



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# INSPIRING YOUTH VOICES



## METRO YOUTH ADVOCATES

### About

The Y, the Mayor's Healthy Hometown Movement, Metro United Way, Metro Council, the Louisville Free Public Library, JCPS, and community leaders around Louisville partnered to develop a new annual youth advocacy program called Metro Youth Advocates.

The goal of Metro Youth Advocates is to create an annual cohort of young people inspired, informed, and engaged to effectively advocate for policy change at the community level. This program serves as an instrument for elevating the youth voice across the city and engaging young people more substantively in the issues that impact them, both with policymakers and among one another.

Students who participate strengthen their advocacy, public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking skills while engaging with public officials, community leaders and youth from the Louisville Metro area.





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## 2013 Metro Youth Advocates

Students formed focus groups based on shared interest in community issues. They heard from panels of community leaders about key components of advocacy work, including:



- Researching and storytelling
- Mapping stakeholders and community supporters
- Understanding the role of the Metro government
- Connecting their work to the business sector
- Effectively communicating with the Metro Council
- Leveraging media and social media

In their focus groups, students discussed each component through the lens of their chosen community issues and formed a proposal on what they believe to be the top

policy priority for the city's young people. Please see below for a brief summary of the focus groups' proposals.

After 16 weeks and 8 sessions, 89% of the students completed the program, with 85% earning a stipend for successful attendance and productive participation.

### Our inaugural 2013 class by the numbers...

- **95** youth advocates participated
- Students came from **31** high schools
- The group was comprised of **14** different self-identified ethnicities
- **26** Metro Council districts and **33** zip codes were represented





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## 2013 Student Issues and Proposals

- Higher Education
  - Implement a program for JCPS schools that will inform students of their post-secondary opportunities, not just for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders (which currently exists at some schools), but for all high school students.
- Secondary Education
  - Increase individualized learning options within classrooms by providing professional development classes that teach and reinforce individualized learning methods for JCPS teachers.
- Violence
  - Mandate that a violence reduction program be built into curriculum at all public middle schools.
- Vacant Lots
  - Increase awareness about vacant lots through public events promoting local artwork and focused Metro Council meetings.
- Economic Development
  - Support more trade classes in the JCPS curriculum and as part of after-school programs.
- Tobacco Use
  - Leverage public-private partnerships to support youth-led health councils in each school.
- Illegal Drug Use
  - Crowd-source social-media based anti-drug Public Service Announcement competitions with a community block party or celebration as a prize.
- Food and Agriculture
  - Restructure the policy concerning school gardens to refocus from just building modification to include required maintenance and a shared-use procedure.
- Environment
  - Partner JCPS with Public Works and Assets to implement a county-wide single-stream recycling system in public schools with a complementary education initiative.
- Health, Fitness, Obesity
  - Implement menu-labeling in all school cafeterias using a “stoplight” system, at the point of purchase and a complementary education program.





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## **Follow-Up**

In the immediate aftermath of the program, several community groups have reached out to the students to get their input or to seek support for existing community initiatives. Our community partners will also be setting up optional meetings for members of each group to present their proposals to relevant community leaders.



## **Future Involvement**

We have already started the planning process for next year, and are eager to expand our community partnerships. If you or anyone you know is interested in nominating a student for next year's class, participating as a guest speaker, or partnering with the Y to support the program, please do not hesitate to contact us!

To indicate your interest, please fill out the form found here: <http://tinyurl.com/lwbub4j>.

