

PHILLY STUDENTS SPEAK: VOICES OF LEARNING IN PANDEMICS

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COVID-19 and the sweeping civic responses to police brutality against Black America has had an enormous set of impacts on everyone across the world, altering the dynamic of our day-to-day lives. Young people can at times feel like what we experience and what we think isn't taken into consideration by educators and leaders because there are not enough public outlets for us to share our stories of this time in our lives, especially since we are stuck at home without our normal outlets, connections, and activities. The Youth Voices section of the *Perspectives on Urban Education* Back-to-School Pandemic Edition is a collection of student essays, narratives, and photos that lift up the voices of our generation as we experience high school during the twin pandemics. This corpus of written reflections on our experiences of living and learning through a time of great panic and civil unrest in the United States have helped us to understand more about each other, and in writing them, to learn about ourselves as well.

Youth voices and experiences are often disregarded, left out of major discussions in education. This is especially true for the voices and experiences of youth from marginalized identities and communities. Given this ongoing threat of representational inequity, we worked with principals and teachers in the Philadelphia School District over the summer to ensure equitable representation so that educators can learn from the experiences of high school students as you begin your school year as leaders and teachers. The students featured throughout this section attend high schools in the Philadelphia School District (and a few live in Philadelphia and attend school outside city limits).

The reflections in Youth Voices express the individualized struggles and unique triumphs of a range of Philadelphia high school students during this stressful and demanding time of crisis. Each individual represented in this section is coping with the current state of structural racism in the United States in our own way as well as with the daily effects of the pandemic and in our lives and families. We respond in various ways such as physical protesting, social media protesting, various kinds of activism, improving allyship, working to get voters registered for November, and working to better ourselves and those around us by making change in ways we can around us every day. We hope that these reflections give you insight into the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of Philadelphia high school students as we enter the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, one that we all are interested in seeing through well.

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