



CHESTER UPLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

Administration Building
232 WEST 9TH STREET
CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA 19013
www.chesteruplandsd.org

Claudia S. Averette
Chief of Staff
HR & Community Relations

610-490-3340 OFFICE
610-447-3616 FAX

May 19, 2016

Re: Youth Courts

Dear Senate Democratic Policy Committee Members:

The Chester-Upland School District is pleased to write in support of student-based youth courts. Next fall will be the tenth year we have had youth courts in our district. Initially we had just one at Chester High School. After a few years we expanded them into our middle school, and this school year we had students in 9 classes (from the fourth grade to the 12th grade) learning the skills needed to operate a youth court. The schools were: Stetser, Main Street and CUSA elementary schools, Toby Farms Middle School, Chester High School and our S.T.E.M. school. Well over 200 of our students received youth court training this school year.

We view youth courts as an alternative disciplinary method that in some cases were more affective than traditional school discipline. They take advantage of the power of positive peer pressure. Just as negative peer pressure from others can lead to inappropriate behavior by many youth, so positive peer pressure can help steer youth on the right path. We have seen the effect of positive peer pressure in our youth courts. Youth court is a youth development tool providing students with socialization, academic, and civic engagement benefits.

In addition youth courts, as taught in our schools, promote restorative justice, not punishment. This approach is more consistent with neuroscience findings that adolescent brains are still developing and lack the necessary self-regulation capacity found in adults. New scientific research confirms what society has always observed about adolescent behavior: that youth are immature and often lack the necessary self-discipline to resist impulsive and risky behavior, causing them to make bad decisions. Youth courts recognize this behavioral immaturity as a major cause of student rule violations, and seek not to punish the student offender but to identify and fix the harm caused, and help the student offender reflect on their bad behavior, so they can avoid it in the future.

Should you need further information, we would be happy to put you in touch with both our teachers and climate control staff who support and help implement our youth courts. We encourage all efforts to increase support for youth courts statewide and wish you success in this endeavor.

Sincerely,
Claudia Averette
Claudia S. Averette