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Courtesy of SUPE

Students United for Public Education launched a campaign recently to spotlight flaws in the Teach for America program.

#ResistTFA Twitter trend ignites sparks in ongoing Teach for America controversy

by EMILY WEINSTEIN

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A recent trending Twitter hashtag – #ResistTFA – marked the beginning of a campaign against Teach for America, the controversial initiative that brings recent college graduates and working professionals to teach in urban schools to close the achievement gap.

Students Resisting Teach for America (SUPE) went live Feb. 17 with a Twitter chat that sparked national debate and discussion about the nonprofit organization. SUPE co-founders Stephanie Rivera and Hannah Nguyen said they launched the Twitter discussion strategically to coincide with Teach for America's final application deadline.

"It was also to bring out this kind of unheard perspective that so many people don't know about," Nguyen said. "To raise more awareness about other perspectives, other opinions and other experiences and views of Teach for America that aren't so often portrayed in the media."

According to Nguyen, SUPE believes Teach for America does more harm than help for the students and communities it serves. The student-led SUPE has about 16 campus chapters throughout the country with a goal to "fill a void in the movement for public education."

While Nguyen explains that resistance to Teach for America comes in many forms, the main issues, she says, are two-fold: inadequate teacher training and the connection between TFA and the corporate education reform movement.

"We find it problematic that TFA is funded by these large, antiunion corporations," Nguyen said. "We want to see them cut ties with that and focus on strengthening neighborhood schools and defending public education."

Teach for America officials say they believe they have the same interests as SUPE but perhaps a different approach.

"At the end of the day, we all want the same things for kids," said Becky O'Neill, Teach for America-Chicago spokeswoman. "So, it's a little disheartening when we see these sorts of activities that we don't necessarily view as helpful especially in a time when the status quo just is not working for so many kids in this country."

O'Neill says the Twitter chat focuses attention on the wrong issues.

"The focus areas should be: Where can we work together to improve education? Where are we seeing real victories? What are those tough questions that we really need to come together to tackle? We need to set

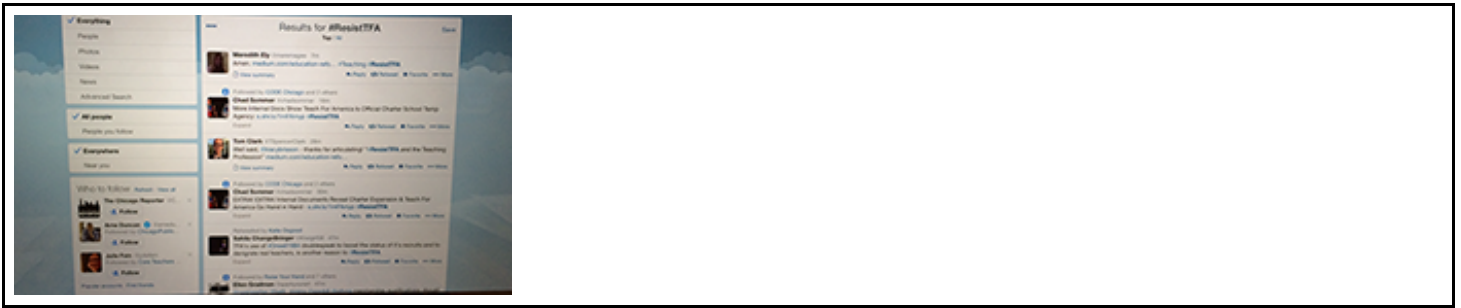
aside the old divides,” O’Neill said.

Whatever the questions may be, both groups do agree on one thing: “Tough” conversations need to be had about what’s working and what isn’t in education.

According to Nguyen, the Twitter chat was only the beginning of the campaign. Nguyen and Rivera appeared Monday on Aljazeera’s “The Stream” in a panel titled, “Teach for America: Making the Grade?”

The panel discussed criticisms of Teach for America such as high teacher turnover rate and the short five-week training for their teachers.

“Clearly there is some resistance, and Teach for America does see that this resistance is growing,” Nguyen said, “It’s a great start to some tension, and hopefully we’ll see some change from there.”



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