

From The Notebook, School District of Philadelphia

An Ounce of Prevention
by [Michelle Welk](#) on Mar 17 2010

Maybe the [first hearing](#) held by the [Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations](#) (PCHR) focusing on school violence was cathartic because it presented an opportunity for victims and those who care about them to open up about their experiences and allow others to see what they've gone through.

And that's a good thing.

Healing is a hard process if you never acknowledge the pain. Finding solutions can be difficult, too, if you aren't sure what the problem is.

So maybe that's why the second hearing, held last night at Myers Rec Center in West Philadelphia with upwards of 50 people in attendance, focused on another aspect and perhaps the most important one pertaining to school violence - prevention.

After speaking with members of PCHR, I've learned that the goal of these hearings is to figure out the causes of school violence and, ultimately, ways to eliminate it.

Members of the [Philadelphia Student Union](#), [principals from District schools](#), and various representatives from a host of youth and educational organizations who testified last night were all pretty much in agreement on what is necessary to put a stop to violence in Philadelphia schools.

Specifically, communication with the students. After all, they are the ones most affected by the epidemic.

PSU member Anthony Robinson talked about the progress made in his school once an open dialogue was established between the school's security guards and the students.

[Furness High School](#) Principal Timothy McKenna credits the decline in violent incidents at his school to daily announcements he makes over the PA system.

He tells students that if they have a problem with one another, talk with an adult. They care and they will work it out.

Mark Ensley, a representative from the [Institute for the Development of African-American Youth](#), and one of the evening's last speakers, put it most succinctly.

"Let's not try to reinvent the wheel. We know what works."

There are programs already in place and seemingly plenty of knowledgeable people already aware of viable and successful practices that can curb violence and possibly even negate the causes behind it. So why is it still happening?

Allocation of resources for one.

When students testified that their schools had more guards than counselors and body searches were the norm before home room, it makes sense that the educational environment in Philadelphia schools may be more akin to an episode of the once-popular HBO series [The Wire](#) than a comfortable place where children can feel safe to learn.

It seems like it would be so simple to create a culture based on prevention rather than punishment. But judging by the ongoing violence in the District's public schools, this approach may be a ways off in Philadelphia.

Maybe if more time and resources were spent on the preventive side in talking to these kids and listening to the source of their anger, security guards and metal detectors would be rendered unnecessary.