

2021 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

■ BLACK ORGANIZING PROJECT



The year 2020 saw the unfortunate continued rise in fatal encounters with people of color murdered at the hands of law enforcement.

The year 2020 also saw, however, a fortunate rise of engaged, organized, and activist youth. Oakland's Black Organizing Project (BOP) was there to assist young people in rising up to advocate for justice and empowerment.

In the spirit of Martin Luther King's tradition of social engagement, founded in the city that gave birth to The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Black Organizing Project (BOP) is an African American-led community collective, harnessing the energy of "Youth Power" to work towards racial, social, and economic justice in the Bay Area through grassroots organizing and coalition building.

Under the dedicated leadership of Executive Director Jackie Byers, BOP has become a catalyst for young people to take control of their own destiny; holding public officials and the educational system accountable for righting past wrongs, and leveling the playing field. BOP and NEA local affiliate Oakland Education Association have created a lasting partnership; standing in unity with one another on union strikes and issues impacting students and the community.

In June 2020, in coalition with parents, educators and community activists, BOP won a campaign to eliminate the Oakland Schools Police Department. The movement for "Police-Free Schools" gained momentum in the wake of George Floyd's tragic murder the month prior, but had been called for from progressive leadership for years.

This initiative revealed the sordid history of discrimination, mistreatment and violence against students of color in school discipline and suspensions, leading to what is sadly referred to as the "School to Prison Pipeline". Taking organizational cues from the Black Panther Party, BOP developed a very simple 4-point program and presented "The People's Plan for Police Free Schools." The key component of the program was diverting law enforcement expenditures to fund mental and behavioral health specialists, and to have Oakland Public School police officers retrained as mentors who can facilitate peaceful conflict resolution.

BOP uses the power of social media to raise awareness about vital issues such as voter registration, participation in the U.S. Census, and has held several youth-led marches and rallies to protest the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many countless others to name. This exemplary community organization contributed greatly to the achievement of self-determination by students and parents in the Oakland community. BOP believes that those most impacted by racism and poverty have to put their own issues on the table and demand change.

To that end, BOP youth organizers were instrumental in leading and supporting many campaigns for justice in Oakland schools. Youth organizers led speak-outs at schools to stop the cuts to Restorative Justice Programs. These inspirational youth were present at board meetings leading rallies and restorative justice circles so that other young people could be heard.

BOP has achieved status as national influencers, inspiring young people to become their own best advocates. From Martin Luther King Jr. to John Lewis, from Angela Davis to Harvey Milk and to #blacklivesmatter, Black Organizing Project is on a mission to get into "good trouble".

