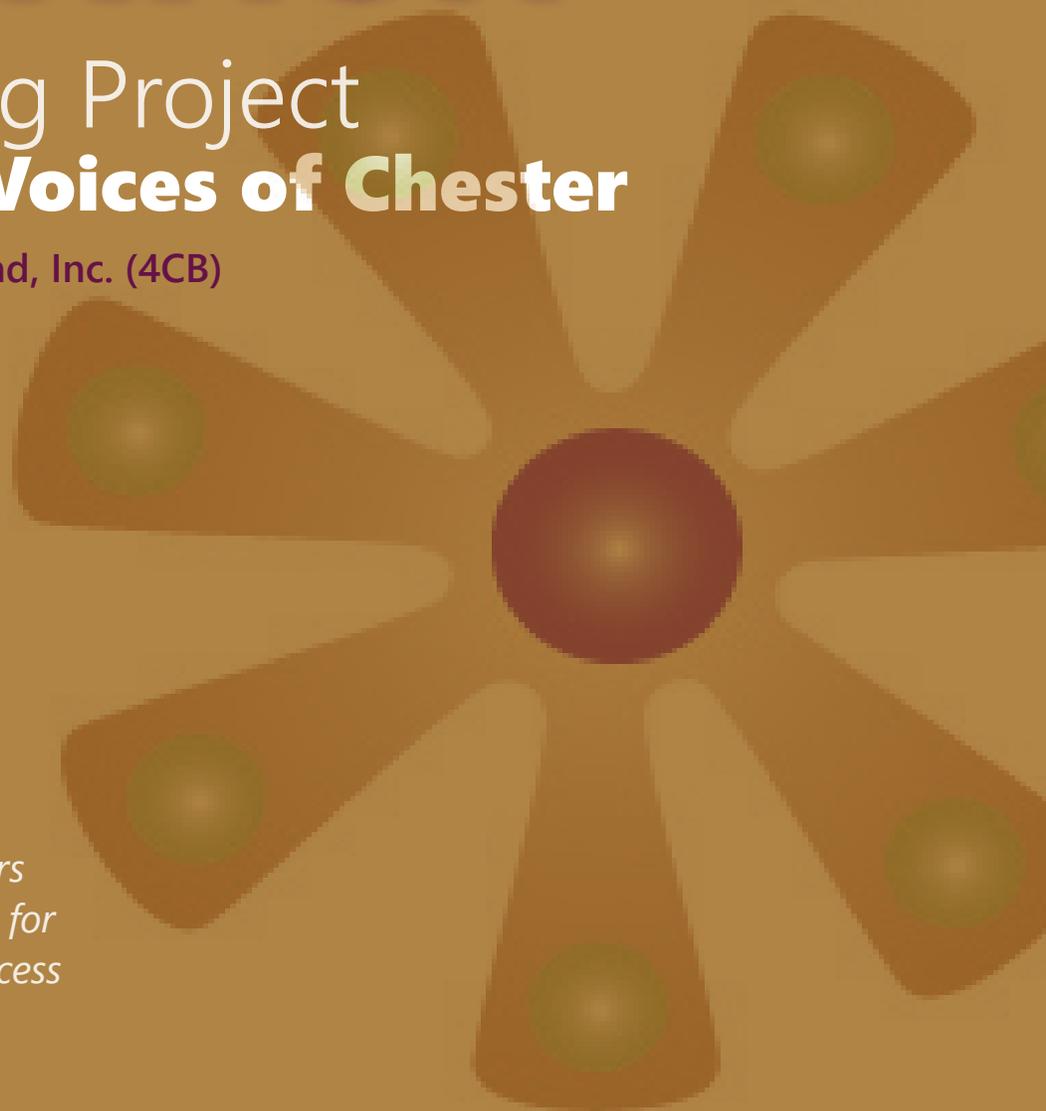


THE
ACADEMY FOR
PEACE &
LIBERATION
EDUCATION

The Listening Project
Hearing the Voices of Chester

A Project of 4 Circles Beyond, Inc. (4CB)

*Special thanks to Herb Walters
and the Rural Southern Voice for
Peace, for developing the process
and making the LP Training
Manual available.*



THE LISTENING PROJECT

was created in order to hear Chester residents' response to the emerging vision and mission of the planned Academy and to ask their advice as we plan for such a school. A central question was: If high school education was intended for liberation, what would it include? How would it run? What would it be and feel like?

The 4CB Academy for Peace & Liberation Education (AP&LE) Internship began with a three-day training at Temenos Retreat Center in West Chester, PA. The purpose of the training was to help the 6 new interns (1 college age & 5 high school-age) interpret and own the purpose of the Listening Project. This time was also intended to build a sense of camaraderie so that we could identify good working partnerships for conducting interviews.

As President of 4CB, Inc., I feel honored that through this Internship, we have created an opportunity for youth development and leadership while at the same time truly listening for the wisdom coming from members of the Chester Community. May we, at 4CB and the coming Academy for Peace and Liberation Education always remember to ground our work in community voice and remain true to our foundational value called, UBUNTU = I am what I am because of who we all are.

~ Niyonu D. Spann



WE **INTERVIEWED 21 PEOPLE:** AFRICAN AMERICAN

16 WOMEN | 6 MEN

3 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS | 1 COLLEGE STUDENT

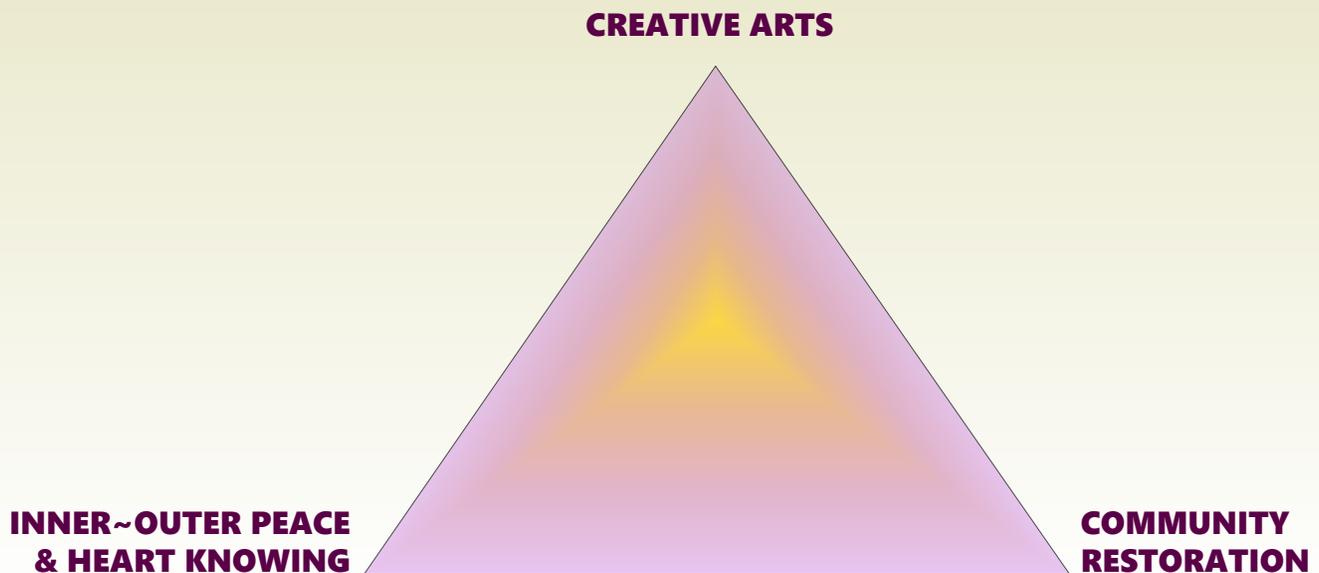
3 CHESTER SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

3 ENTREPRENEUR | BUSINESS OWNERS

EMERGING VISION/PLANNING FOR THE 4CB AP&LE:

4CB Academy for Peace and Liberation Education

CORE PRINCIPLES DRIVING CURRICULUM, PROGRAMMING AND OPERATIONS



UBUNTU

'I am what I am because of who we all are'

QUOTES THAT EXPAND THE **UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE, LIBERATION or EDUCATION**

"I think that the students should be allowed to voice their opinions more. Because you are the ones that are living it. I think with a school opening up they should get the input of students, that way, you know what they want, what they need, what they like/dislike."

"I think it would include courses on History, African-American History. A lot of people don't know their history, not just young people, adults they don't know the history of our country, they don't know the history of our arrival to the country against our will, and I think that hurts us a lot because we hear a lot about slavery you know, historically but, we don't hear a lot about our civilization before we came here, because we had everything. It was actually like a Wakanda . . . just a very small portion of our history. I don't think a lot of people know that. I think that that's something I would like to see included in a high school . . . "

". . . I think vocational is one of the best things for young men. If they don't want to go to college they can always go to a technical school and get some education . . . "

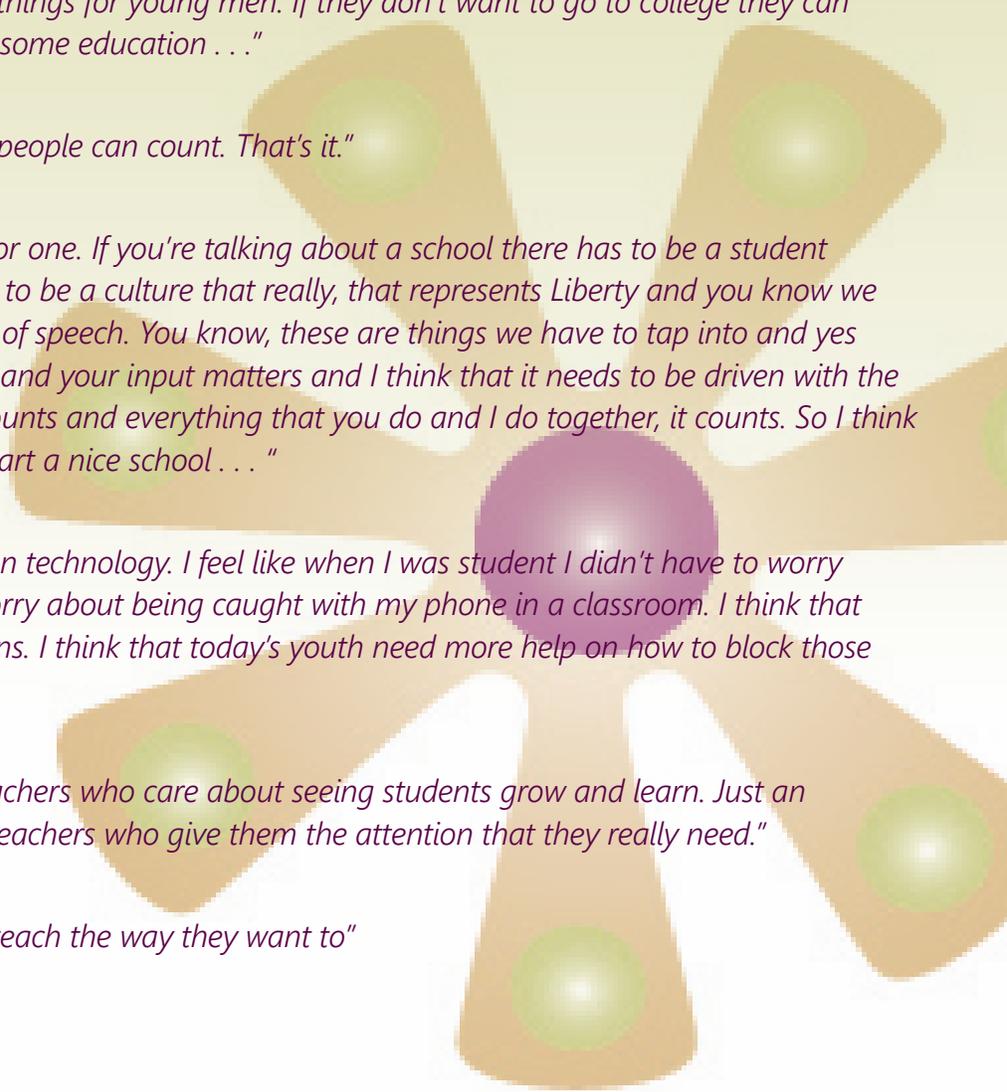
"Love, just love. Love, reading, math, so people can count. That's it."

"Well you must have the student body for one. If you're talking about a school there has to be a student body on one accord togetherness, it has to be a culture that really, that represents Liberty and you know we do believe that everyone has a freedom of speech. You know, these are things we have to tap into and yes your decision and your thought process and your input matters and I think that it needs to be driven with the agenda that everything that we do, it counts and everything that you do and I do together, it counts. So I think togetherness would be a good way to start a nice school . . . "

"I think there is a much more reliance on technology. I feel like when I was student I didn't have to worry about cyber bullying. I didn't have to worry about being caught with my phone in a classroom. I think that today's youth have a lot more distractions. I think that today's youth need more help on how to block those distractions out."

"The most important thing would be teachers who care about seeing students grow and learn. Just an environment where kids can grow and teachers who give them the attention that they really need."

"I think that teachers should be able to teach the way they want to"



QUOTES THAT EXPAND THE **UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE, LIBERATION or EDUCATION**

"Support system for kids that don't have any support"

"It's important to teach our kids about education but we also have to get them prepared for the level of education"

"Making education real- they should see themselves in the classroom"

"We need Restorative Justice Programs set in place, in the community and in the schools"

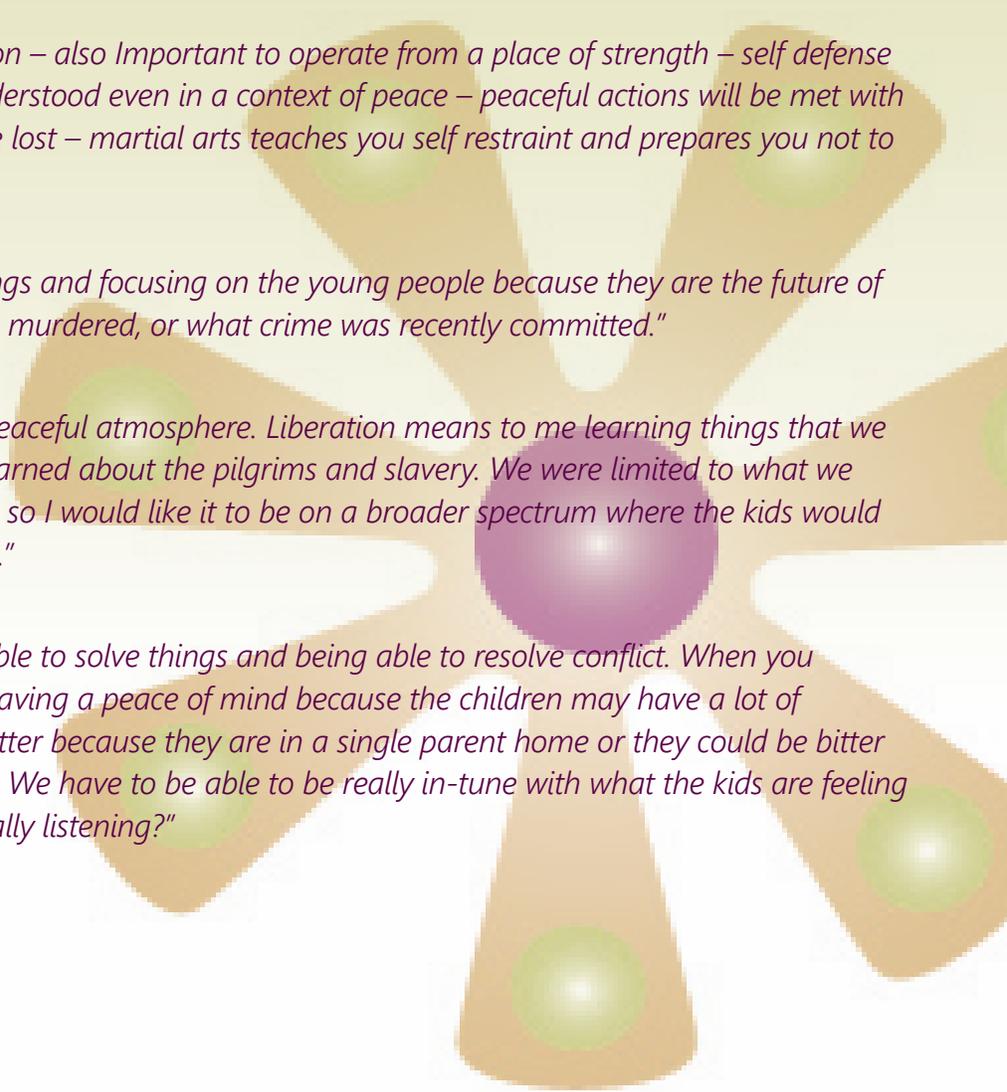
"Staying positive, keeping positive people around you. It's still a work in progress"

"...definitely peace – I'm a peaceful person – also Important to operate from a place of strength – self defense is very important – that needs to be understood even in a context of peace – peaceful actions will be met with harsh realities – I think that shouldn't be lost – martial arts teaches you self restraint and prepares you not to attack – to be on the defense. "

"Need to focus more on the positive things and focusing on the young people because they are the future of Chester, instead of focusing on who was murdered, or what crime was recently committed."

"To me peace means people getting a peaceful atmosphere. Liberation means to me learning things that we should learn. Back in the day we only learned about the pilgrims and slavery. We were limited to what we were supposed to know in the textbooks so I would like it to be on a broader spectrum where the kids would learn more about what really happened."

"Well, we definitely need peace. Being able to solve things and being able to resolve conflict. When you think of peace you think of stress-free, having a peace of mind because the children may have a lot of things bothering them. They could be bitter because they are in a single parent home or they could be bitter because they didn't have enough to eat. We have to be able to be really in-tune with what the kids are feeling sometimes we hear them but are we really listening?"



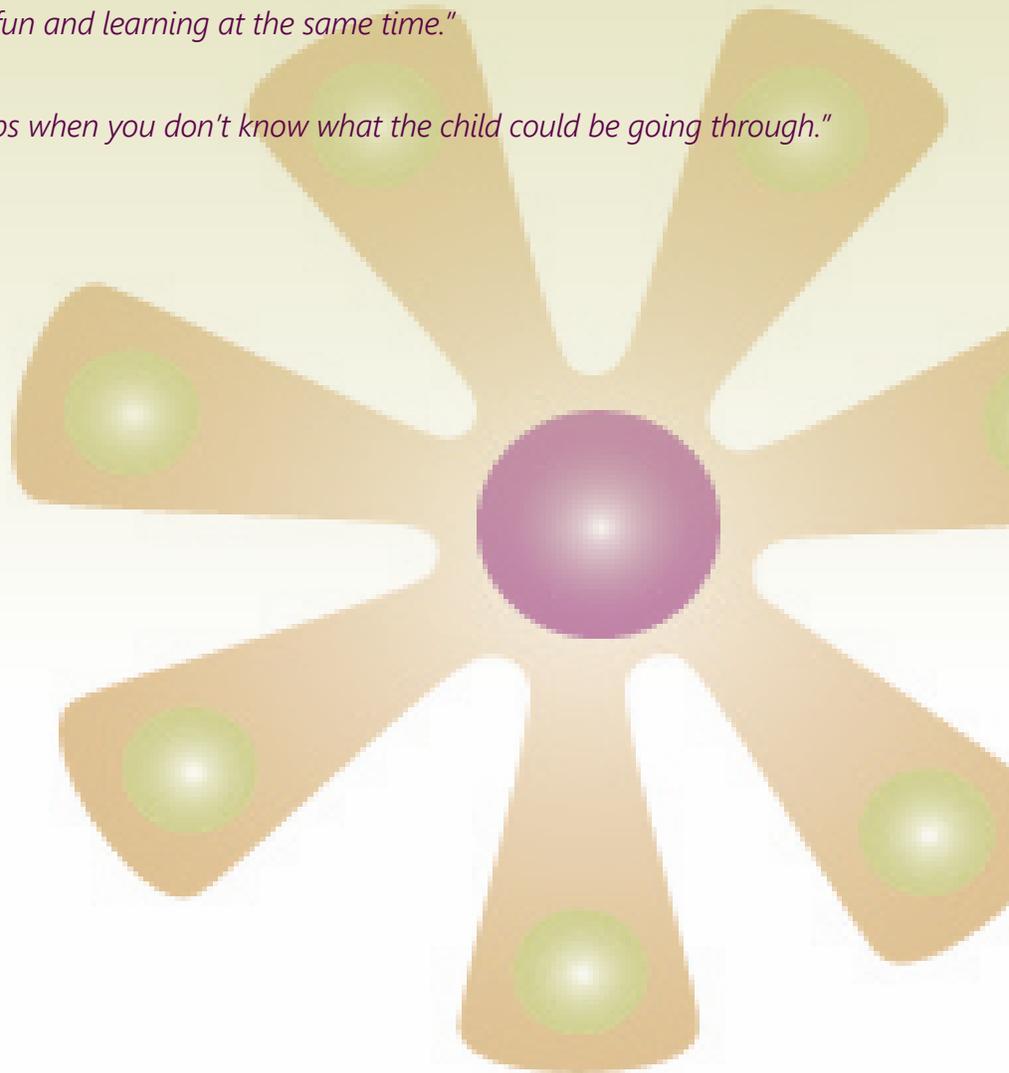
QUOTES THAT EXPAND THE **UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE, LIBERATION or EDUCATION**

"Peace and liberation for me means, as far as the city of Chester at this time, to live in the city you need peace because there is so much violence and that has brought a spirit of fear in the community and people are afraid to live in their community. I would like to people not to have to look over their shoulder or be able to be in their households and have peace of mind and know that no stray bullets are going to come in to their house and they don't have to duck down. Peace of mind means I can enjoy my community, I can enjoy my house and I don't have to be concerned about bloodshed or violence within the community and I feel that Liberation will come as the city is brought under control. You want to be free to be able to do whatever is available to you in a good way not in negative way. Liberty from poverty or lack."

"We need to teach young men how to be law enforcement, not from the perspective of the law enforcement but to understand this sanctioned kidnapping."

"Being able to go on class trips, having fun and learning at the same time."

"Stop giving them demerits and write ups when you don't know what the child could be going through."



SUGGESTIONS TO **IMPROVE** **CONDITIONS** IN CHESTER

" . . . we have very little parent involvement. And that in my opinion is one of the main factors in education period. You have to have a village, it takes a village, and if you don't have the parents involved then you really don't have anything."

"The biggest problem in Chester, I think is lack of resources. I think it's a lack of focus on the young people. I think that we need to join efforts regardless of politics around what's going to be good for the city and around what's going to be good for children and youth growing up here . . ."

"There are a lot of schools in Chester and some are abandoned. So what that tells one who is a student or those who are coming in, how do we feel about our educational system. There shouldn't be schools that are torn down and schools that are abandoned. So there are a lot of schools, let's focus on the schools that we can help you know, to help the kids, make it more of a modern school and if those schools aren't in the best shape, demolish them and do something else with the land . . ."

"When we are all working together we might be able to change some of those problems."

"We need a safe space for our kids. The streets are so dangerous now the kids don't even go out and play anymore. They need somewhere to be safe."

"Get the community more involved with the school."

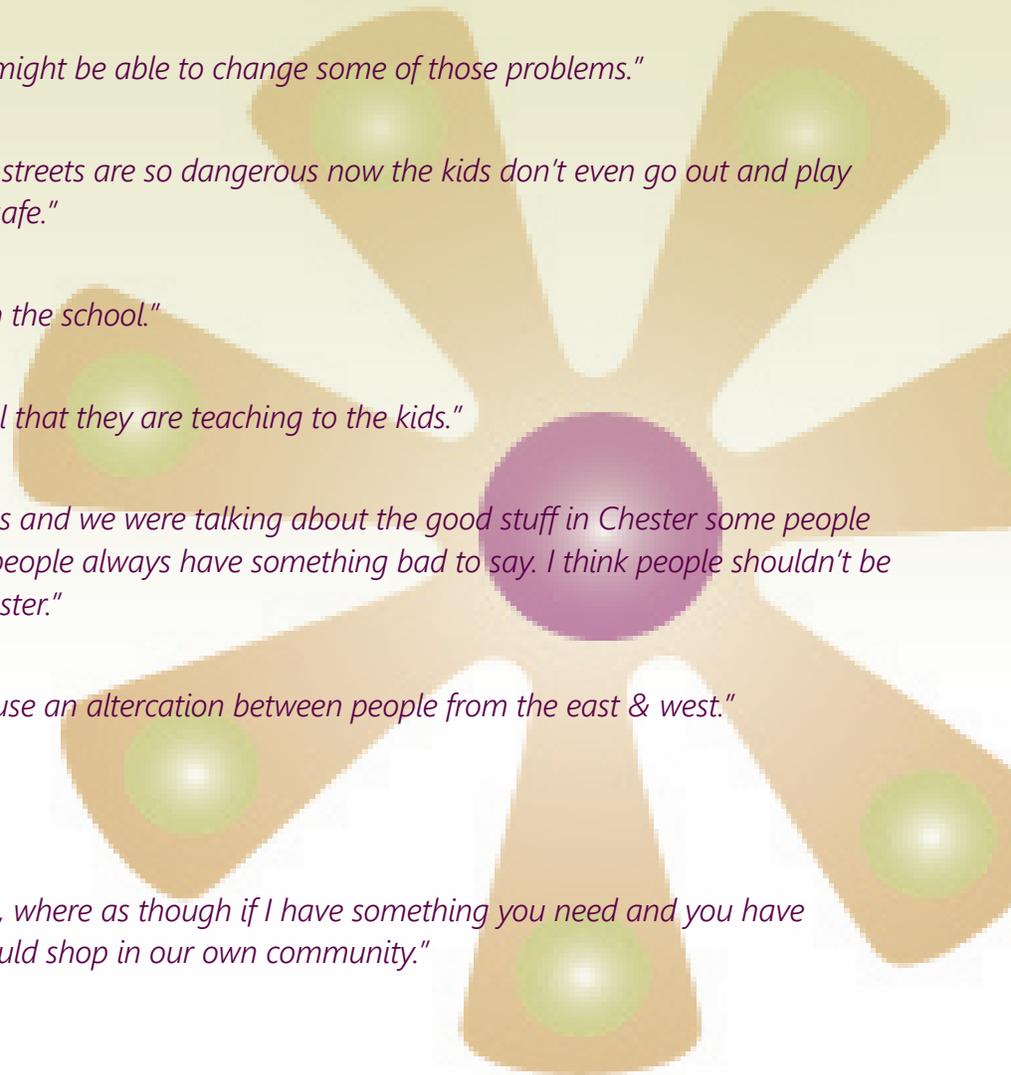
"Get teachers to care about the material that they are teaching to the kids."

"I think about when we were in Temenos and we were talking about the good stuff in Chester some people were scared to mention because other people always have something bad to say. I think people shouldn't be scared to talk about what's good in Chester."

"Put the school in a place that won't cause an altercation between people from the east & west."

"Inspire kids to be who they are."

"She suggested using the Barter System, where as though if I have something you need and you have something I need we can trade. We should shop in our own community."



SUGGESTIONS TO **IMPROVE** **CONDITIONS** IN CHESTER

"More college tours, doing community service, and looking out for people in the community."

"Early childhood education – needs to be put in the budget. Great foundation. First 5 years of a child's life – foundational. You need to have affordable early education for those formative years."

"The bullying issues."

"...I would love to see them light up the city cause it's dark to me."

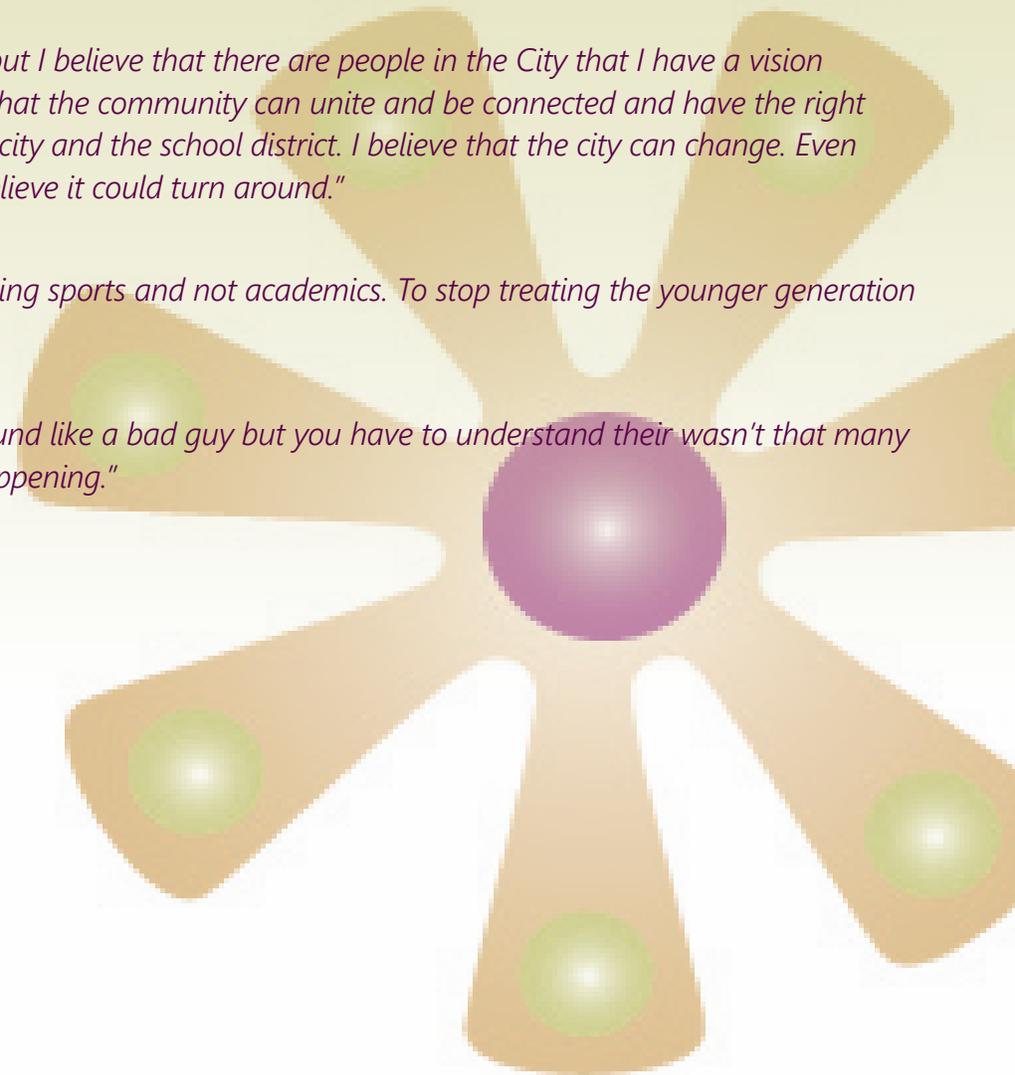
"I would like to see our local government get revised meaning getting rid of all of them and starting fresh. I would really like to see that done. I would like to see more public schools come back instead of the privatization because that's really like a selfish mode only one person is benefiting from that."

"I feel the City lacks vision at this time but I believe that there are people in the City that I have a vision but they will have to come forward so that the community can unite and be connected and have the right resources to bring about change in the city and the school district. I believe that the city can change. Even churches should get involved cause I believe it could turn around."

"Yes, teaching young men to stop idolizing sports and not academics. To stop treating the younger generation as if their mind is infantile."

"Let drug dealers out of jail, I know I sound like a bad guy but you have to understand their wasn't that many murderers or killings when that was happening."

"Stop giving them too much freedom."



QUOTES THAT ADDRESSED SOME OF THE **OBSTACLES** TO THE CREATION OF THE SCHOOL

"Majority of Chester Upland Schools have closed down. We have six school's left. SIX. And now that I think about it, there is no middle school on the East side neither, or High School. So I don't know. Has to do with money, a lot things are about money."

"I think some people might not understand the vision and what the school can accomplish. Because school is a lot more than just learning math and reading and science, you know it's a lot more than that.. "

". . .Okay, How do parents support their kids in school? by coming to the school, keeping a good report with their teachers and administrators, along with the school principal and how their student is making out."

"I just think, I feel as though they should be separated. I feel as though to keep high schools, they should have a high school, yeah there was another high school but they aint let everybody come in. They only let certain kids come in . . ."

"Faith. I believe some people may not believe that they are in need of a school like this. So that maybe the opposition you know, if one person doesn't see the vision of another person they decided to say they think we don't need that. So I think that you gotta have faith in the vision and if anyone opposed to it, that's just already one person or one obstacle other than building the school. So you gotta have faith in that . . ."

"I think they should work on the ones they have because another school would push away the kids that need help."

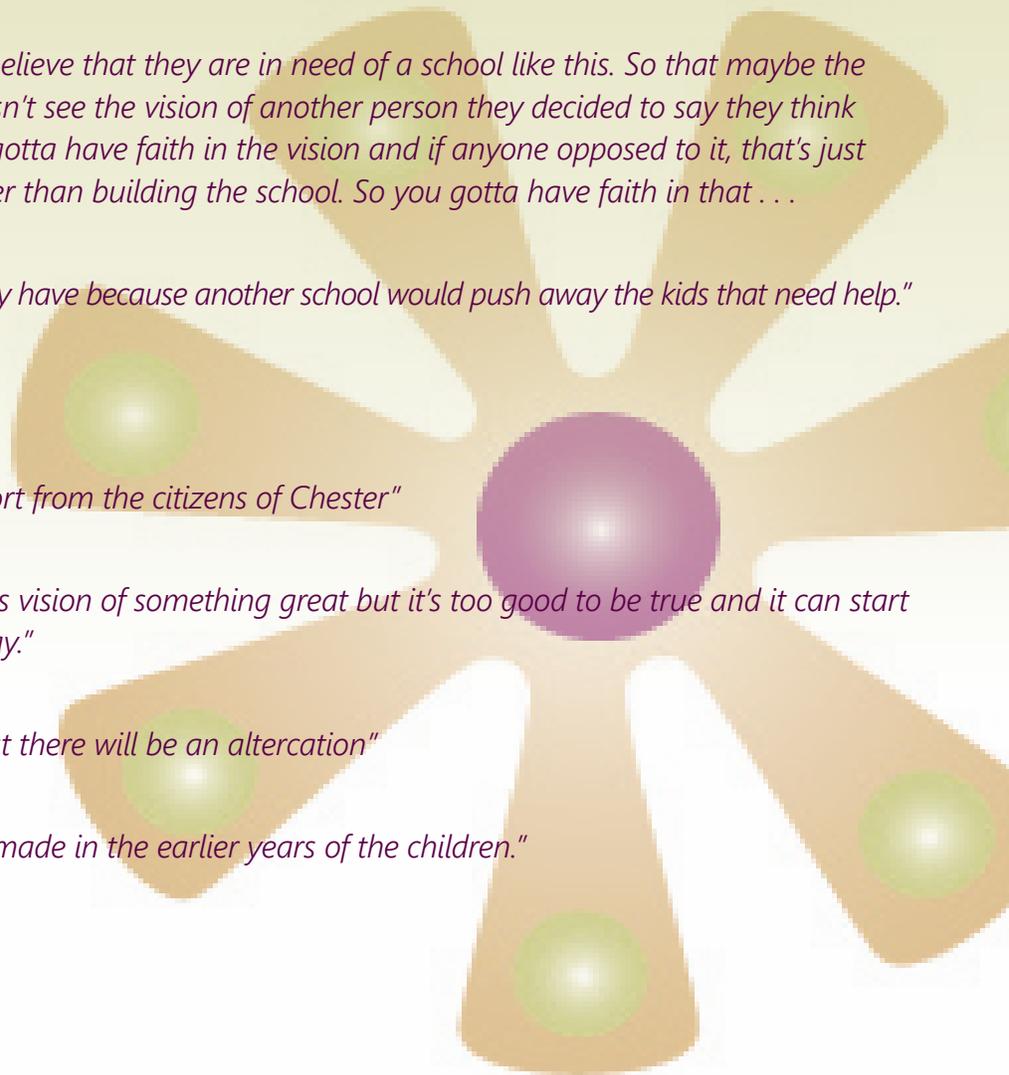
"How will you maintain the school?"

"It's gonna be a challenge getting support from the citizens of Chester"

"I feel like people may think we have this vision of something great but it's too good to be true and it can start off that way but is it gonna stay that way."

"When kids from the west side go to east there will be an altercation"

"There was never any real investments made in the earlier years of the children."



QUOTES THAT ADDRESSED SOME OF THE **OBSTACLES** TO THE CREATION OF THE SCHOOL

"I've always argued against another school because of the fact that Chester Uplands enrollment numbers aren't very high and the more schools you have it lessens the Chester Uplands school district population."

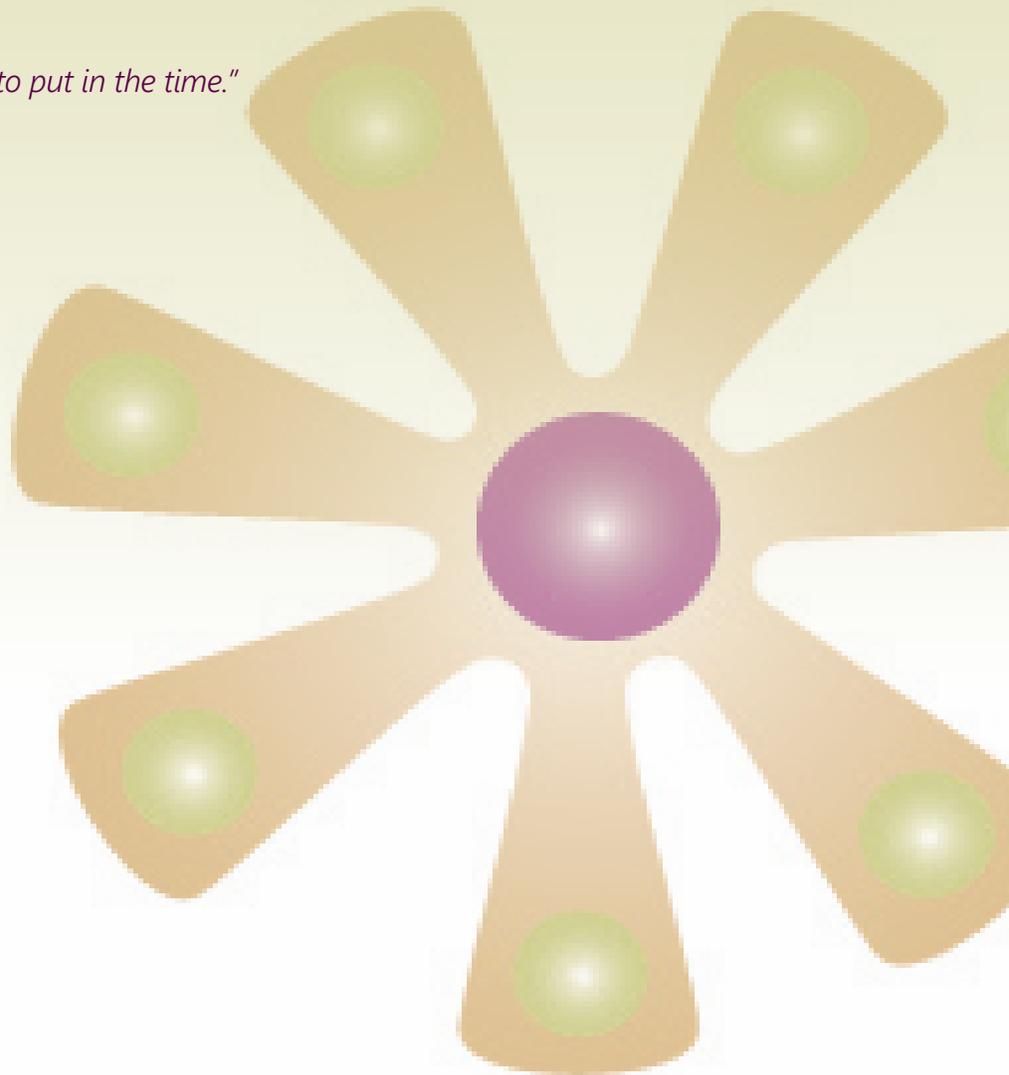
"Some people would have opposition toward because they wouldn't understand it or they wouldn't know because a lot people have grown up in this age in time with a great educational background?"

"People have a problem adhering to change. If we change the climate of the school, people would be like why do we really need this? When it's needed."

"I think that there has to be a change of mindset within the community even for that to happen. I feel like the mindset has to change and they have to change in order for that to be implemented into the community."

"Bring teachers in that will have constant interaction with your kids."

"Don't bring in people who don't want to put in the time."



SOME **ADVICE** OFFERED FOR STARTING THIS SCHOOL IN CHESTER

"...You know some people have different gripes about different things. It could be from the grade level of it, In my opinion I think another high school should be opened here. I definitely think there should be another high school to give students more options. "

"... if we can't educate students in this country, we are going to meet them one way or another right. They're either going to be our doctor or they're going to be a service worker in the community or they're going to be a perpetrator because people meet their needs whatever way they can. So America is no longer a superpower, we are behind a lot of the countries of the world and it's because of our education system is falling down ..."

"...A suburban place in Chester, a suburban area. Like say over there on 24th Street going out of Chester would be a nice place. Out of the city limits ..."

"... I believe with this vision, whoever's in front of it should stay focused ... "

"Promotion"

"Less isolation and more involvement with the community."

"In order to start another school you have to work on the ones you have now."

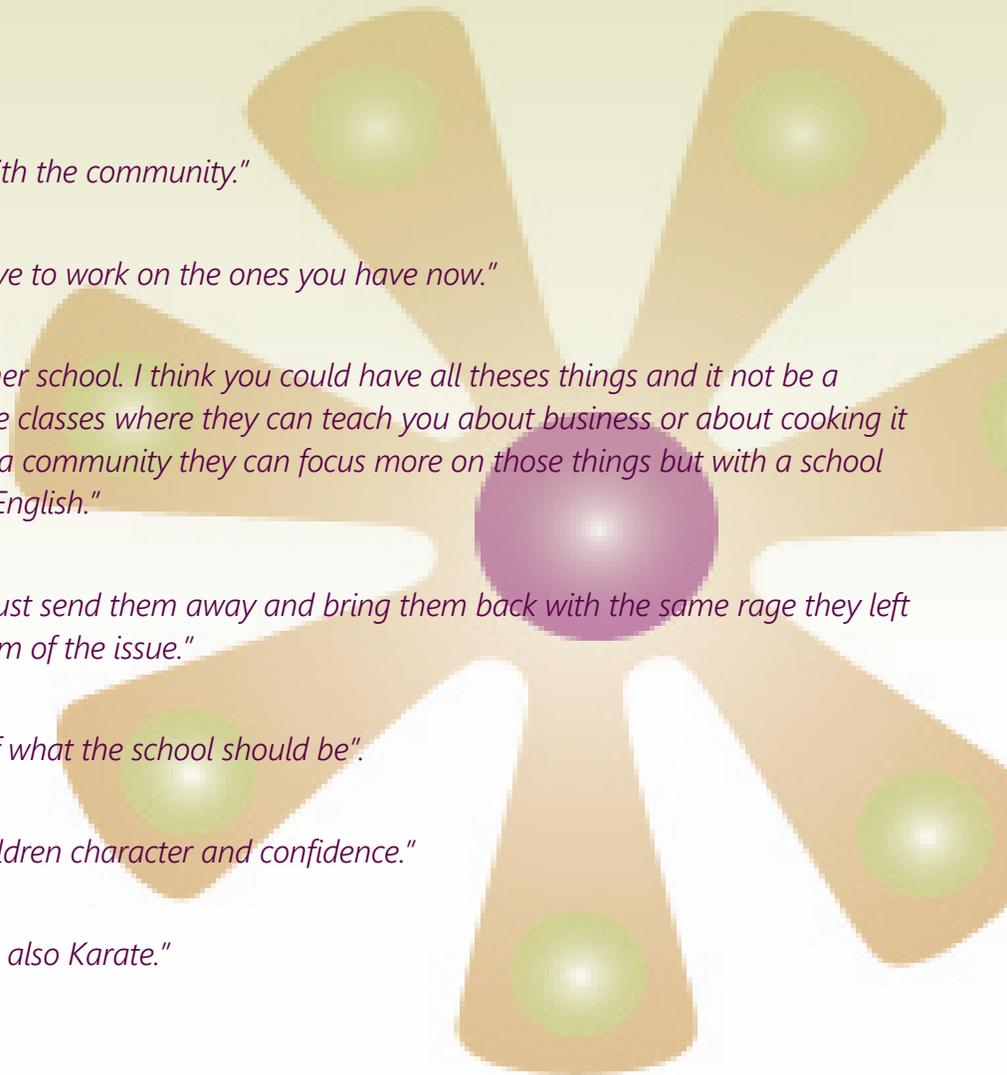
"I don't know if there is a need for another school. I think you could have all these things and it not be a school like a community center can have classes where they can teach you about business or about cooking it really doesn't have to be a school. With a community they can focus more on those things but with a school they would have to focus on math and English."

"When they punish kids they shouldn't just send them away and bring them back with the same rage they left with. They should try to get to the bottom of the issue."

"Involve people that share your vision of what the school should be".

"Start using arts because it gives the children character and confidence."

"The school should have Drama classes, also Karate."



SOME **ADVICE** OFFERED FOR STARTING THIS SCHOOL IN CHESTER

"...because of my involvement with this and Peace Camp – I think this is something that I think would be good for our community."

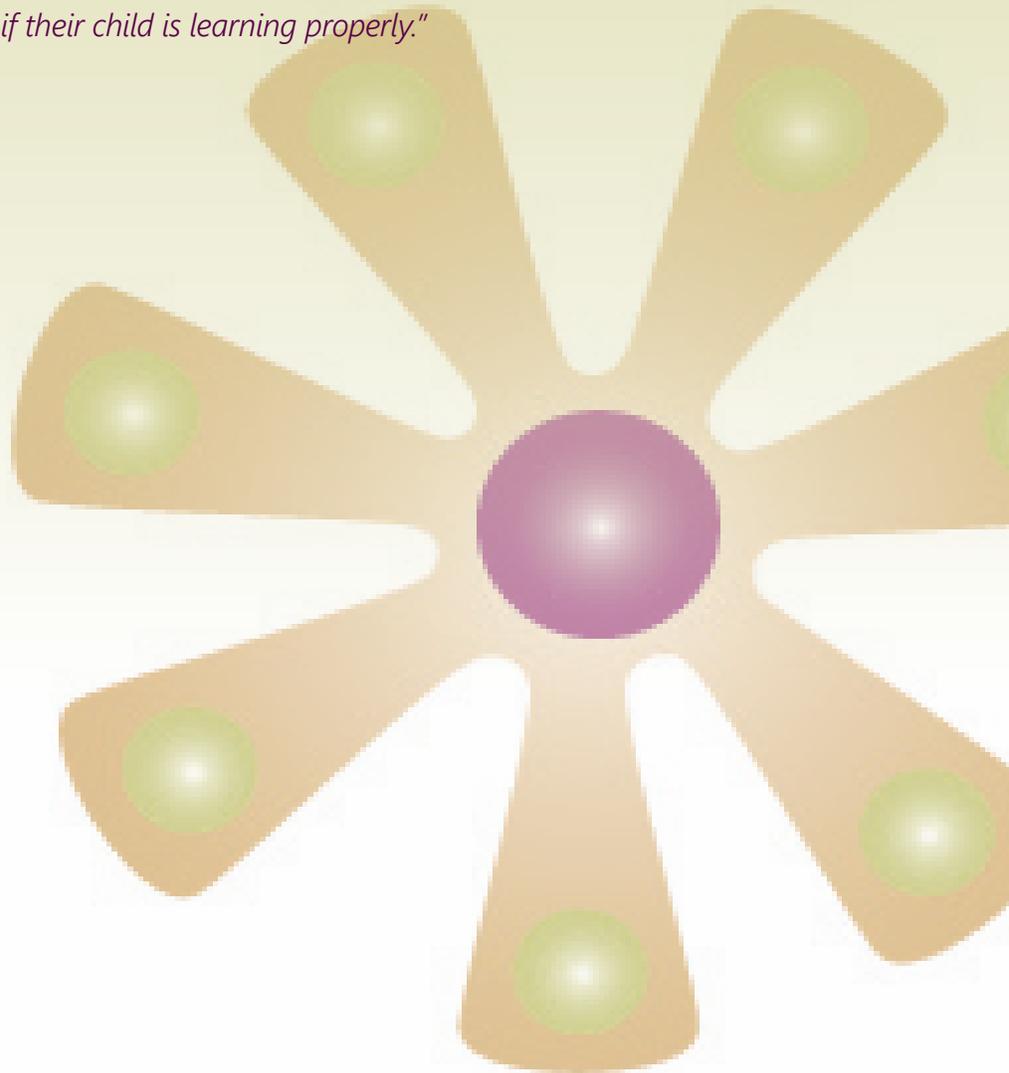
"That the school should teach Self-love, Inner peace, and African Americans Studies. Improving the no-bullying tolerance."

"Yes, it should be another high school so that you wouldn't have as many children in the same high school. It might deter beef between sections of the community as far as territorial issues that oppose a threat to other students and they don't have to be afraid to come to school and the classroom sizes could go down and they wouldn't be over crowded."

"Teach trades of all kinds."

"Stop denying the parents access to see if their child is learning properly."

"Get more city funded trips in place."



INTERVIEWS RAISED THESE **NEW QUESTIONS**

"Is parent involvement the biggest issue?"

"I was simply just amazed by this interview and how I shared a lot of the same views as the answers that were given."

"What exactly would be taught in the Academy for Peace and Liberation Education, when all is said and done?"

"Why are teachers that do not care being hired, or teachers that are clearly there, only for the urban experience?"

"Will a lot of parents have the will to listen when the time comes?"

"Is a new school what Chester needs the most? Will a new school actually solve problems in Chester?"

"Will there be a limit to how many kids can attend this school?"

"How will this school help build up the community?"

"Would a community center be better for Chester?"

"What method of teaching will this school include?"

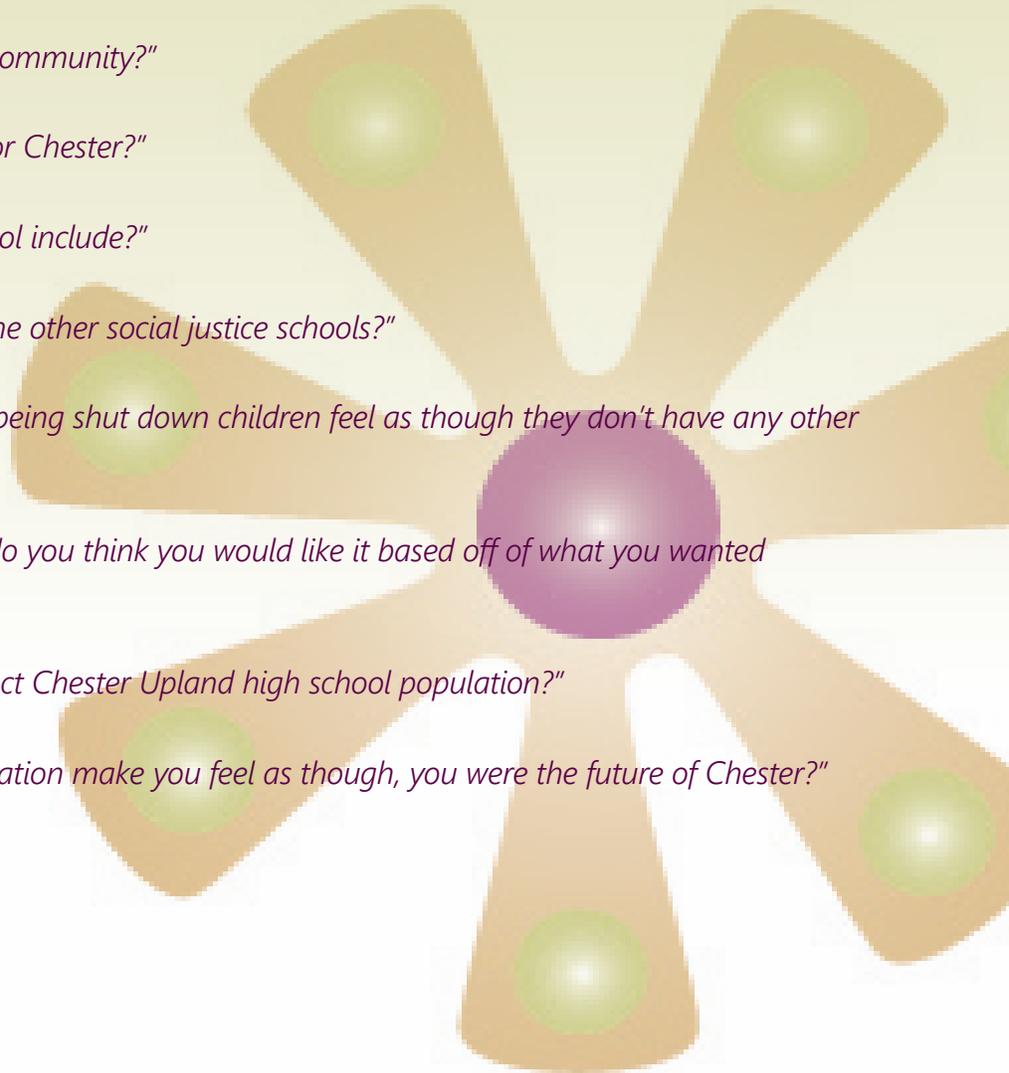
"How will this school be different then the other social justice schools?"

"Do you think due to the Arts program being shut down children feel as though they don't have any other way to express their emotions?"

"If you were able to attend this school, do you think you would like it based off of what you wanted to see it include?"

"How would starting a new school impact Chester Upland high school population?"

"As you were growing up, did your education make you feel as though, you were the future of Chester?"



HOW INTERVIEWS PERSONALLY TOUCHED THE INTERNS (INTERVIEWERS)

"It was my mom and I enjoyed hearing about her experience."

"It made me think about how I survived all the bad days I have encountered, and that I should remember that there will always be better days that come after the worst."

"How things are so much different now, especially the curriculum."

"He's my cousin, and I've always wanted to talk to him about his experience with school because he had always told about how his education wasn't the best and I wanted to go more in depth with him."

"I've never met someone who CAME to Chester from somewhere else and stayed because they believed they had a purpose or obligation to the gifted children of Chester. As well as motivated and determined to stay no matter the obstacle."

"It was interesting getting his perspective as a teacher and a parent."

"It showed me the different struggles that parents go through trying to get more involved with their kids education."

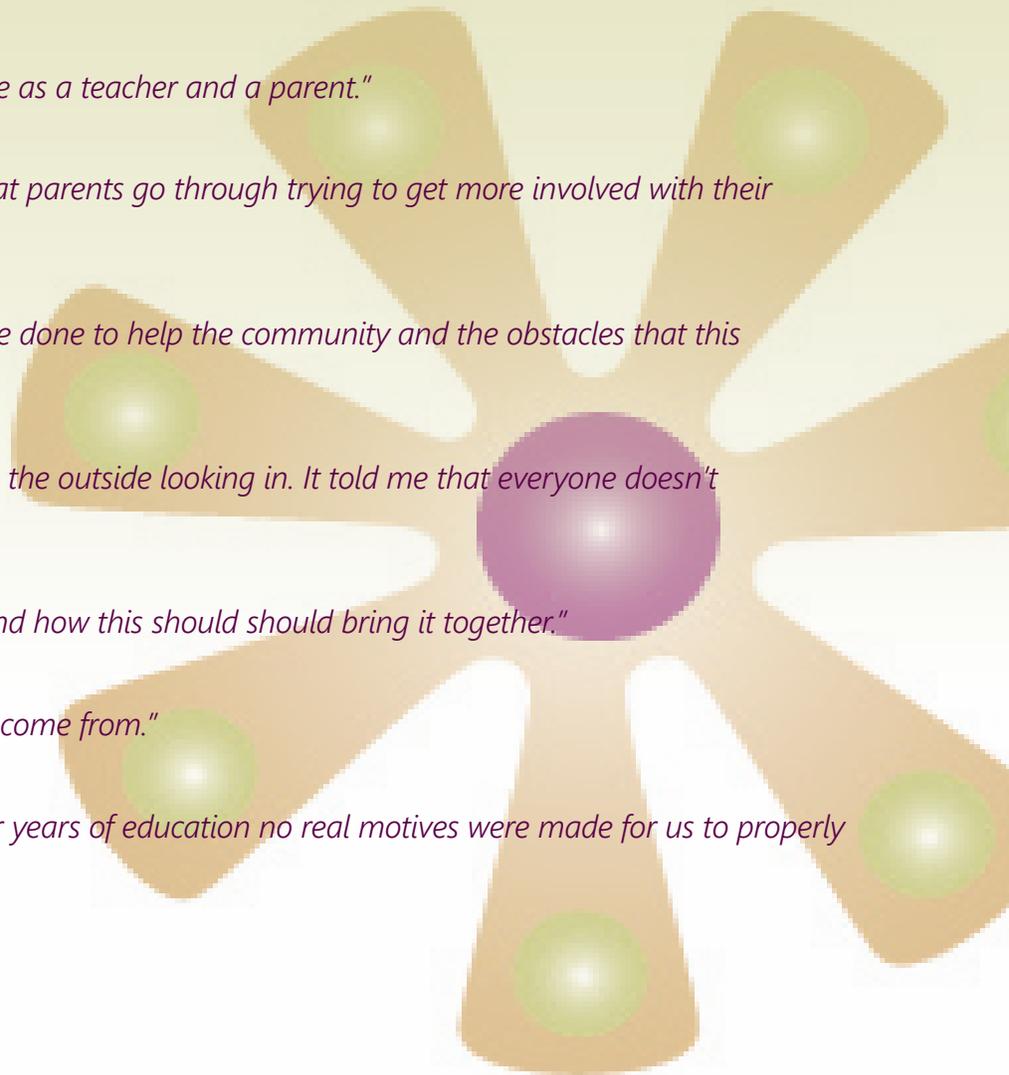
"It showed me the thing that needs to be done to help the community and the obstacles that this school will face."

"I gave me a perspective of someone on the outside looking in. It told me that everyone doesn't think Chester is bad."

"It showed me how divided Chester is and how this should should bring it together."

"It's important for us to know where we come from."

"She spoke on the fact that in my earlier years of education no real motives were made for us to properly succeed without difficulty."



HOW INTERVIEWS PERSONALLY TOUCHED THE INTERNS (INTERVIEWERS)

"He is a young black male, that has grown up in the city of Chester for 14 years. I feel as though the violence weighs more with the males because some go through trauma. To have a young male from the community willing to speak up is impressive."

"[She] spoke on the negativity and bullying inside of the school system, she has a strong passion to end it. She feels as though what better way to start than building a new school with better management?"

"It was my mommy!"

"He is my uncle. His brothers, with my father being the oldest, had to overcome major hardship growing up in different homes. This day explained other things about our family that I never knew."

"When he mentioned that Chester is known as the city of celebration."

