



The Black Swan Academy's 2021 Black Youth Agenda was created in collaboration with middle and high school youth. The agenda raises the unique concerns of black youth living in the District of Columbia and aims to create positive systemic change through public policy and youth organizing at the local level.

THE ISSUES:

1

Queer Affirming Learning Spaces

Make schools a safe space for ALL students by supporting and investing in queer and Black youth.

2

Communities Ground.Guns Down!

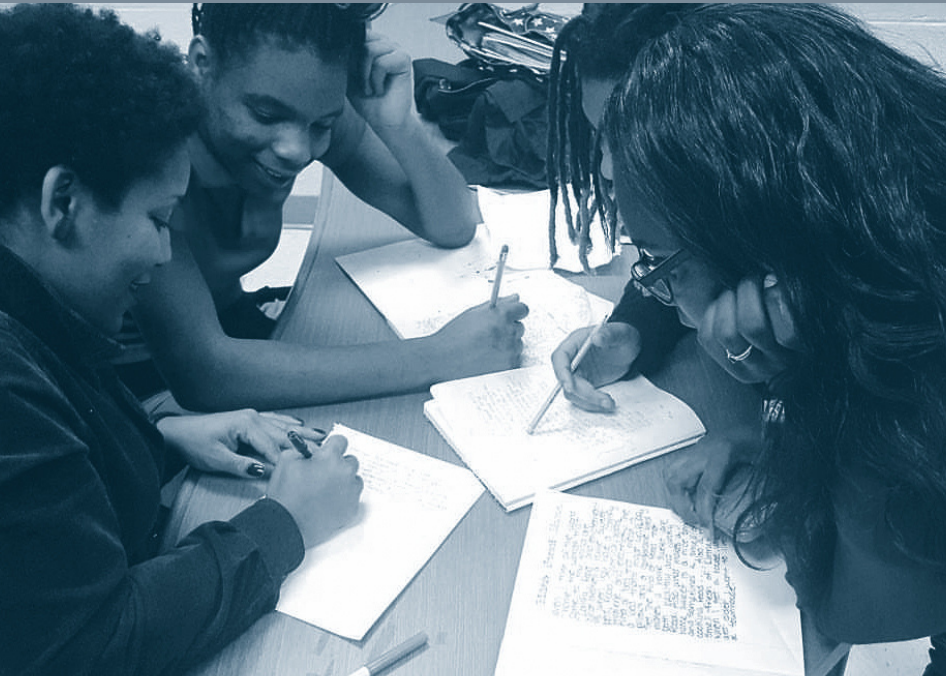
Address violence by investing in the community and moving beyond policing.

3

Hope and Homes

Ensure youth, especially those facing housing instability, have the resources needed to be safe, supported, healthy and to thrive.

Queer Affirming Learning Spaces



Make schools a safe space for ALL students by supporting and investing in queer and Black youth.

DID YOU KNOW?!

- In the district, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning young people make up nearly 31% of the students in middle and high schools combined.
- 1 in 5 queer youth in DCPS reported being physically assaulted in the past year because of their gender expression.
- The proportion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who said they attempted to commit suicide in the past year was nearly four times larger than heterosexual youth.

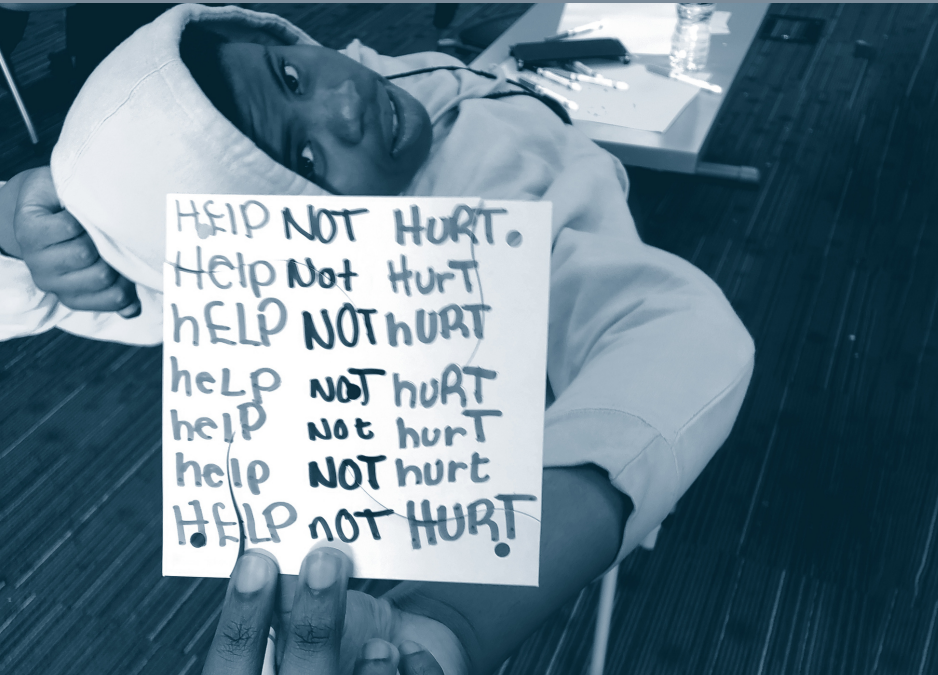
DEMANDS:

- 1 Increase the number of gender affirming bathrooms in schools and within community spaces
- 2 Hire more Queer and Black staff personnel in local schools
- 3 Require that educators and adults who interact with youth be trained to respond to harm as it relates to one's gender identity or sexual orientation
- 4 Grant access to mental health support services to ALL youth

We know that for Black students, the intersections of their gender identity, sexual orientation, and race often compound to result in violence or discrimination. Ultimately, schools fail to provide mental health resources that would allow youth to cope and maintain their mental health. Instead schools often replicate the same harms that many queer youth experience at home and in their larger communities. The trauma young people may carry as a result of being denied access to places in which they feel emotionally and physically safe needs to be addressed, *especially* as young people are asked to continue navigating spaces that are not always affirming in their gender or sexual orientation. Despite young people spending most of their time in schools, schools fail to provide students opportunities to engage with people, resources, or literature that reflect sexual and gender minority youth and families.



Communities Ground. Guns Down!



Address violence by investing in the community and moving beyond policing.

DID YOU KNOW?!

- Many young people in the district, particularly black youth, have lost two to three friends to gun violence.
- Nationally, more than 25% of children have witnessed an act of violence in their homes, schools, or community over the past year.
- Nationally more than 5% of young people have witnessed a shooting.

DEMANDS:

- 1 Increase the number of “violence interrupters” across the district
- 2 Provide community- led trainings to strengthen our community’s skills and capacity around mediation, conflict resolution, de-escalation techniques, and healthy coping mechanisms
- 3 Increase the frequency in which community led peace walks happen
- 4 Decriminalize pepper spray in local schools
- 5 Provide self defense classes for D.C. residents

Real public safety requires that investments be made into funding schools, public housing, healthcare, transportation, and living-wages. As a result of structural continued divestments, Ward 7 and 8 currently have the highest percentages of households who are economically insecure and also have the highest ratio of violent crime. Young people who witness violence repeatedly can be mentally and emotionally impacted, yet the community remains ill equipped to address the trauma and PTSD the Black community continues to carry. Calls to end gun violence have only resulted in increased surveillance and violence at the hands of the police. Addressing intra- community violence will require community based interventions and mental health support services outside of the realm of policing.

Hopes and Homes



Ensure youth, especially those facing housing instability, have the resources needed to be safe, supported, healthy and to thrive.

DID YOU KNOW?!

- On any given night there are 6,308 people experiencing homelessness in the District. While any number of people experiencing homelessness is too large, this count likely underestimates the true number of people experiencing housing instability.
- The 2017 youth census counted 1,117 unaccompanied youth and youth heads of households experiencing literal homelessness or doubling up with friends or strangers

DEMANDS:

- 01 Expand childcare options for people who have or are supporting children living in the district
- 02 Expand funding to better support young people with emergency needs like toiletries, food, or clothes
- 03 Require that schools give young people access to laundry machines and showers
- 04 Mandate that rapid rehousing not be terminated until new housing options are identified and secured
- 05 Expand funding for utility assistance programs
- 06 Remove the "one- time payment" stipulation from rental assistance programs

Many Black families, queer people, and young people are simultaneously navigating housing instability alongside structural barriers to healthcare, childcare, education, transportation, and employment opportunities. The saturation of systemic violence that Black and Brown people experience influences youth of colors' ability to get the support they need to cope with housing instability. Government based housing programs need to take proactive measures in preventing homelessness and supporting houseless people. Often, financial support is not offered to people experiencing housing instability prior to utilities being turned off or residents receiving an eviction notice. Furthermore, this type of financial support is for singular instances or once the amount people owe is outsized. Access to housing should be available without barriers like sobriety requirements or participation in mental or physical health treatment programs. Providing housing that is safe and affordable is the first step to stability and any longer term goals like sobriety or improved mental and physical health.