



Cooperative Arts & Humanities Magnet High School, New Haven  
No "N" in High School

Students, teachers and the principal, Dr. Dolores Garcia-Blocker worked collaboratively to research the historical roots of the "N" word and create strategies to reduce its use by students at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School in New Haven. The school will be moving into a new building in 2008 and sought to evaluate ways the school climate could be recreated along with the new classrooms.



Representative student team members with Dr. Garcia-Blocker (center).

Teachers in the subject areas of history, language arts, drama and video technology were recruited to support students who volunteered to participate in the project as a service to the school and the broader community. In January, the students were shown a film regarding the modern debate about the "N" word and began a process of strategic planning to engage their school community in the discussion. Student responses to the movie included reflections such as, "I didn't know the history behind the word." "My family uses this word all the time, this will be hard to change." "My mom wouldn't tolerate the use of that word in our house." After the reflection session there was a consensus agreement to work together to see what could be done through education to reduce the use of the "N" word. The project was named, *No "N" in High School* and the student team along with teacher collaborators agreed to make a long-term commitment to the project.



One of three discussion groups in dialogue tent at Arts & Idea Festival

During the school year the project team began to collect student perceptions on the use of the N word and looked for opportunities to advance a community discussion. A meaningful opportunity arose in cooperation with New Haven's Festival of Arts & Ideas. The Festival of Arts & Ideas is an annual event hosted on New Haven's historic green that includes a diverse assortment of artists and social activists with the goal to "re-image the world". The Cooperative Arts High School team was invited to facilitate a dialogue tent during the first weekend of the event. The student team was trained in facilitation skills and created questions to spark participant dialogue such as, "What problems does the

use of the N-word cause?" and "Should we try to stop the use of the N-word?"

Approximately 28 participants joined the three dialogue circles led by the students. Each dialogue circle recorded their own conclusions to the discussion questions. The objective for this activity was to expand the discussion about the use of the N-word within the broader New Haven community and collect ideas for application back at Cooperative Arts High School. The students intend to keep the project going into the next school year.



No N-word student facilitators at the Festival