

## **GUN VIOLENCE, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Kathie Wainwright, Heston Academic Plus**

The topic hit close to home for these students at Heston Academics Plus School in West Philadelphia.

This winter one of Kathie's students brought a gun to school and threatened some of his peers. The school also had to deal with the loss of a former student who was shot on the front steps of his house on Easter Sunday, in full view of his father. Every one of her students knows someone who has been the victim of gun violence.

Kathie particularly recalls a social studies lesson when the class was discussing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

“Right in the middle of the lesson my students asked if this was NID or social studies,” she said. “This gave me a great opportunity to link our topic to the unit on the U.S. government. We discussed the right to bear arms and responsible gun ownership as it related to our issue of gun violence.”

She took full advantage of the many community partners generous enough to work with her class: Scott Charles from Temple University's Cradle to Grave program; Keith Bailey from Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR); Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' "Lost Dreams on Canvas" program; Court of Common Pleas Judge Shelley New; and FBI agent Greg Branch.

Her students showed remarkable motivation and initiative: getting up at 5 a.m. on a Sunday to participate in PSR's "Legs Against Arms" walk, conducting independent research, planning the program for a parents' night, and writing, directing and producing a PSA that synthesized all they learned.

Student voice played a key role throughout their yearlong process.

When community partners visited the class, Kathie explains, "my students introduced the visitor and explained why their visit was relevant to the project. We had student commentators, records, videographers and photographers. Students willingly took charge of these roles and looked forward to their duties."

Not surprisingly, her students' project received an award at Need in Deed's Shout Out awards ceremony for "Outstanding Project."