



Group calls for improved classrooms

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UNION CITY — When it comes to goal setting, there's no shortage of dreams among New Haven youths.

Take Yuyu Zarate, who yearns to become a veterinarian. Or Meghan, who hopes to become an "all-star swimmer." And let's not forget Briana, an aspiring pop star.

Those were just a few of the wishes that students talked about in their posters, displayed this week at an "I Have a Dream" community forum hosted by the grass-roots group Congregations Organizing for Renewal and attended by about 100 people.

Urging city and school officials to ensure the safety of youths and a quality education for all, organizers called on Councilman Richard Valle, who attended the forum, to:

4Help identify funds to conduct a city data and crime analysis within the next six months.

4Call a joint study session between the City Council and Human Relations Commission to discuss violence prevention strategies by September.

4Work to ensure that a November ballot measure to raise money for public safety and youth services would set aside \$500,000 for youth programs.

After Valle agreed to those actions, organizers pressed New Haven schools Superintendent Pat

Jaurequi to join them in touring three campuses that model the "small school" approach, which many believe helps reduce violence on campus and boost academic achievement.

The superintendent also was asked to work with community members to come up with ways to use existing resources to implement effective small learning communities at secondary schools and, along with the consulting group Stanford School Redesign Network, to identify future uses of the soon-to-close Barnard-White Middle School on Whipple Road.

Jaurequi agreed fully to two of the three requests but said she could not commit to hiring the Stanford group because of funding issues. But, she said, "I certainly would commit to getting input from all the stakeholders."

Meanwhile, James Logan High School sophomore Candace Yifru, the sister of Biniam Yifru, a 17-year-old who was shot and killed at a house party last summer, reminded audience members why they had gathered to talk about youth violence and education.

"We envision a school with challenging course work . . . not where we're breaking up fights," she said. "(Youths) are the future of Union City. We are your future business owners and teachers."

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