The Hate U Give
A Talk Back Series

On October 26, Bridge to Success (BTS) held a private screening of the Hate U Give. Approximately 75 youth from local elementary, middle, high schools and postsecondary institutions – UConn, Post University and Naugatuck Valley Community College - attended. Following a film screening and youth panel discussion of The Hate U Give, Bridge to Success (BTS) facilitated a Talk Back series to engage Waterbury youth in conversations about race, racism, movement building, and liberation. With this series, BTS intended to arm youth with the language and knowledge they need to best articulate their realities, their histories, and current events surrounding race, racism, oppression and liberation. It was also our objective to provide a safe and equitable space where honest and transparent conversations around these topics are a key strategy in building community and youth civic engagement.

Seven (7) students completed the full series, representing different Waterbury schools and grade levels. All participants identified as African-American/Black. Ages spanned from 10 – 17.

The Series spanned over 3 months with six, 2-hour sessions to discuss the following topics:
1. Racial Equity Terms & Definitions
2. School Culture
3. Microaggressions & Identity
4. Violence
5. Liberation

“\(I’ve\text{\ ‘seen\ my\ son’s\ vocabulary\ improve\ since\ he\ started.\ I\ see\ an\ interest\ and\ a\ commitment\ from\ him\ to\ come\ to\ every\ class\ and\ learn\ more.\ He\ wants\ to\ be\ here.’\)\)"

Mother of African American boy, 17,
Sacred Heart High School
being able to define (on average) 7 out the 26 terms we would cover throughout the series. By the final class, most participants were able to define 10 to 20 of the 26 terms.

Students identified three key barriers to a healthy school culture:
- Disengaging teaching methods
- Lack of trust between students and teachers
- Unhealthy peer relationships

The top two recommendations to improve school culture were:
- Representative staff
- Culturally responsive curricula & student engagement

Microaggressions, Identity & Violence
The fourth class focused on identifying how microaggressions impact young people and moved to a discussion on how to reclaim our own narratives. The fifth class engaged participants in a heavy conversation about intra-community violence, specifically on the origins, perpetuation and impact of colorism.

Liberation
In the last part of this series, participants, parents/caregivers and district personnel gathered to learn about past and current racial justice movements and their objectives. As a final project, attendees worked in groups to imagine a racial equity campaign that would address identified disparities in Waterbury. From criminal justice reform to youth-led programming, participants visualized meaningful solutions to problems that directly affect their ability to succeed. One workgroup attended the Board of Education meeting later that night to present their push for “Programs, not Prisons” with respects to Waterbury’s increasing rate of juvenile arrests.