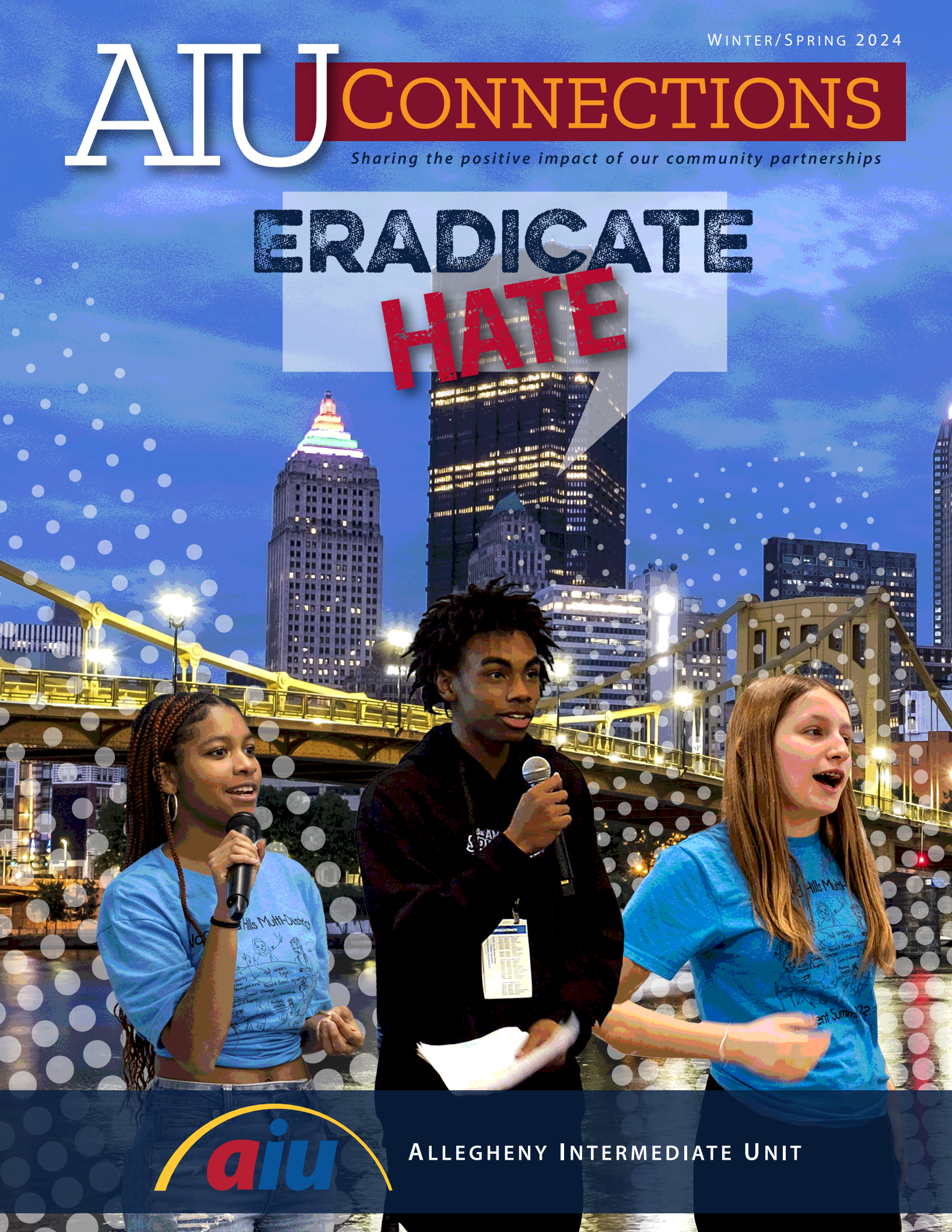


# AIU CONNECTIONS

*Sharing the positive impact of our community partnerships*

## ERADICATE HATE



ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT



## EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO ERADICATE HATE

At left: Mt. Lebanon High School students discuss ideas for programs and activities they can create in their district to help spread positivity.

brainstormed ideas of how they can affect change in their schools. Unprompted, they began comparing notes and sharing experiences with their peers from other schools. “Not even halfway through the design sprint, the students just started to get up and go to other tables to share ideas with one another,” Dr. Scherrer said. “You give a little bit of direction to young people, and they can do amazing things.”

The ideas ranged from broad concepts like incorporating the arts into social justice advocacy or educating their fellow students on the power of influence, to specific events like Shaler Area’s Enlightenment Day — focused on broadening cultural horizons — and Allderdice’s Dragon Day, a student-led day of bonding that plays off the school’s mascot.

“You give a little bit of direction to young people and they can do amazing things.”

BY ANDREW CHIAPPAZZI

**EXPERTS AND LEADERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD** gathered in late September for the third Eradicate Hate Global Summit. Throughout the three-day event at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, participants explored recent trends and incidents involving racism, antisemitism and homophobia. They also shared innovations in technology, detailed developments with cases proceeding through the justice system, memorialized victims and celebrated heroes.

While nearly 1,000 leaders, activists and advocates spoke on stage and in conference rooms, a group of approximately 150 high school students was busy tackling the same topics on a more local level. For the first time in the three-year history of the Eradicate Hate Global Summit, the program featured an opportunity for young people to be part of the solution.

The idea to include students from 14 high schools in Western Pennsylvania came from the summit’s education working group, which included AIU Executive Director Robert Scherrer, Ed.D. The AIU served as the primary organizer for the Eradicate Hate Student Summit. “If we’re trying to affect change, and that is what the global summit is all about, it doesn’t start with adults. It starts with young people,” Dr. Scherrer said. “I think that lasting change occurs when students have ownership of the process.”

Students from Cornell, Fox Chapel Area, Hampton Township, Keystone Oaks, McKeesport, Mt. Lebanon, Northgate, Penn Hills, Shaler Area, South Allegheny, South Fayette Township, West Allegheny and Pittsburgh Public’s CAPA and Allderdice high schools met to devise ways that they can bring positive changes to their districts and communities.

The global summit formed in response to the 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Squirrel Hill. In the wake of the tragedy, filmmaker Patrice O’Neill produced the documentary “Repairing the World: Stories From the Tree of Life,” which highlighted stories from survivors of the attack as well as the community response. Students watched the documentary and

At left: Students from every school district at the Eradicate Hate Student Summit, including this student from Penn Hills, shared their ideas for their districts to embrace positivity and inclusion. Photos: Matt Brosey

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Northgate High School students discuss the possibility of setting up a screening of the documentary “Repairing the World” for their entire district.



Thanks to the generosity of the Grable Foundation, schools represented at the Eradicate Hate Student Summit will receive funding from the AIU for the programs and activities that grew out of the summit. Summit participants will meet again in the spring to share updates on their progress.

The challenge that lies ahead is determining what future summits might look like, how organizations like the AIU can serve as consistent incubators and support systems for these efforts, and how students will continue to carry the banner of eradicating hate. In other words, what happens next?

“Repairing the World” might play a significant role in answering that question. Just one month after experiencing the summit, several schools expressed an interest in setting up a screening of the film, including Northgate.

The Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in 2018 was the catalyst for creating the Eradicate Hate Global Summit and this year’s Eradicate Hate Student Summit. It was imperative to include Pittsburgh Public Schools in the conversation, including students from Pittsburgh CAPA and Taylor Allderdice.

South Allegheny High School students discuss plans for new events and activities to spread positivity, including a meet your neighbor day.



Erin Wall, founder of the Woodland Hills Student Summit, works with student leaders during a visit to the Saturday Light Brigade Youth Radio studios at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum as part of the fourth annual Woodland Hills Student Summit on April 20, 2023. Photo: Andrew Chiappazzi



"It's such a moving film that we thought it would show the other students how we felt and hopefully have the same impact," junior Carrie Wynn said.

Emotional connections are often the catalyst for high school students to advocate for change. Just four months prior to the Tree of Life tragedy, the shooting of Woodland Hills High School senior Antwon Rose II by an East Pittsburgh police officer led to the formation of its own student summit. Founded by Woodland Hills High School teacher Erin Wall, the district's student summit has expanded from an internal platform for students to grieve to one that will feature 15 districts at the fifth gathering in March. Students pick the topics, plan the structure for their discussion groups, and then serve as moderators in an exchange of ideas and perspectives.

"I think that is what makes our program so unique. It is centered completely around the students as not only participants but leaders. When you give the power and the voice to the students it changes the dynamic," Wall said.

Empowering the students as leaders removes some of the barriers that prevent students from opening up, and places control of the discussion in their hands rather than teachers or outside experts, said Woodland Hills sophomore Aubrie Moon.

Avonworth senior Cassandra Heinauer said that the inclusion of rural, suburban and urban districts leads to a wide range of viewpoints and greater student growth. "By sitting down with kids your own age, you can learn empathy and understand others in ways that I don't think are possible unless you're sitting down and having that discussion," Heinauer said.

Participants in the Woodland Hills Student Summit are on a similar path as those who took part in the Eradicate Hate Global Summit. Students bring

**"When you give the power and the voice to the students it changes the dynamic."**



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Photos: Dan Rinkus

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Penn Hills students present ideas on how best to change their world.



**VIDEO:** Watch highlights from the first Eradicate Hate Student Summit.

Cornell High School students work on their ideas for ways they can increase positivity and inclusion.



South Fayette High School students brainstorm ways they can expand upon the programs they've established to help eradicate hate.



Author and activist Leon Ford speaks to students during the fourth annual Woodland Hills Student Summit on February 10, 2023. Ford was invited to speak to the students about trauma, adversity and resiliency between their student-led group discussions. Photo: Andrew Chiappazzi

back ideas and action plans to implement programs and activities in their home districts, placing those students in important leadership roles. "Getting involved in these conversations early on is really important, because we can learn from other people, but it's not the same as taking action and learning how to lead," said South Fayette junior Pranamya Rangaraju.

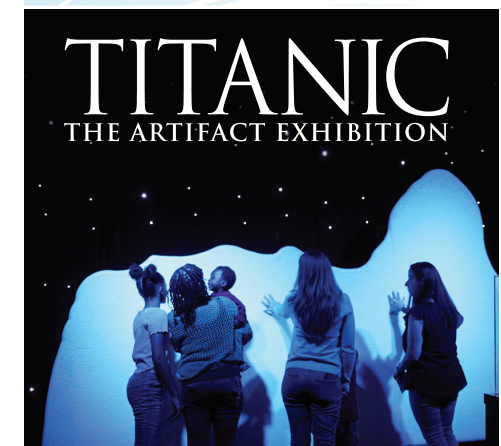
South Fayette is one of several schools in either the Eradicate Hate Global Summit or the Woodland Hills Student Summit to have formed a club or program dedicated to eradicating hate and spreading positivity. Through SHOUT, or Social Handprints Overcoming Unjust Treatment, South Fayette students work to create a diverse, inclusive and equitable environment in the district through service projects and special events. Rangaraju said she and her classmates have been inspired by what they've seen at other districts, and that SHOUT is continuing to enhance its own Uncommon Conference, which is an annual celebration of traditions in various cultures.

South Allegheny is extending its outreach into the community with its first Meet Your Neighbor Day, a festival featuring music, games and food.

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Students from multiple school districts sign a mural celebrating the fourth annual Woodland Hills Student Summit on February 10, 2023.  
Photo: Andrew Chiappazzi



Get Involved

### Fifth Annual Woodland Hills Multi-District Student Summit

hosted by  
Penn State Greater Allegheny  
and welcoming students from  
15 school districts

Friday March 8, 2024  
10:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.

“It’s much easier to love your neighbor whenever your neighbor is a familiar face,” South Allegheny junior Adriana Rodriguez added. “It’s much easier to help your neighbor when you know their struggles.”

South Allegheny, South Fayette and Northgate are among the districts that are exploring ways for high school students to share positive behavior and cultural appreciation with their middle schools and elementary schools. Rodriguez and fellow South Allegheny junior Aaron Marts both noted how challenging middle school can be and stressed the need to include that age group in any activity that can help bring positive change.

As educators and students sort out the immediate and distant future of eradicating hate, family members of survivors are encouraging them to continue. Tree of Life shooting survivor Andrea Wedner, who lost her mother Rose Mallinger in the attack, visited South Fayette High School with her family to learn what students were doing to address hate and discrimination and to share their support. South Fayette senior Sarah Kornacki said it was a reaffirmation of the students’ mission.

“With everything that’s happening in the world, there is a light – and it’s the next generation,” Kornacki said. “Everyone comes from a different background, but at the end of the day, they want the same thing.”



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## Contact us

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