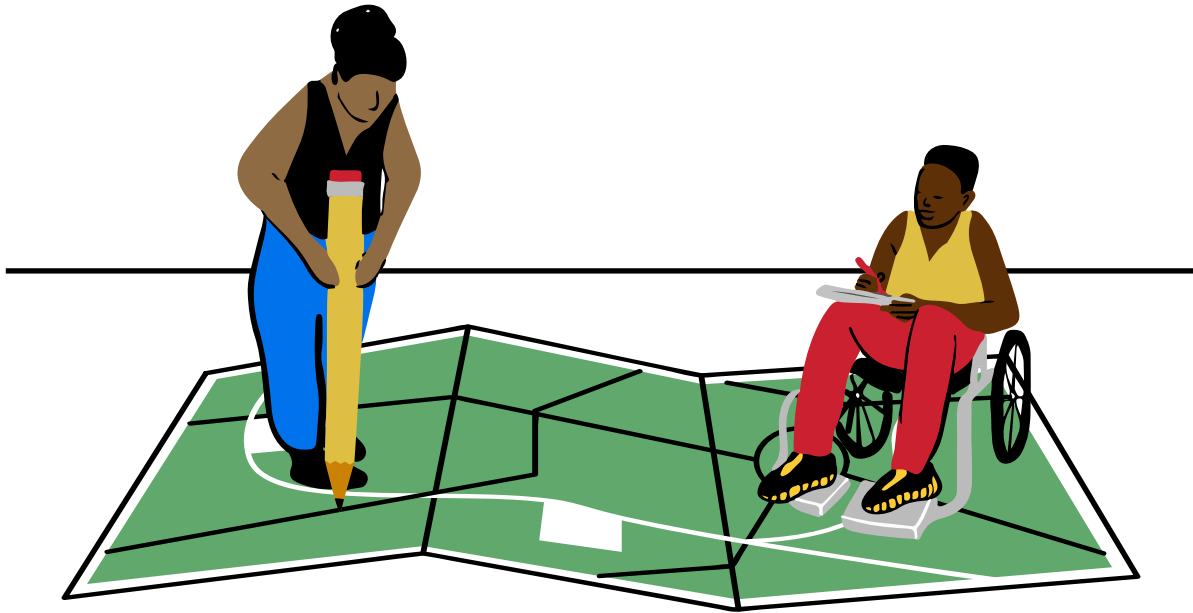


DIVESTING FROM SCHOOL POLICING AND INVESTING IN COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION:

A CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT FOR ACTIVISTS



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT



This toolkit covers an ongoing campaign, **Schools on Fire**, led by Power U Center for Social Change to divest funding from policing in Miami Dade Public Schools and to reinvest funds into comprehensive sex education, counselors, and nurses — removing funding from criminalizing young people and instead investing resources into the health and wellbeing of young people. Advocates for Youth (Advocates) was pleased to partner with Power U on this campaign. Advocates helped build capacity and provided technical assistance and support to Power U and its coalition partners.

This toolkit is a resource for anyone interested in removing police from schools, and for others to replicate similar campaigns, and to provide a framework for the clear connections between police in schools and the need for fully funded, honest, inclusive, comprehensive sex education nationwide.

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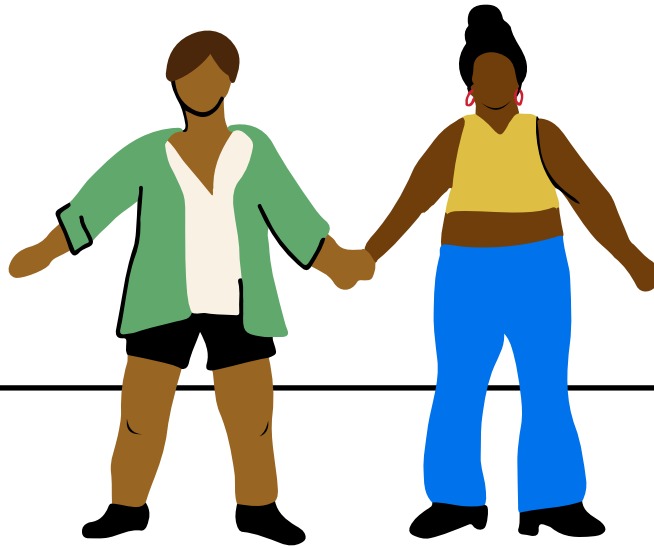
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**ANOTHER WORLD
IS POSSIBLE**

The text is rendered in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The words 'ANOTHER' and 'WORLD' are on the top line, and 'IS POSSIBLE' is on the bottom line. The text is surrounded by various small, stylized floral and leaf motifs in a light blue or teal color, giving it a natural, organic feel.

INTRODUCTION



Defunding the police is a reproductive justice issue, as fundamentally, both movements for abolition and reproductive justice are centered around the need for bodily autonomy and self determination for all people. Rather than spending billions on policing and militarization at the state, local, and federal level, we could instead use those resources so that every person can get the healthcare they need, can afford to parent if they want to, and have the resources to ensure they do not become a parent if they don't want to.

Power U Center for Social Change's campaign to divest from police in schools and invest those funds into comprehensive sex education is at its core about the need for bodily autonomy, the need for young people to have agency over their own decisions, and for our public school systems to actually invest in the health and wellbeing of Black young people instead of investing in the anti-Black violence of the school-to-prison pipeline. Bodily autonomy, youth agency, and investing in young people of color are all demonstrated in this innovative and transformative campaign.

This toolkit explores best practices from one successful campaign that worked to divest from policing and invest in comprehensive sex ed, led by Power U Center for Social Change (Power U), a south Florida-based grassroots organization that led the Schools on Fire campaign alongside their coalition partners, Florida Rising (formerly known as New Florida Majority) and the Miami Workers Center. This report, coauthored by Advocates for Youth and Power U, explores the divest/invest framework, which originated with the Movement for Black Lives, and offers key takeaways for other activists looking to replicate this campaign. This report will analyze the issue of funding for policing in schools, the need for comprehensive sex education in the US, and explore the inherent connections between the need for both abolition and reproductive justice.

BACKGROUND

Power U is organizing and developing the leadership of Black and Brown youth and Black women in South Florida so that they may help lead the struggle to liberate all oppressed people. Their campaign to divest from police and invest in comprehensive sex education fits in with an overarching campaign called **Schools On Fire** about the problems in Miami Dade Public Schools (MDPS). The Schools on Fire campaign connects the fact that the school district is overly invested in the school to prison pipeline when it should actually be invested in resources that benefit students, like quality sex education, mental health counselors, and ensuring that there is a full-time nurse in each school. To learn more, here is a [video](#) about **Power U's** Schools On Fire campaign and their [campaign website](#).

The Issue

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and for Black young people and other young people of color, minor infractions within schools are highly criminalized, funneling young people of color into the prison system through punitive disciplinary practices in what is commonly known as **the school to prison pipeline**.

Across the United States, public schools are continuously **under-resourced**, while funding for police departments **is highly prioritized** by city councils and school districts. Young people's health and rights are constantly threatened by white supremacy, state violence, and attacks on bodily autonomy—**both because of the investment in criminalizing young people of color, and the lack of investment in young people's health and well being**.

Many young people nationwide receive sex education that is inaccurate and harmful. Sex education requirements differ from state-to-state, which result in a patchwork of policy and practice across the country. Currently, **20 states do not require** that sex education be age-appropriate, medically accurate, culturally responsive, or evidence-based. While around half of states mandate sex education in some way, 29 states require that abstinence is stressed within sex education, despite the fact that there is no evidence that stressing abstinence will lead to fewer young people having sex or delaying sexual activity. Additionally, abstinence only programs have shown to be **actively harmful** to young people. Honest and evidence-informed **sex education promotes** social and emotional learning, prevention of child sexual abuse and sexual violence, advances gender equity, promotes healthy relationships, improves the health and achievement of LGBTQ young people, and results in more contraceptive use and fewer unintended pregnancies. Comprehensive sex education can play a **critical role** in the sexual health and overall well being of young people.

Investing in quality sex education can play a role in **dismantling rape culture and ending patriarchal violence**. Sex education in public schools is critical in creating a culture of consent and normalizing consent conversations in friendships, families, and romantic relationships. Rape culture is **pervasive**, and **Miami Dade County Public Schools specifically was sued** in 2019 by a student who was sexually assaulted and experienced retaliation for reporting. Comprehensive sex education includes lessons on consent, healthy relationships, and open communication, laying a foundation that can support healthy relationship dynamics and healthy behaviors throughout a young person's lifetime. Young people need sex education that is honest, complete, and accurate.

The United States over-invests in policing and under-invests in young people's health, rights, and the mitigation of policing on their day to day lived experiences. This further illustrates the need for bodily autonomy, youth to have agency over their own decisions, and public education that will actually serve Black youth instead of stigmatizing them and showing example after example of anti-Black violence from policing in schools.

How to Build a Divest/Invest Campaign

A Brief Overview of Power U's

Campaign Timeline

The elements of Power U's campaign are illustrative for others wishing to replicate the strategy.

There are six basic steps to implementing an advocacy strategy such as the one Power U created to pressure the superintendent of Miami/Dade Public Schools (MDPS) to divest from school policing and invest in sex education.

- 1. Build a team of people impacted** — in this case, young people in Miami Dade Public Schools. Young activists became members of Power U and went through a membership orientation process which included ongoing trainings on reproductive justice, sharing their own experiences with the school to prison pipeline, organizing fundamentals like basebuilding and 1 to 1s, and the importance of sex education in a young person's right to self-determine. Out of this group, a core organizing committee of youth leaders was formed.
- 2. Build relationships with stakeholders** — outreach to create a wider network of work groups composed of parents, community members, teachers, health professionals, and faith leaders. These sub groups were essential to the campaign moving forward and took action for this group, through circulating petitions, opening conversations on sex education and addressing family trauma, and other calls to action.
- 3. Continuously recruit new people** — Power U has a membership process where they continuously bring in new young people and invest in them as leaders, as ongoing recruitment and training is essential to building capacity to carry out a campaign. Their new youth activists go through over 30 hours of training over the course of a few months about organizing and their issues, like sex education and other reproductive justice issues, to support their growth and development, showing how training is an important part of developing new organizers.
- 4. Take action** — Power U created a variety of ways for their base to take action and demonstrate their power to the target of the campaign, the superintendent of MDPS. Through this process they built community support and increased the number of people who sought to divest from policing in schools and invest in comprehensive sex education. Some examples are canvassing in their local community and hosting educational events. It's important to take action in a number of ways that educate your base and put pressure on the decision maker who you are targeting.
- 5. Find key moments** — Power U was really effective in mobilizing a large number of people to support their agenda at school board meetings and hearings. Using key moments where your target can be confronted by members of the community like school board meetings is an effective way to pressure your target and mobilize others. In the school board context, Power U's campaign chose budget meetings and hearings. Find out when hearings are, research your school district's process and timeline, and identify strategic moments to mobilize a large number of people to these events.
- 6. Use creative tactics to build community support** — demonstrate how many people in your community want to divest from policing and invest in sex education. Some examples from Power U's campaign include putting up billboards, banner drops, passing out campaign materials at local STI testing locations, class raps (asking teachers if they can give a short presentation about the campaign during class and recruiting interested students), and utilizing social media & digital ads.

Key Takeaways to Use in Your Activism

Making change in your community can be overwhelming, especially if you are in a conservative community or have many right wing opponents to your cause. Here are some takeaways that may help you as you start this work in your community:

Remember your why: picture what it would look like if every person in your community had received honest, medically accurate, inclusive, age-appropriate sex education at all stages of their education. What if we invested in supporting young students of color rather than criminalizing them from a young age? What impact do you think this would have on you and your community? Organizing is challenging, and keeping the bigger picture in mind is helpful for motivating us to fight against policing and prisons and for reproductive justice day in and day out.

Failure to plan is planning to fail: making a plan to win - otherwise known as a strategy - is a really helpful step before getting started, and it's a living document you can refer back to and adjust throughout the organizing process. See the next section of this toolkit for more information on building a strategy.

Do research and know your facts: understanding your school district's budget process and how your local government works is crucial so you can understand your school district's current priorities. This will help you identify key moments like hearings and public school board meetings to pressure decision makers.

Above all, take collective action: building capacity and continuously building up leaders within your campaign is essential to winning. Strong coalitions, like Power U's coalition with the Miami Workers Center and Florida Rising, can be really valuable. When working with partner organizations, make sure to get clear commitments regarding their roles in the campaign. Make sure campaign partners know that you engage with young people as leaders and organizers and that they know how to work with young people in a way that isn't tokenizing.

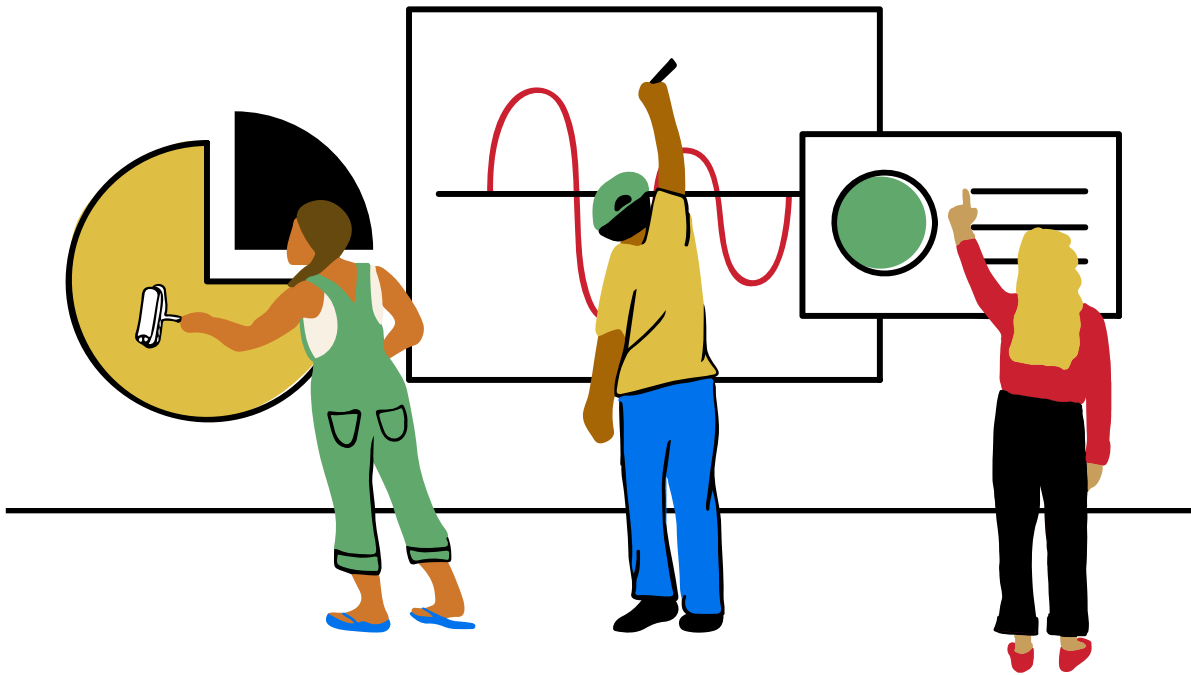
For young activists:

- Talking about sex and the need for sex education can be uncomfortable, especially at first. When you prepare to talk to your classmates and peers, think through what you are going to say beforehand, as being prepared to have intentional conversations makes 1 on 1s more effective.
- Check out Advocates for Youth's **Youth Activist Toolkit**, a comprehensive guide to organizing in your school or community.

For adult allies:

- To succeed in a campaign related to the rights of young people and students, you need to authentically engage young people as leaders and organizers. If you are an adult ally working on these issues, don't tokenize young people and treat them as pawns in your strategy. Invest in training young people as leaders and organizers and make sure they have an active role in your campaign. Make yourself available to answer questions, troubleshoot problems, work together, and offer support. Actively involve young leaders in discussions of strategy and the planning process.
- Read **Advocates' resource on youth-adult partnerships** to learn more.

How to Replicate this Campaign in Your Local Community

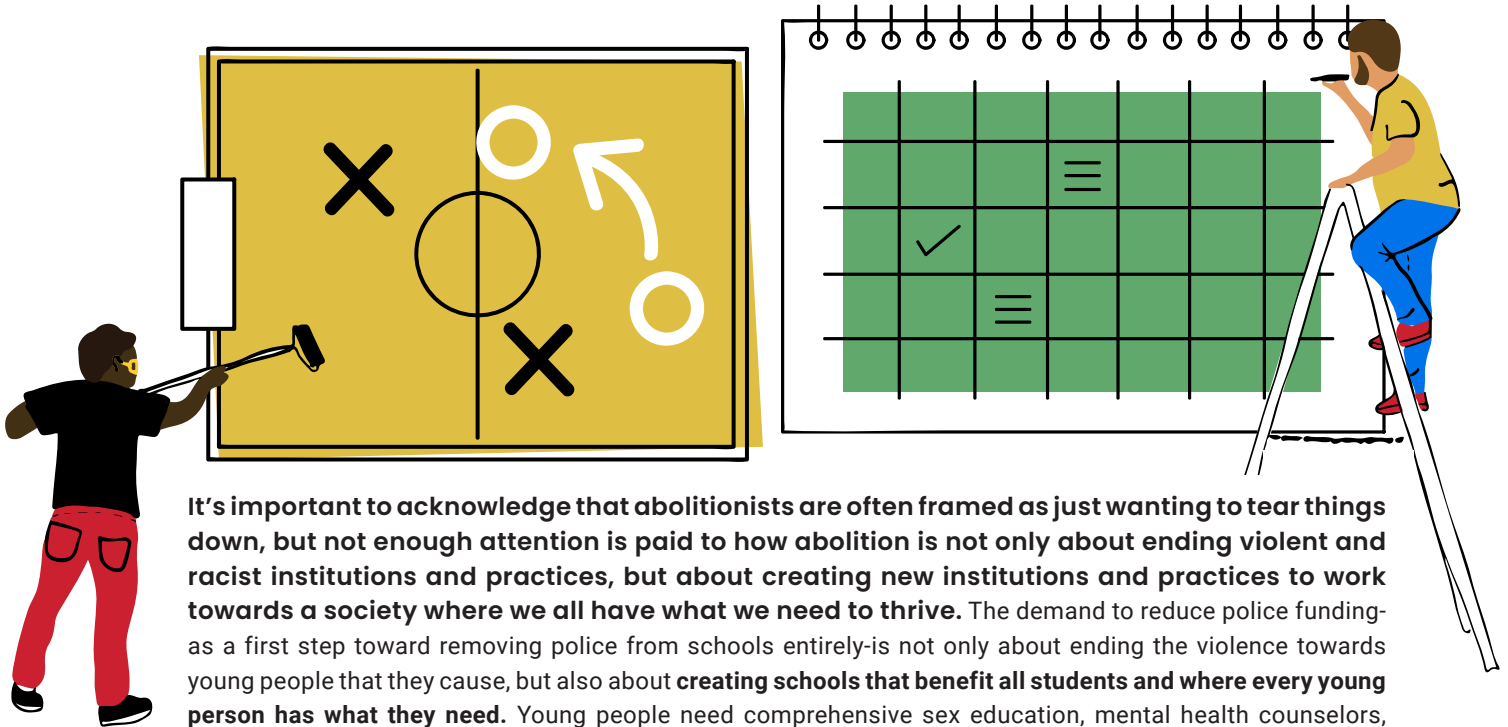


Schools are a fundamental site of shaping for people. Often we discuss the impact curriculum has on our understanding of the world. Yet we also must also recognize that the ways schools are structured, resourced and organized also do the same. When schools have histories of gender violence, but no actual intention to discuss bodily autonomy, what message does that send? When schools with decreasing budgets have increased funding for police, but no school nurses, what does that indicate leadership prioritizes? Although it may be challenging to organize a campaign in your local community, it's important, particularly if your school invests in school policing or fails to guarantee students age appropriate, and inclusive sex education. Comprehensive sex education offers important lessons about bodily autonomy, consent, and healthy relationships for people at a young age, so that they have the knowledge and ability to make safer decisions about their health and bodies throughout their whole lives. Eliminating school policing interrupts the school to prison pipeline and offers students a safer, more just environment in which to learn. **So, how can you get started?**

1. **Build a team** — at first, it doesn't have to be too big—you might be surprised how much a small, dedicated, strategic team can accomplish—but aim to bring in more people and build capacity as the campaign goes on. Once your team gets bigger, **delegate** and ensure there are clear roles among the team. Make sure those directly impacted by what you are organizing around are included—if you didn't already do this naturally, make sure you are including people in a way that isn't tokenizing and ensures that people have decision making power within your team about the direction of the campaign.

2. **Decide on a clear goal** — what do you want the school district or city to invest in once they have divested from the police? Make sure your demand(s) are specific. Decide if you will include alternatives to policing- restorative justice, other aspects of public safety and responding to conflict, harm, and abuse that are not carceral- in what you are demanding or not.
3. **Do the necessary research** — understand the local political landscape and your target. Look into the past stances your target has made around policing and sex education. Try to find as much information about funding within your school district as possible. If possible, talk to people within the school system to get a better understanding of the current situation and what your target thinks about these issues.
4. **Create a solid strategy** — that will move you towards your goals.
 - a. Assess *all* of the resources your team has. What does your team have that will help you move forward?
 - b. Who cares about this issue in your community? Make a list of key groups of people and organizations that also care about this issue, decide how you will reach out to them and involve them in your campaign and get them to take action in support of your demands. Assess your likely opponents: people who support prisons and policing and people who don't believe young people should be able to make decisions about their bodies and lives. Be mindful of who your natural opponents will be because as you grow community support for your demands, they will likely try and organize against you.
 - c. Decide on a target, one person who has the power to make the decision and say yes or no to your demands. In this case it was the superintendent of Miami Dade Public Schools. In the case of a university, it would be the school's president. This is the one person at the top of the institution you are pressuring who has enough power to make what you want happen.
 - d. Decide on how you will take action to move towards your goals - what tactics will you use? - Once you've come up with a list of tactics, make sure they escalate over time.
5. **Carry out your strategy!** — Actually launch the campaign and begin to organize for divestment from police in schools and an investment in young people's health and well being.
6. **If your target says no** → Every time your target says no, you should escalate and increase the pressure.
7. **If your target says yes** → Hold the school district accountable if they agree to changes. Publicly claim victory in a way that credits the movement and young people's visionary leadership.

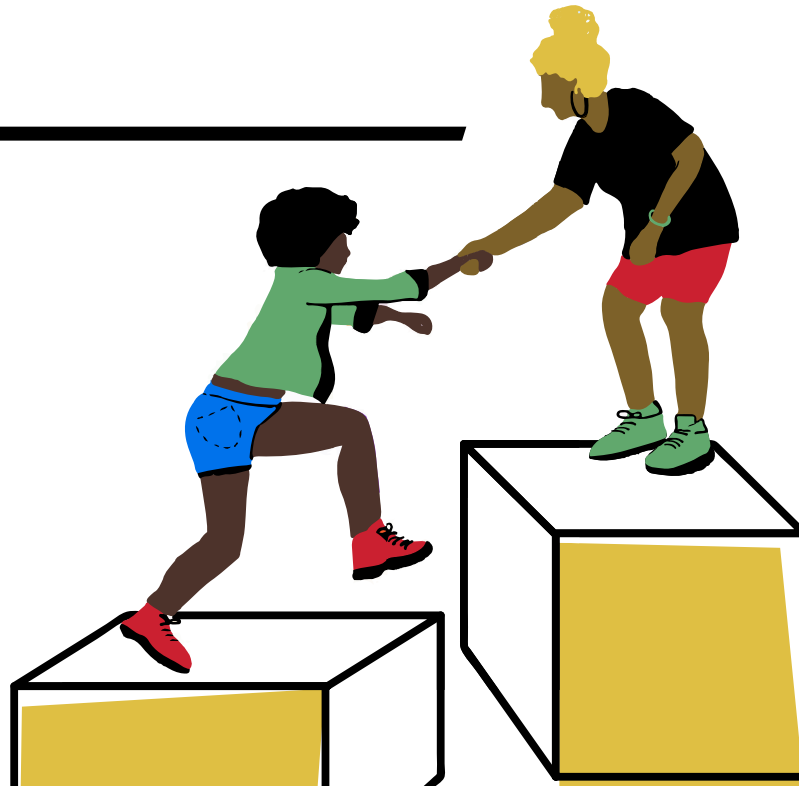
What to Expect from Your Opponents



It's important to acknowledge that abolitionists are often framed as just wanting to tear things down, but not enough attention is paid to how abolition is not only about ending violent and racist institutions and practices, but about creating new institutions and practices to work towards a society where we all have what we need to thrive. The demand to reduce police funding—as a first step toward removing police from schools entirely—is not only about ending the violence towards young people that they cause, but also about **creating schools that benefit all students and where every young person has what they need**. Young people need comprehensive sex education, mental health counselors, nurses, and so many other resources and services to be provided in public schools. Below are some common counter arguments people may make to your campaign and notes about what to say in response.

- **Acting as if policing equates to safety.** The ongoing **criminalization** of youth of color **does not** keep them safe. For example, young people experiencing mental health crises need **support** and trained counselors, not punitive discipline. There is no evidence that more police in schools leads to them being safer - police in schools do what they usually do, **brutalize** and **arrest** young people, causing **harm and trauma** to young people of color.
- **Acting as if talking about sex will lead more young people to have sex.** This is a common refrain of opponents to medically accurate and honest sex education, and it is a myth - there is no evidence to support this claim. In fact, research shows that young people who get accurate and honest sex education are more likely to wait to have sex and to use condoms and contraception when they have sex than young people who receive abstinence only education. Multiple studies have shown that abstinence-only education is **ineffective**. Young people deserve sex ed that teaches them the information and skills they need to make their own sexual and reproductive health decisions.
- **Saying yes to one of your demands but not the other.** In issue based campaigns with more than one demand, it is always possible that your target will say yes to one demand but not the other. Even if your campaign doesn't fully succeed, keep in mind that yes the primary objective of a campaign is to win it's demands, but **campaigns are also about how we convey our vision** for reproductive justice and a world where young people have what they need to thrive. Campaigns also **help the movement develop new leaders**. Throughout the campaign regardless of what your target does and says, remember that you should be communicating to the public that this is also about how budgets are moral documents — we are illustrating to the broader public that the city and school district are choosing to invest in violence and criminalization instead of basic things that young people need and deserve and in public schools.

Conclusion



In 2019, as a result of Power U's work, Miami Dade Public Schools agreed to implement comprehensive sex education!

MDPS signed a contract to institutionalize sex education and implement a comprehensive curriculum. This is a huge victory for our movement as MDPS is the 4th largest school district in the US and thousands of students will now receive better sex education. The school district did not agree to cut funding for policing--yet. But this campaign is ongoing.

Working to convince schools to divest from policing and invest in reproductive justice is very difficult, but a small group of dedicated and strategic activists can accomplish more than you may initially think. The existence of police in schools goes back **several decades**, and systems of oppression like the school to prison pipeline, patriarchal violence, and the lack of bodily autonomy, are enormous and longstanding. Recently a group called Black Organizing Project in Oakland California won their campaign to divest from policing in public schools and that campaign **took close to a decade** to achieve its goal.

Campaigns are often not just one year, and if we are committed to reproductive justice and abolition we should expect to be in this for the long-haul. If you hear this and you fear a long commitment, don't be discouraged as if you follow the steps laid out in this resource **you should continuously be bringing in more people who are able to carry the work alongside you.**

This work is all about chipping away at violent systems while also building up new institutions and ways of being that holistically support young people. Organizing to divest from policing and investing in sex education is also about fighting for a society that puts people first and invests in young people - a campaign is a way to help people in our community see that vision as we work towards building the political power to make that vision a reality.

It will take all of us to end the school to prison pipeline, and to create schools and institutions where young people of color are supported rather than surveilled and criminalized. Young people deserve to have everything they need to thrive and become well-rounded adults. Abolition and reproductive justice are not just about destruction of oppressive systems but about creation, and if we work in partnership with young people and our community members we can make this a reality.

Appendix – Resources to Use



Developing Talking points and testing messaging — Once you have developed your campaign messaging and talking points the best way to test how effective they are is by seeing what people in your local community think about them and how they react. Use many of the tactics that the campaign is already incorporating like canvassing, door knocking, conducting town halls to share your main talking points and your clear vision for divesting from police and investing in sex education and gauging people's feedback and testing and editing your messaging from there.

Youth Members speak at board meetings — a helpful tactic in the Miami/Dade Public Schools campaign was getting young people and other community members to speak at school board meetings and public forums with elected officials.

Background on Power U's membership process — this document shares information about how PowerU recruits and retains youth activists.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools: The Hidden Truth: A report on the school to prison pipeline in Miami Dade Public Schools by Power U and the Advancement Project. Partnering with a nearby university and working with the members of your campaign team to do interviews and talk to people in your community is a great way to do research for your campaign. Power U partnered with the University of Miami which was very helpful - they had their members conduct the research by talking to people in their community so it achieved two objectives 1) doing the research necessary to compile the report and 2) training young activists in engaging with new potential supporters.

Glossary of Terms

Abolition — Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives. (Source: **Critical Resistance**)

Bodily autonomy — the simple but radical concept that individuals have the right to control what does and does not happen to our bodies. When we have full bodily autonomy, not only are we empowered to make decisions about our health and future – without coercion or control by others – we also have the support and resources needed to meaningfully carry out these decisions. (Source: **Positive Women's Network**)

Comprehensive sex education — Sex education is the provision of information about bodily development, sex, sexuality, and relationships, along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and their sexual health. Sex education should occur throughout a student's grade levels, with information appropriate to students' development and cultural background. It should include information about puberty and reproduction, abstinence, contraception and condoms, relationships, sexual violence prevention, body image, gender identity and sexual orientation. It should be taught by trained teachers. Sex education should be informed by evidence of what works best to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but it should also respect young people's right to complete and honest information. Sex education should treat sexual development as a normal, natural part of human development. (Source: **Advocates For Youth**)

Divest/Invest framework — investments in the education, health and safety of Black people, instead of investments in the criminalizing, caging, and harming of Black people. (Source: **Movement for Black Lives**)

Reproductive Justice — the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. (Source: **SisterSong**)

School to prison pipeline — Across the country, school systems are shutting the doors of academic opportunity for students and funneling them, unnecessarily, into the juvenile and criminal justice system. The school to prison pipeline is a racial justice crisis: students pushed out of school are disproportionately students of color. (Source: **Advancement Project**)

Prison Industrial complex — The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. (Source: **Critical Resistance**)