



Student Advisory Committee Report SY2019-2020

Background: The DC State Board of Education (State Board) Student Advisory Committee (SAC) is a body of high school students designed to strengthen the influence DC public and public charter school students have in the legislative and education-policy-making process. The committee is co-chaired by the two Student Representatives on the State Board and is composed of public and public charter DC high school students. The committee meets weekly and its progress is reported by the two Student Representatives at the State Board's monthly working sessions.

Overview: The current Student Advisory Committee is co-chaired by Student Representatives Dayja Burton, a Senior at McKinley Technology High School, and Alex O'Sullivan, a Sophomore at BASIS Washington DC. This is both Dayja and Alex's first term as Student Representatives where they attend State Board meetings as Board members without voting powers and preside as co-chairs over the Student Advisory Committee.

The State Board received about 20 applicants for the Student Advisory Committee-Student Representative position. There were approximately 20 members on the Student Advisory Committee this year, and they met starting in September on the first Monday each month until June 1st. Their monthly meetings were joined by guest speakers ranging from OSSE to the Office of the Student Advocate to State Board members.

After the committee's first meeting, the SAC decided to focus this year's report on two topics: Post-Secondary Preparation, and Maximizing Productivity Within the Classroom.

Dayja led the sub-committee on Post-Secondary Preparation, and Alex led the sub-committee on Maximizing Productivity Within the Classroom.

Around May, State Board President Wattenberg suggested the SAC include recommendations and experiences with distance learning amidst the global pandemic due to the outbreak of COVID-19. So, the SAC included a list of recommendations on how distance learning can be best implemented in the Fall, and the SAC addressed its concerns for students and their safety upon a reopening of schools next school year.

The annual report is broken down into 3 respective parts: Post-Secondary Preparation, Maximizing Productivity Within the Classroom, and Distance Learning.

Post-Secondary Preparation

- ❖ High school represents the last four years before adulthood becomes a reality. Although some choose to pursue a college education or go into a branch of the military, some students advance all the way through high school and leave still not knowing what they want to do or have a basic understanding of how life works. As of now, the education system is designed to introduce students to various topics in math, science, history, language, art, music and more. While these subject areas do spark some interest in individuals, there are still some left without a passion or interest. **The goal of this committee and this report is to bring more attention to the fact that students desire an education that sets them up for true success.** In the age of technology and entrepreneurship, up and coming generations need an education that encompasses financial literacy, home economics, guidance toward pursuing other post- secondary options outside of college and the military.
- ❖ **Findings:**
 - To find out what students want so that they feel prepared, the student advisory committee conducted a survey designed to understand which areas schools need to improve on. Some of the questions we asked included: How often do you meet with your counselor?; Do you feel informed about options outside of college?; Does your school offer

professional readiness classes?; and What do you want to see from your school to prepare you for life?

- 35.1 percent of the responses stated they only visited their counselor once a week.
 - 48.6 percent of the responses hinted at students not feeling informed about options other than college.
 - 73 percent of students reported not being offered any financial literacy class or classes pertaining to professional readiness.
- Given the majority of students want to be well informed citizens and be able to maneuver through their early years of adulthood, the SAC finds it imperative that schools and OSSE reconsider the standards required for graduation. If the whole goal of going to school is to develop our abilities to be active and successful individuals, why is it that some students graduate having their thirst for tangible knowledge unquenched? Indeed, **Jessi, a junior from D.C International Public Charter School, states, “While it is important that schools prepare students for tests and academic challenges, they should also see how important teaching real world skills is if they want to prepare students for life outside of a classroom”.**
- The process of elevating education starts with resources provided to every school. Equity across D.C. Public and Charter school represents an aspect that needs to be addressed so that students’ post secondary needs can be met. **Londyn Napper, a sophomore from Woodrow Wilson High School, states, “Overall, during my two years of being in highschool, I only received a minimum amount of life after high school knowledge.**

The only time that it was a main focus was when I was taking a Finance class which was an elective and wasn't well advertised unless you were in the class or had friends who took the class. Other than that, there was really no conversation or talk about "life after high school" unless I went into the college and career center, which would have had to be on my time." Seeing as she has only been in high school for two years, she represents just one of many students who want to have stable and structured knowledge in financial literacy. Despite her school offering it as an elective, there are several problems with that:

- If it's an elective, it's not required, which means some students will not get this experience.
 - Given it's an elective that may be in high demand, not every student will be able to sign up.
 - Given it's an elective, it's not prioritized as much.
 - With every school not offering this, even as an elective, there is a disparity.
 - The lack of structure in this elective ultimately does not provide students with the tangible knowledge they need.
- Another area that needs to be addressed is that of staffing across all schools in D.C. Certainly, counselors play an essential role in making sure students are on track to graduate and they have everything they need to navigate post -secondary options; however, the ratio of student to counselor is often impractical for an adult to equally manage every individual and give them the attention they need, ultimately resulting in more students without other options and guidance to navigating life after high school.

Nadine Beckford, a senior at Coolidge High School, states, “ My school did a great job with showing students that there is more than one path you can take after graduating high school. I wish there were more senior counselors or maybe one to two counselors per grade. Giving one person multiple grades to be the counselor of is overwhelming and takes time away from other students who need assistance.” By having more counselors, students will be able to easily navigate through the college, SAT, and other post-secondary options.

- Knowing where you are going and achieving a quality score on standardized education are two aspects that need to be improved for students to leave high school feeling properly educated and able to pursue the college of their dreams. Given SAT scores play a role in the college students get accepted to, students feel like there needs to be more emphasis on preparing for the test and knowing about other option like the ACT. In a similar way, students need to know about options other than college given not every individual desires to go to a university. **Abigail Quashie, a senior at BASIS DC Public Charter School, states, “My school did a pretty great job of preparing me for life after high school. It’s never been difficult to meet with or talk to my college counselor and all the college visits to the school were pretty helpful. We even had a college counseling class during senior year that was very beneficial to the college application process. I only wish that I knew about alternatives to the SAT earlier. I also sometimes wish we could be taught about options after highschool that differ from the traditional college path.”** Despite her post-secondary resources being above

average, there is still room for improvement so students get all they need to be ready to advance into their next steps of life after high school.

- For those who want to take an untraditional path or in general are unsure of what to do after high school, the conversation and resources are almost obsolete at some schools.

Alyssa Richardson, Duke Ellington School of the Arts class of 2022 states, “I believe students would greatly benefit from learning about their options for their future prior to senior year. Oftentimes I find that seniors are extremely overwhelmed because they did not discuss their options for after graduation with anyone, in their earlier years of highschool. High schools should begin inviting all of their students to job and college fairs, so that scholars can grasp an idea of what they like earlier on in their high school careers”. Given DCPS puts an immense amount of pressure on students to attend college and have a path following graduation, schools need to offer more opportunities for students to explore various avenues of life earlier in high school.. Some adults seem to forget how difficult it is to require a teenager to have a whole life plan figured out in just a year or two when schools do not even provide the basic knowledge of what it means to be an adult and how to maneuver through society. Schools need to offer more college and career experiences earlier in high school so students have some understanding of what they may want to pursue after high school

- **Recommendations:**

- **Our proposal is that the State Board encourages:**

- LEAs to develop a financial class that covers how taxes work, how to file for taxes, how to take out loans, how to create budgets, and how to pay bills.
 - LEAs develop professional and career classes that teach students how to create a proper resume - work etiquette, and how to respond in an interview.
 - LEAs to adjust Counselor staffing plans made to accommodate the student body by increasing the number of counselors or having counselors that are solely focused on seniors.
 - This is important to making sure transcripts and other college related things are met in a timely manner and students have the ability to discuss more post-secondary options.
 - Indeed, these subjects are essential to enabling students to graduate and have tangible skills that they can use to navigate the new and complicated world of adulthood.
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Maximizing Productivity Within the Classroom

- ❖ Over the course of the 2019-2020 school year, Members of the Student Advisory Committee examined the various factors contributing to the productivity of students throughout the district in the classroom and located potential improvements to the success of students' learning as well.
- ❖ Members of the Student Advisory Committee shared their own experiences of successful learning and unsuccessful learning, and together, we came up with a

short list of topics we felt impacted students' learning ability the most, and those topics consisted of:

- **Access to learning**
 - **Teaching/Learning styles**
 - **Relationship with teacher**
 - **Mental well-being of students/teachers**
- ❖ In our monthly meetings, we spoke about these four subtopics and their impact on the success of a classroom. In addition to summing up findings from these monthly meetings, we created survey questions to be distributed to students across the city through in-person physical questionnaires and digital electronic surveys.
- However, the outbreak of the global pandemic prevented us from distributing the survey physically, so we were forced to collect responses purely digitally to the best of our efforts.
 - Our survey was filled out by 107 district students across all high-school grade levels representing 10 public schools and public charter schools.

Findings/Recommendations

❖ **Access to Learning:**

- The SAC finds students prefer smaller class sizes because they are easier to learn in
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board examine overcrowding in certain schools, and the different possible factors that cause it.
 - **“The best way to make classes more productive is also if we had no more than 20 students in each class. This would really help all students, especially the ‘I feel like we should do more small group activities and we should be able to pick our own groups’ ones. Teachers should also listen to students about their work load. A lot of the times, they assign too much work”** - Sophomore, Duke Ellington School of the Arts
 - **“Large class sizes are a primary deterrent of productivity, as many students lack an opportunity to get the help they need, and teachers experience difficulty keeping the course on schedule due to the sheer quantity of students. If smaller classes can not be an option, perhaps there can be a protocol geared towards smaller clusters within a class, such as students seated in clusters or assigned study groups outside of class.”** - Sophomore, Wilson HS
- The SAC emphasizes the importance of students having access to their teachers before or after school,

- The SAC **recommends** that LEAs establish “student-teacher” hours and explore which schools excel in this practice, and where other models could improve.
- The SAC emphasizes the importance of students and schools having working access to technology,
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board examine inequity in access to technology and identify the specific schools and wards where this inequity is highest.
- The SAC emphasizes the importance of students having equity in access to creative arts, performance arts, and athletics.
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board examine inequity in access to these opportunities and identify and support the specific schools and wards where this inequity is highest.

❖ **Teaching/Learning Styles:**

- The SAC emphasizes that not each student learns successfully in the same ways and that students tend to appreciate variations in styles of teaching and schooling
 - The SAC **recommends** that LEAs develop interactive and non-traditional forms of learning and teaching in the classroom with an emphasis on experiential learning.
 - **“There is often too much focus on one or two specific types of learning in a class that makes it extremely difficult for many students who may not respond well to that type to thrive. The reality is there is no one specific form of learning that will allow every student in a class to succeed, which is why it should be assured that there is a variety required.” Sophomore, School Without Walls**
 - **“I love my school but I hope that we have more interactive learning in the classroom. This will help teachers really see what students have learned and critically comprehended, as well as it will allow students to learn from their peers. ones who have learning differences.” - Freshman, School Without Walls**
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board advocate for greater flexibility in curriculum and lesson plans because some students feel they learn at paces not conducive to their learning ability, and feel rushed when completing work.

- The SAC **recommends** that the State Board identify intra-school factors that limit teacher ingenuity, autonomy, and creativity because students often perform best under an adaptive, and sometimes non-traditional, work environment.

❖ **Relationship with Teacher:**

- From conversations with students around the city and in Student Advisory Committee meetings, students expressed that the driving factor in a student's commitment to a class is the relationship that student has with their teacher and the level of interest in the student's life expressed by that teacher.
 - **“Having teachers who actually care about all of their students’ success is important for students and provides a more productive setting in which learning can take place, so I hope we can find teachers like this.” - Senior, Washington Latin PCS**
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board conduct surveys with students to better analyze a pattern in why students sometimes feel comfortable talking to certain teachers about personal issues, and then use this information to effectively recruit teachers.
 - The SAC supports resolutions taken by the State Board to improve recruitment for minority teachers, specifically Black and Hispanic teachers.
 - Additionally, the SAC supports resolutions taken by the State Board to explore teacher retention and curb teacher turnover.

❖ **Mental well-being of students/teachers**

- Students around the city and the SAC strongly believe that a student's mental health is and always should be their most important priority, and we believe it should be schools' number one priority for its students as well.
- Unfortunately, students do not feel that their mental health is being treated as the importance it should be. Only 25.2% of students feel their mental health is prioritized as much or more than their academic success.
- Students have also pointed out that teachers' mental health matters just as much and should also be treated with the seriousness it deserves.
 - **“Sometimes no one focuses on how the teacher is feeling and when the teacher isn't well the class isn't either.” - Junior, Washington Latin PCS**

- The SAC **recommends** that the Mayor and Council direct more funding for mental health programs at schools for students and staff and explore ways to amplify the efforts for mental awareness and suicide prevention.
- There are many different factors that contribute to stress and mental health issues in a school building, and one of those factors is work overload and stress that comes from having too much work.
 - The SAC **recommends** that the State Board look further into the structures in place in schools designed to instill communication between teachers to limit students' work overload.

Distance Learning

- ❖ The global outbreak of COVID-19 abruptly curtailed the 2019-2020 school year for students across the country in March 2020, and schools were forced to transition into a modified non-traditional form of schooling where students did not attend school physically. Public and public charter schools took measures to adapt students to this new form of schooling including the nullification of the remaining semesters/trimesters. Different schools took different approaches to the forms of learning and teaching, and different schools used various different online and interactive platforms to facilitate learning. As schools prepare for the possible continuation of distance learning next school year, students, schools, and education experts aim to improve distance learning experiences for students and teachers.
- ❖ Additionally, it appears very likely that in some capacity schools will be reopened in the 20-21 School Year, and different modified plans for reopening have been provided by the Mayor's Office.
- ❖ This section of the report is broken down into 3 topics:
 - **How Distance Learning can be more effective in the 20-21 School Year.**
 - Structurally
 - Learning/Teaching
 - Grading
 - Access to Technology
 - Social & Emotional Well-Being
 - **What must take place before and during modified school-reopenings.**
 - Student Safety
 - Making up for Lost Time
 - **What needs to be done in the event of a second outbreak of COVID-19.**

❖ How Distance Learning can be more effective next school year:

➤ Structurally:

- The SAC strongly **recommends** only one digital platform is used throughout each school to obtain work, submit assignments, contact and communicate with teachers, obtain recorded video lessons, and to join live sessions with teachers through simultaneous learning.
 - This platform **must allow transparency** for students to easily access their teachers and their grades.
 - Said platform must allow for **effective communication** with teachers and school administrators through easy-to-use and easy-to-access chat-rooms.
 - ◆ **“Having teachers be able to use different platforms for communicating assignments and announcements is not only inefficient, but also makes keeping organized and learning very difficult for students. There should be one, or at most two, platforms that teachers can use in distance learning, with some exceptions for language classes or other classes that have specific needs.” - Vance Gootman, Sophomore, School Without Walls High School**
 - Having one structural platform limits confusion created by students being forced to navigate different platforms for different classes and assignments.
 - **“Online work is stretched over so many different platforms and lots of students have trouble with online learning and staying focused and it’s frustrating to get penalized for not being able to focus” - Woodrow Wilson HS Sophomore**
 - An example of said platform would be Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom.
- The SAC **recommends** that LEAs ensure that teachers provide students realistic weekly suggested schedules for completing daily work in each class. And to ensure that teachers coordinate with each other on expected workloads for students.
 - This can improve students’ work efficiency and ensure students know the level of productivity they need each day to stay on track.

- **“Teachers assigning work one day/class and reviewing it the next day/class has given students adequate time to complete the assignments along with work from other classes” - Winston Wardlaw, Junior, DC International School**
 - The SAC **recommends** a uniform approach of distributing work to students and turning in work to teachers for each school.
 - For each school, there should be one consistent and repeatable approach toward what day assignments are distributed each week and on what day they are supposed to be submitted each week.
 - This would curtail sporadic and random work distribution which is detrimental to retaining information.
- Learning/Teaching:
- The SAC finds a flexible balance of synchronous learning vs non-synchronous forms of learning should be encouraged.
 - Encouragement of optional live sessions (synchronous learning) mostly for review and Q&A with teachers, also to create a more interactive learning environment
 - ◆ Students like the ability to ask their teachers questions in real time, face-to-face or voice-to-voice, for thorough and detailed explanations of content.
 - ◆ Synchronous learning in small interactive groups can be effective at encouraging students to complete work.
 - ◆ However, many SAC members shared their own concerns with an over-reliance on synchronous learning because the time spent on these calls can hinder students’ ability to complete their graded work.
 - Encouragement of pre-recorded instructional videos for teachers to use for lessons.
 - ◆ This type of learning allows for students to pause, rewind, and resume at the students’ preference.
 - ◆ **“The most effective tool to come out of distance learning” - Dayja Burton, McKinley HS.**
- Grading:
- Students recognize the importance of displaying mastery of content and understand individual grades reflect their mastery of content; however, the Student Advisory Committee encourages teachers and schools to recognize the unprecedented difficulty of learning during this time and the SAC encourages teachers and schools to take this difficulty into account when issuing grades.

- This could look like:
 - ◆ The encouragement of the limited yet flexible use of extra credit, optional assignments, and assignments that can only help not hurt grades.
 - ◆ The encouragement of appropriate grading curves for weighty assignments.
 - ◆ The encouragement of teachers grading with discretionary-leniency on completion assignments and project-based assignments on the basis of effort and noticeable hard work.
 - The SAC now more than ever highlights the importance of transparency of grades between teachers and students.
 - The previously mentioned digital platform used in each school should be able to have teachers return grades in real time for students to easily and readily access if such a system is not already in place.
- Access to Technology
- The SAC wants to highlight the importance that **every student in the city must have 24/7 access to a computer/laptop or tablet even if they already have a smartphone.**
 - If the student's school needs to lease a laptop/computer or tablet to a student, then that is what should happen.
 - No student should only have access to a smartphone because smartphones are not equipped enough to handle the full capacity and requirements of distance learning.
 - The SAC finds it imperative **that every student in the city have 24/7 access to a working high-speed internet connection.**
 - We **recommend** that schools and school support systems help any student dealing with technological challenges, and that students not be punished in any way by schools if they do not have equitable access to technology.
- Social/Emotional Well Being:
- This is an extremely difficult time for students and families as well as a very challenging time for teachers and their families as well. The SAC recognizes the impact of students being away from their peers on students' mental health and their emotional well-being. Because of these challenges, we **recommend** support systems be in place for students to get the social and emotional help they may need.

❖ **In the event of a modified reopening of schools:**

➤ **Student Safety:**

- The SAC is aware of the proposed potential plans for a modified reopening of public schools delivered by the Mayor's Office, and members of the SAC want to ensure that any plan for reopening schools will be able to guarantee and prioritize the safety of students and their families above all else.
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board directly gauges students' feelings about a modified reopening of schools prior to the fall - and gauges under what set of conditions and preventative measures students would feel most comfortable entering school buildings.
 - The SAC **recommends** the State Board makes students' - and parents' concerns upon reopening schools in any capacity visible to OSSE, the Mayor, and her ReOpen Advisory Group.
 - ◆ **“I think it's critical for the Mayor to hear from students and teachers before they make any decisions” - Walker Price, Junior, Wilson High School**
 - The SAC **recommends** any plan for reopening schools in any capacity consists of a detailed and thorough comprehensive analysis of how students will be at a low-risk of contracting COVID-19 in the school building and how public transportation will be safe for students to use to get to and from school.
 - ◆ **If there is no reliable method of public transportation to use without students contracting the virus, then schools should not re-open in any way**
 - ◆ Schools **must** have a reliable source of sanitary materials
 - **“Communication with student body and staff upon reopening schools is critical to getting everyone on the same page” - Reagan Allvin, Sophomore, Wilson High School**
 - The SAC **recommends** the Mayor conducts a survey to grasp an accurate understanding on how many students and families are actually socially distancing
 - ◆ If certain students cannot successfully socially distance outside of school, how is that reassuring for the students and families who actually are socially distancing and care about getting sick if they are re-entering the same building?
 - The SAC **recommends** that any family who feels unsafe or uncomfortable sending their child to an in-person school in the fall

is given the option for their child to stay home and is guaranteed equal access to learning opportunities.

➤ Making Up for Lost Time

- Existing achievement and learning gaps will only have likely been exacerbated by the sudden shift to distance learning this past school year, and the SAC **recommends** that an appropriate amount of time be spent assessing academic regression for individual students particularly those disadvantaged on the basis of socioeconomic status and access to technology.
 - The SAC **recommends** OSSE use teacher input to assess the appropriate amount of time needed to identify and shrink achievement gaps.
 - The SAC recommends OSSE allow teachers the necessary time and capacity to teach at the discretionary pace teachers believe will best fit the social, social, academic needs of the students in the classroom

❖ In the likely event of a second COVID-19 outbreak:

- The SAC **recommends** that if there is a second outbreak of COVID-19 or if any situation arises where students can no longer safely enter the school building again in the 20-21 School Year:
 - A fully transparent comprehensive plan that consists of a seamless and immediate transition into distance learning at full capacity to be provided to all schools at the start of the new school year in advanced preparation for such an event.

In addition to this report being shared with the members of the DC State Board of Education, the Student Advisory Committee recommends this report be shared with other district officials responsible for education policy in DC including the City Council of the District of Columbia, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, the State Superintendent of the Office of Education and OSSE, the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, and the principals and heads of schools of all DCPS and DCPCS schools. Furthermore, the SAC recommends this report is shared on the SBOE's, the DC City Council's, the Mayor's, and OSSE's social media accounts and is distributed on all platforms to district students, schools, teachers, families, and education legislators.

Additionally, the Student Advisory Committee highlights the importance that the Mayor, OSSE, the DCPS Chancellor, and DCPCS board read through the ‘Distance Learning’ part of the report, and use the suggestions and recommendations listed as input for how distance learning can be improved next year. Furthermore, the Student Advisory Committee recommends this part of the report be shared with the Mayor’s ReOpen Advisory Group prior to any reopening of schools, and the SAC recommends the Mayor’s ReOpen group use the recommendations listed in the report as guidance and counsel for determining reopening district schools.

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The highschools represented on the 2019-2020 Student Advisory Committee Report included:

BASIS DC
McKinley Technology

School Without Walls
DC International
Woodrow Wilson
Duke Ellington School of the Arts
Benjamin Banneker
Calvin Coolidge
Washington Leadership Academy
Thurgood Marshall

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