



OFFICE OF THE  
**STUDENT  
ADVOCATE**

Be Informed. Be Connected. Be Empowered.

## Quarter 2 Report



[student.advocate@dc.gov](mailto:student.advocate@dc.gov)



202.741.4692



[sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate](http://sboe.dc.gov/studentadvocate)



@DC\_Advocate

# Office of the Student Advocate

We guide and support students, parents, families, and community members in navigating the public school system in DC.

Our mission is to empower DC residents to achieve equal access to public education through advocacy, outreach, and information services.

We provide step-by-step assistance for students, parents, families, and community members to be informed, be connected, and be empowered.

## BE INFORMED

- ✓ School enrollment process
- ✓ Student/parent policies and rights

## BE CONNECTED

- ✓ Community organization/ government agency referrals and resources
- ✓ Parent/student organization development assistance and support

## BE EMPOWERED

- ✓ Self-advocacy and leadership training
- ✓ One-on-one coaching and advocacy assistance

...and, our office can help with many other issues that impact student learning, parent/ community engagement, and more.

# Data

90 Requests for Assistance  
handled since June

## Referrals primarily from:

- Councilmembers
- SBOE Board Members
- Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education
- Ward Education Councils
- DCPS Community Action Teams
- Material placement: Wilson Building, Schools, DC Public Library
- Word of mouth
- Presentations and event participation (monthly meetings, EdFEST, and other education or community focused events)

# Requests by the Numbers

- Top Wards: Ward 7 (31%) followed by Wards 6 and 4 (33%)
  - Councilmember referrals (Todd, Allen, and Silverman)
  - Word of mouth through OSA presentations
- DC Public Schools: 74% vs. DC Public Charter Schools: 24%
  - DC Community Action Teams
  - Posted in the PCSB Wednesday Bulletin
  - Preparing another school leader email that will go to all DCPS and public charter school leaders
  - Likely an increase in more outreach

# Requests by the Numbers

## Request for Assistance Categories:

- Enrollment & School Choice/Access: 24%
- Special Education: 20%
- Bullying/Student Safety: 17%
- Academics/Instruction: 10%
- Communication Issues/Parent & Family Engagement/Advocacy: 10%
- Student Discipline/Out of School: 7%
- Attendance/Truancy: 4%
- Student Records: 4%
- Homelessness/Transportation: 3%
- Language Access/ELL: 1%

Request for Assistance category areas, in just about every instance, have a co-occurrence with at least one additional category area.

When a family reaches out to enlist the services of our office it is not usually for one issue or question; although the issue is not initially linked to another category area we quickly discover a correlation with another.

# Requests Received: the WHY?

There is a high correlation among requests regarding Enrollment & School Choice/Access, Special Education, and Student Safety – which also highly correlate with the secondary issue areas regarding Truancy, Communication Issues, Student Discipline and Academics & Instruction.

These correlations exist because they often signify a bigger problem. Specifically:

- Parents feel that schools aren't meeting the needs of their children who have disabilities
- Parents feel that schools can't protect their children from bullying
- Parents don't know what the best school is for their child, and apply to only a few select schools, which often have high waitlists
- Parents often feel that there aren't appropriate avenues or methods of communication with the school

1) Thus, it is vital for students and parents to not only have access to relevant resources but also to have the knowledge that such resources and supports exist.

2) After identifying resources and supports: parents and students need help understanding how the resources can work for them and how they can activate such supports to be their own best advocate (through resources, training, and coaching).

These supports allow resolutions and change to be realized at the place where it matters the most – in the school, in the community, and in the home.

# Requests by the Numbers

## Finding Resolution & Next Steps

When we respond to requests, we provide the following types of support:

- Providing Resources and Information: 27%
  - Offering of information needed to address the issue or question
- Providing Coaching: 20%
  - The guidance needed to address the issue, concern, or question – this includes advocacy
- Providing Referrals: 17%
  - Being a connector – connecting families to the relevant agency or organization to assist in addressing their need
- Intervention: 10%
  - Lending another voice, presence, or perspective to address an issue or concern – this includes collaborative work that we do with the Office of the Ombudsman as well as other agencies and community based organizations

# Community & Policy Engagement

- Panelist for a panel discussion entitled “Engaging Families as Partners in Education” with the Carnegie Institution for Science; DC STEM Network on November 5, 2015
- Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force
- Truancy Task Force
- Panelist for District of Columbia Association for Special Education (DCASE) discussion regarding special education on February 16
- Collaborations: bullying and leveraging parent power in prevention with Citywide Youth Bullying Prevention Program (Office of Human Rights)
- Continuing principal/school leader and school meetings/presentations about our office
- Involvement and thought-leadership in a host of relevant education policy focused conversations – testifying before DC Council regarding updates to our truancy policies and legislation; setting up meetings with DCPS and PCS on trends that we are seeing in our work; partnering with relevant agencies and community based organizations.



# Requests for Assistance help guide & inform our work!

## Here's what we're up to...

- **Special Education Panel Discussions and Workshops:**

This first panel discussion was a “Know Your Rights” special education discussion, which included panelists from the Children’s Law Center, Advocates for Justice and Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, Family Voices of DC, and a parent advocate. The next panel discussion is being planned for Ward 4. Currently, I am working with the Ward 4 Education Alliance to be the host of the event (to have it on their regular meeting night); once a date is confirmed more details will be forthcoming. For the upcoming panel discussions we will be working more closely with OSSE and their special education parent advisory committee.

- **Navigating the Enrollment Process:**

I am partnering with My School DC to attend several of their parent information sessions to offer support to parents and families during the My School DC lottery process.

- **Ward 7 Parent Organization Development & Support Summit:**

Working with Ward 7 SBOE representative, Karen Williams, and the Ward 7 Education Council to create a series of events focused on supporting parent organizations in Ward 7 (both DCPS and public charter schools). This series is not only focused on equipping the organization with the tools to revive or establish a parent organization but also focused on building capacity, tools to support parent organizations in thriving and longevity, creating systems of support/communication amongst parents and parent organizations, and fostering/leveraging parent power.

# What we're up to...

- **Education & Community Resource Guide and Tip Sheets/Advocacy Resources**

These items are located on our webpage and we are continuing to add more resources and tools for students and parents.

Education & Community Resource Guide

<http://sboe.dc.gov/page/resource>

Includes: over 30 topic areas with more than 300 resources.

Advocacy & Informational Resource page

<http://sboe.dc.gov/page/advocacy-and-informational-resources>

Includes resources: Public Education Governance Structure in DC, Effective Communication tools; tools for navigating special education and understanding your rights and the differences between an IEP and 504 plan.

- **Volunteer Advocate Program:**

In the planning and partnership stages.

- **Translation of outreach materials/outreach to English Language Learner communities**

Our outreach brochure has been translated to Spanish; we will have print copies in February. We are also in the process of having our brochure translated to Amharic, French, and Chinese - we will not print copies of these but we will have electronic copies on our webpage and also available to share and print.

# Meeting the Mandate

- Since May 2015, we have been working diligently to share information about our office. As awareness continues to increase, the challenges that we have regarding resources (both in FTE and fiscally) present constraints and limitations. In Quarter 2 of FY16, the Office of the Student Advocate is currently staffed with 1 FTE, one part-time Program Associate, and one part-time Fellow. The current staffing model does not begin to address the capacity needs of our office and the work that we are charged with doing in the community. Planning trainings, developing resources, forging partnerships and opportunities for collaboration, and being involved in policy conversations relevant to the mission of the office all take time. The current lack of staffing capacity makes it extremely challenging to meet the statutory mandate of our office.
- Reaching non or limited-English speaking communities is a challenge. Our office continues to have concerns about our ability to meet the Language Access requirements which include translation and interpretation services. Currently, we do not have adequate funding to meet such requirements nor do we have all that we need to appropriately support the families that we work with.

Questions?