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## **City Youth Question Mayoral Candidates at Youth-Led Forum**

*Youth release results of 900 surveys of their peers;*

*Recommend ways to strengthen public education and curb violence*

PHILADELPHIA - Another Mayoral Forum was held in the city, but this time those who would be mayor did not answer questions posed by adult voters. Instead teens did the talking.

More than 600 youth from neighborhoods across the city attended the youth-led forum, held April 13 at the National Constitution Center. Their goal: to ensure that their voices and issues are heard prior to Primary Day, May 15.

In planning the forum, thirty youth ambassadors worked for dozens of hours on weekends, after school and during spring vacation to create the event and the accompanying city-wide survey of youth – the results of which were released at the forum and informed questions asked of the candidates.

The forum began with a welcome by Eli Lesser, director of education, National Constitution Center. “This program is a true testament of what can happen when young people get inspired by the political process,” he said. “Survey after survey tells us that today's young adults are less politically interested and informed than previous generations. Events like this prove that doesn't have to be the case. Given the opportunity to participate, young people will respond.”

And respond they did. Master of Ceremony Marcellus Taylor, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader at Philadelphia Electrical and Technology Charter School, talked about the importance of the forum, saying “when Philadelphia youth are heard our city can grow and prosper, and our futures start to look brighter.”

José Figueroa, Thomas Edison High, and Jordan Jude, J.R. Masterman High, presented the results of more than 900 surveys of their peers, about issues youth think should be addressed by the city's next mayor. The findings:

- City youth view crime and violence, including violence in the schools, as the No. 1 issue, followed by education and employment.
- The youth believe schools are overcrowded and inadequately funded, and that the money that is available to schools is not spread equally around the city.
- Regarding solutions to crime and violence, they see much more promise in strategies centered around recreation and community centers, more after school programs and improving the quality of education, as opposed to law-and-order strategies, such as hiring more police officers.
- To improve public education, they believe that teachers need to be better equipped to fully engage their students, class and school sizes need to be smaller, and all students should have access to a range of school choices.
- The city should do more to promote college among youth at an earlier age, and encourage local colleges to "adopt" high schools to provide mentoring and other resources.
- They strongly believe that young children see far too much violence in their lives and that this has an impact on the level of violence in the city.
- The overwhelming majority plan to talk to adults in their lives and urge them to consider youth issues when voting for mayor.

Jamirah Burley, a senior at Overbrook High School and president of the Citywide Student Government, served as moderator for the forum. Youth leaders asked questions of the three Mayoral candidates who attended, Democrats Michael Nutter and Rep. Chaka Fattah, and Republican Al Taubenberger. Questions were posed by youth leaders Celeata Bailey, Amirah Blake, Nina Spencer, Analicia Lindsay-Wilson, Michael Wixted, Ezequiel Amparo, William Brown, Daniel Cariño, Taja Jones, Whitney Jones, and Shardell Martin.

Youth-run Communications and Information Teams staffed the event, lead by Erick Banecker, Justin Coffey, Christopher Haines, Andrew Howard, Jasmine Lewis, Dana Robinson, Jamal Robinson, Kendra Souffrant, Jemile Thornton, Kwarmir Traylor, and Joseph Wilson.

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Organizational support for the student leaders and the Forum was provided by the Philadelphia Youth Network, the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC), the National Constitution Center and the Philadelphia Children’s Commission. Commenting on his work with the Forum’s youth leaders, C. Kemal Nance, director, Youth Leadership Initiatives, Philadelphia Youth Network, Inc. said: “I am convinced that the answer to world peace exists among the young people who came to this Forum. They are intelligent and resourceful, true leaders who deserve to be heard.”

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### **Youth Forum Organizing Sponsors**

#### **About the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC):**

Unites government, business, neighborhoods, and individual initiative to improve the quality of life in the region, build wealth in urban communities, and solve emerging issues. Provides business services to allow social entrepreneurs to carry out programs and projects, manages programs and partnerships, and drives positive change. Visit [www.gpuac.org](http://www.gpuac.org)

#### **About the National Constitution Center:**

An independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the ideas and values it represents. Located on Philadelphia’s Independence Mall, the Constitution Center is a museum, an education center, and a forum for debate on constitutional issues. Visit [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org).

#### **About the Philadelphia Children’s Commission:**

An independent body committed to improving the health, safety, well-being and development of the children and youth of Philadelphia, and to ensuring the implementation of sustained policy that recognizes that attention to the needs of children and youth as a city priority. Visit [www.philadelphiachildren.org](http://www.philadelphiachildren.org)

#### **About the Philadelphia Youth Network:**

As a catalyst for collective action, the Philadelphia Youth Network makes connections among individuals, organizations and systems. PYN increases capacity and resources in order to provide world-class preparation so our City’s youth can thrive in a regional and global economy. Visit [www.pyninc.org](http://www.pyninc.org)

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