

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, a public school that serves grades 6-8, prepares its students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Roxbury Prep is founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to and can succeed in college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum is rigorous, engaging, and well-planned; 2) the school emphasizes student character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities; and 3) a community network supports student academic, social, and physical well-being. Roxbury Prep helps students gain admission to outstanding public and private college preparatory high schools.

In 2004, Roxbury Prep was the highest-performing urban middle school in Massachusetts.¹ In addition, Roxbury Prep was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as one of eight of the highest-performing charter schools in the country.²

The students and staff at Roxbury Preparatory Charter School use an Advisory program to teach students about the Roxbury Prep Creed which includes 10 basic tenets, including Social Justice. The 8th grade students who participated in the Charity Checks Program used about 3 months to complete their Social Justice projects. The Charity Checks Program was just a piece of what they did to learn about and contribute to Social Justice.

Step 1: First, students defined Social Justice for themselves and their peers. They read a poem about doing 'small things' to perpetuate justice. They participated in a class-wide conversation about what issues of Social Justice they see in their own neighborhoods. The staff that participated had decided beforehand that the issues and the solutions – no matter how big or small, should come from the students themselves.

Step 2: Students narrowed down their list of issues from 30 – 40 into 6 major categories: Animal Cruelty, Racism, Neighborhood Violence, Homelessness, Class Inequities, and Domestic Violence. After reading fact sheets on each of these, students ranked which of these issues they felt most compelled to help "solve". Then students and staff members grouped together based on which of these issues they felt most strongly about.

Step 3: For the next 2 months, students and staff members met weekly to discuss the issue they had chosen, and attempted to come up with small ways to help alleviate the issue. Students made numerous phone calls to institutions already dealing with these issues, read a variety of sources, and talked with each other to come up with a joint solution. Whatever the solution was, students with the help of staff members, did the leg work to achieve their solution – whether that was writing fliers for an event, making speeches to educate their community, or advertising an event.

Step 4: Here are the 'solutions' that students came up with:
Animal Cruelty – Held a Walk for Animals that raised money for two organizations
Racism – Wrote a publication with a variety of articles and interviews including one with a Civil Rights Worker

¹ Dedman, Bill. "Numbers Game: Making Sense of This Year's Rankings." *The Boston Globe* 24 Sep. 2004: B5.

² United States Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, *Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

Neighborhood Violence – Conducted research on local neighborhood organizations that help stop violence

Homelessness – Held a bake sale to raise money for a local homeless shelter

Class Inequities – Conducted research on local neighborhood organizations that alleviate poverty

Domestic Violence – Held a teach-in for their group from a local organization that educates teens on dating violence

Step 5: Our final job was to research the organization of where to donate our Charity Checks. Students ended up picking a range of national and local organizations based on their research and their Social Justice project.