



Mentoring program helps Sayre put riot behind

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Written by **Melanie Holmes**

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The William L. Sayre High School chapter of the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) met its goals. After a riot occurred at the beginning of the school year, Sayre students pushed to be a part of the training process for school police officers and start a peer-to-peer mentoring program, both of which have been put into place.

On Sept. 17, 20 teens were arrested after a physical encounter that authorities say started when some students arrived to school late and out of uniform. Told by a city police officer they could not enter because they were breaking a school policy, one or more students attempted to enter the building anyway, sparking a confrontation with officers that turned into a series of fights in the school while the building was placed under lockdown. After additional police officers rushed to the school, two students were charged with assaulting police, another was charged with assaulting a teacher and 17 were charged with disorderly conduct.

Improvements did not happen over night, but members of the PSU are happy with the current school climate and say students and school police are forming better relationships with each other. The first training was on April 22.



School policeman Sgt. Skipworth speaks to Candace

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“They did listen to us and had comments,” said freshman Anthony Robinson. “They did care and were responsive to us.”

Junior Zakia Royster said the process was long and took a lot of dedication, but she is happy to see the results she had hoped for.

“Now the school police will talk to us or be more lenient,” she said. “We already have a better connection.”

Students would like to participate in a second training session in the fall before the start of the new school year. They also plan to expand the peer-to-peer mentoring program, which began on a small scale this year. The goal is for upperclassmen to look out for underclassmen and dissolve problems before school police need to get involved.

“Volunteer training is involved so they know how to be an affective mentor and how to help the mentee grow,” Royster said.

Along with PSU Executive Director Nijmie Dzurinko, students met with James Golden, head of school safety, several times before implementing the first session and appreciate the time he put into meeting the needs of Sayre students. However, Dzurinko would like to see similar outcomes at other schools.

“It’s been a pretty big year for us in terms of success,” she said. “We want to try to build on it. I think it’s something we want to expand to other schools. There are plenty of places where conflicts happen and escalate when they would not need to if things were in place.”



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Carter and Zakia Royster at William L. Sayre High School in West Philadelphia. — HIROKO TANAKA/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER