

The Black Student Solidarity Network's Non-Violent Direct Action Toolkit

Are you a student in a school where racism, hate speech, and racist violence are rampant yet remain unchecked? Have you tried to report these incidents to the administration, only to see no meaningful action taken? Do you witness blatantly racist students escaping consequences, while you or others are reprimanded for merely reacting? Are you exhausted by the endless excuses from your school's administration, their hollow assurances that they're doing enough, or their empty promises of future change?

If these scenarios resonate with your experiences, then this toolkit has been created specifically for you. It's designed to empower you and your peers to take action, to challenge the status quo, and to demand the change you deserve in your educational environment.

Part 1: The History & Purpose of Direct Action

This toolkit, crafted by the Black Student Solidarity Network, is designed for student organizers and allies committed to fighting racial injustice in schools. It outlines strategic steps and actions to amplify your voice and secure meaningful change, particularly in the face of administrative resistance and societal apathy.

Why Non-Violent Direct Action? Non-violent direct action (NVDA) is a powerful tool for social change. It allows us to peacefully disrupt the status quo, draw attention to injustices, and compel those in power to respond. NVDA is not passive; it's a proactive stance against injustice, demanding attention and action.

The History & Success of Nonviolent Direct Action

Understanding the Roots: Nonviolent Direct Action (NVDA) has a rich history of success, particularly in the struggle for civil rights and social justice. By understanding these historical roots, we can draw inspiration and strategic insights for our current actions.

The Civil Rights Movement:

- The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s is a prime example of NVDA's power. Peaceful protests, sit-ins, and marches, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, were instrumental in dismantling Jim Crow laws and achieving significant legislative changes, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC):

- SNCC, formed by college and high school activists in 1960, played a crucial role in the Civil Rights Movement. They organized sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, Freedom Rides, and voter registration drives in the South. Their commitment to nonviolent protest was a driving force in bringing about change.

Why Direct Action is Often Necessary

Challenging the Status Quo: Direct action becomes necessary when those in power, particularly school administrations, are committed to maintaining the status quo, often at the expense of Black students. This resistance to change stems from a desire to preserve a sense of normalcy, even if it means ignoring systemic issues.

Common Tactics Used by Administrations:

1. **Referral to Existing DEI Initiatives:** Administrations often point to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) steps they are already taking as a way to sidestep demands for more significant change. These measures are frequently superficial and fail to address the root causes of racial injustice in schools.
2. **Claiming Change Takes Time:** A frequent excuse is that making meaningful change is a slow process. While some changes do require time, this argument is often used to delay action and deflate the momentum of student-led movements.
3. **Alleged Lack of Authority:** Administrators might claim they lack the power to make certain changes, deflecting responsibility and stifling demands for immediate action.
4. **Temporary Concessions to Quell Outrage:** In some cases, administrations may appear responsive by making minor concessions or statements to calm immediate outrage. However, these efforts are typically short-lived, with a return to normalcy once public attention wanes.
5. **Creation of Ineffective Task Forces:** Another common tactic is to establish task forces or committees that seem promising but are often ineffective. These bodies can serve as a way to appear action-oriented while actually maintaining the status quo.

Why Direct Action is Critical:

- **Exposing Administrative Inertia:** Direct action shines a spotlight on the reluctance of school administrations to enact real change, exposing their tactics to the wider community.
- **Maintaining Pressure:** Continuous direct action ensures that the issue remains in the public eye, preventing administrations from quietly reverting to business as usual.

- **Creating a Sense of Urgency:** By disrupting everyday activities and creating a visible disturbance, direct action forces administrations to acknowledge and address issues they might otherwise ignore.
- **Empowering Student Voices:** Direct action empowers students, particularly those from marginalized communities, giving them a platform to express their grievances and demand change.
- **Building Solidarity:** It unites students, faculty, and community members in a common cause, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared purpose.

Conclusion: Direct action is a strategic response to the tactics employed by administrations to preserve the status quo. It is a powerful tool for Black students and allies to challenge administrative inertia, keep their demands at the forefront, and push for tangible, lasting change in their educational environments.

Part 2: Strategies & Timelines for Direct Action

Timeline for Action:

1. **Immediate Response (0-2 days after an incident):** Organize a walkout or a peaceful demonstration. The immediate reaction is crucial for capturing attention and setting the tone for the campaign.
2. **Escalation (Within a week):** Plan a larger, more inclusive protest. Involve community members, and seek local and national media coverage. This expands the impact and puts additional pressure on decision-makers.
3. **Sustained Pressure (1-2 weeks post-incident):** Prepare for strategic actions like disrupting district meetings. The goal is to make 'business as usual' impossible and force the administration to confront the issue. Show them that this will not die down and be forgotten. The actions will end when the demands are met.

Effective Non-Violent Strategies:

- **Sit-ins at Administrative Offices:** Peacefully occupy spaces where decisions are made. This direct approach makes it harder for administrators to ignore your presence and demands.
- **Disruption of Official Meetings:** Attend school district meetings en masse. Use your collective presence to emphasize the urgency and importance of your demands.
- **Public Demonstrations:** Regular, peaceful demonstrations keep the issue in the public eye, maintaining pressure on the district.

- **Media Engagement:** Regularly update the media with your actions and the response (or lack thereof) from the district. This maintains public and national interest.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Utilize platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to spread your message, rally support, and document your actions.

Key Messages:

- Your demands are non-negotiable and must be met.
- The district's past actions have been inadequate.
- The community will not tolerate racial injustice and will continue to demand change.

Conclusion: Non-violent direct action is a testament to the power of organized, peaceful protest. As Black students and allies, your voice and actions can drive change. This toolkit is not just a guide; it's a call to maintain momentum, push for your demands, and ensure that the injustice faced by students like Bre at Shawnee Mission East High School is not repeated.

Part 3: Fearless Resistance: The Power of Student Solidarity & Collective Action

Never forget that you hold the power. When you stand together, your collective voice becomes an unstoppable force. Remember, the district cannot, and will not, risk the backlash of disciplining a large group of Black students standing up for justice. Imagine the headlines if they dared to suspend 25, or even 10 of you, for taking a stand against injustice. Your actions are more than just protests; they are powerful statements that will capture national, perhaps even international attention.

Embrace this power with boldness and fearlessness. When you disrupt a district meeting with chants and speeches, refusing to be silenced until your voices are heard, you force the administration to confront issues they'd rather ignore. Occupying the superintendent's office, staging a sit-in, and demanding action isn't just a protest; it's a morally courageous act that draws critical media attention and compels those in power to respond.

Your actions are not just demonstrations; they are declarations of your right to a just and equitable education. Stand unapologetic and unafraid. Your unity and bravery are your greatest weapons in this fight for justice. Together, you can, and will, make a difference.