(% Checked)		
	Volunteers		
b. Juror	56%		
c. Judge	29%		
d. Youth Advocate	31%		
e. Bailiff	22%		
Which of the following reasons motivated you to choose the youth court? (please check all that apply)		(% Checked)	
		Respondents	
a. I didn't want to have the offense on my record		25%	
b. I didn't want to get suspended		25%	
c. I wanted to tell my side of the story		23%	
d. I wanted to get a 'fair hearing' from my peers		13%	
e. I thought I had to go to youth court		15%	
f. The school disciplinarian told me I should go		27%	
Did you complete the assignments you received at the conclusion of your hearing?		(% Yes)	
		Respondents	
		35%	

Which of the following reasons motivated you to volunteer to serve on a youth court? (please check all that apply)	(% Checked)		
	Volunteers		
a. It was part of my class	33%		
b. It was part of the assignment I received after my youth court hearing	4%		
b. I wanted to learn about the legal system	37%		
c. I wanted to help out my fellow students	30%		
d. I wanted to help out my school community	32%		
e. I thought it would help my college applications	31%		
f. My friend(s) on youth court convinced me to participate	26%		
g. I wanted to earn rewards (an iPod, computer, field trips)	8%		
Which of the following skills do you think your participation in youth courts has helped you develop? (please check all that apply)	(% Checked)		
	Volunteers		
a. Public Speaking	38%		
b. Active Listening	46%		
c. Weighing Evidence	28%		
d. Analyzing Arguments	38%		
e. Building Consensus	25%		
f. Team Work	41%		
g. Understanding Fairness	43%		

Appendix D. The CUSD Youth Court Model, Referrals, Selection Process, Years of Operation, and Training Opportunities

Youth Court Referrals: Low-level Disciplinary Infractions

The types of offenses that are brought before youth court are generally low-level infractions. Table 1D shows the typical offenses against persons, equipment or violations of policy that come before youth courts.

Table 1D. Offense Heard by CUSD Youth Courts

Offense Against a Person	Offenses Against Equipment	Policy Violations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defiance • Disrespect of a teacher or other school personnel • Sexual harassment • Physical altercations (“spats”) • Standard refusals • Arguing with another student • Verbal abuse • Profanity • Disorderly conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vandalism • Electronics policy violations • Breaking of equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chewing gum • Violation of classroom specifications • Tardiness to class • Uniform violations • Cell phone violations • Cutting class

Student Selection Process

After school youth court volunteers self-selected to be part of the court. Virtually all respondent dispositions included the requirement that respondents serve on youth court juries, and these students also chose to complete their dispositions and serve on youth court juries. In class youth court volunteers were selected for participation in the class, generally by the principal, or the teacher teaching the youth court class. The adults identified students they thought would not be disruptive and who could benefit from a social studies or civics class which included a curriculum based around the legal system and running a youth court.

Respondents, regardless of venue, were selected by a combination of the school’s climate manager, principal, youth court advisor, and youth court volunteers themselves. Respondents selected for youth courts were selected on the basis of a collective perception that these students could benefit from the youth court process.

Years of Operation

- Afterschool youth courts operated at Chester High School from the 2007-08 to 2011-12 school years, and at Allied Health High School during the 2011-12 school year. In 2011-12, afterschool hearings were held once a week at AHSD, and once a week mid-day for respondents who were unable to attend after-school courts. Once a week the volunteers from AHSD went to Chester High School, where they were joined by Chester High School volunteers and jointly held youth court hearings.
- In class youth courts heard hearings at Chester High School in 2009-10 and 2010-11; at Allied Health High School and Science and Discovery High School in 2010-11, and at the combined AHSD High school in 2011-12. There were also a small number of hearings at two elementary schools, at Village in spring 2011 and 2012, and Columbus in spring 2012.

Training Opportunities

Multiple tools have been developed to train volunteers, and the youth court context itself appears to be a powerful setting for learning. Volunteer training for CUSD youth courts occurred prior to students assuming court roles; however, training varied according to the court venue. Afterschool volunteers received training in three key ways:

1. Beginning in the summer of 2007, some volunteers were able to participate in a month-long Summer Academy. From 2007 to 2011 the summer training evolved, to a clearly defined training curriculum based on The Coordinator's Manual,⁴⁵ developed by youth court advisors. Summer trainings were also supported by local attorneys and judges who contributed time and assisted with the training, including providing opportunities for students to shadow them. To be part of this training, volunteers had to apply and be accepted.
2. Training was ongoing during the school year. Students interested in becoming volunteers could receive on-line training by watching a video that explained youth courts and the various court roles, and were shown a mock trial.⁴⁶ Prospective volunteers were then required to pass a test, and according to one volunteer "get 70% or higher [to become] an actual youth court member."
3. Volunteers in the after school court also learned through experience. Students would begin on the courts as a member of the jury, and as they built their knowledge and skills they could advance to roles with higher levels of responsibility. The court officer ladder of responsibility for youth court volunteers proceeded in the following sequence: jury, jury foreman, bailiff, youth advocate, and finally judge. Only those volunteers who committed to youth court for a significant amount of time could gain the experience needed to advance within the hierarchy of court roles.

In-class training embedded learning about the legal system as well as youth court roles and responsibilities in a social studies or civics curriculum. In most cases, Mr. Volz partnered with the social studies teacher in teaching the in-class course. In some instances volunteer law students and local attorneys would also be involved. Formal instruction was accompanied by holding mock trials.

⁴⁵ <http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/youth-court-coordinators-manual>

⁴⁶ <http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/how-run-youth-court>

Volunteers were selected from class members to serve the various court roles for hearings heard by in-class youth courts.

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