

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Meeting #5
October 11, 2017 at 6:00 PM
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 1114
Washington, DC 20001

Attendance

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Members:

Present:

- **Markus Batchelor** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 8)
- **Erin Bibo** (Deputy Chief, College & Career Programs)
- **Tom Brown** (Executive Director, Training Grounds, Inc.)
- **Julie Camerata** (Parent, DC International, Executive Director, DC Special Education Cooperative)
- **Cara Fuller** (Principal, Ballou STAY High School)
- **Cosby Hunt** (Teacher & Senior Officer of Teaching & Learning, Center for Inspired Teaching)
- **Sandra Jowers-Barber** (Director, Division of Humanities, University of the District of Columbia College)
- **Kimberly Martin** (Principal, Wilson High School)
- **Sanjay Mitchell** (Director of College & Alumni Programs, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCHS)
- **Shenita Ray** (Director of Online Operations, Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies)
- **Karla Reid-Witt** (Parent, Banneker High School)
- **Cathy Reilly** (Executive Director, Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
- **David Tansey** (Teacher, McKinley Technology High School)
- **Justin Tooley** (Special Assistant for Legislation & Policy, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- **Laura Wilson Phelan** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 1)

Phone:

- **Senovia Hurtado** (School Counselor & Parent, School Without Walls)
- **Dwan Jordon** (Senior Advisor, Friendship PCS)
- **Carol Randolph** (Chief Operating Officer, DC Students Construction Trades Foundation)
- **Naomi Rubin DeVeaux** (Deputy Director, DC Public Charter School Board)
- **Jimell Sanders** (Parent, Houston Elementary School)
- **Jahari Shelton** (Student, Sidwell Friends School)
- **Jane Spence** (Deputy Chief, Secondary Schools, DC Public Schools)

Absent:

- **Latisha Chisholm** (Special Education Coordinator, Anacostia High School)
- **Celine Fejeran** (Deputy Director, Raise DC)
- **Larry Greenhill, Sr.** (Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)
- **Jerome Foster II** (Student, Washington Leadership Academy)

SBOE Staff:

- **John-Paul Hayworth**, Executive Director
- **Sabrina Hernandez**, Policy Fellow
- **Paul Negron**, Program Support Specialist
- **Matt Repka**, Policy Analyst
- **Maria Salciccioli**, Policy Analyst

Executive Summary

Members of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force (TF), led by Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor, gathered for their fifth meeting on October 11, 2017. The meeting opened with TF members reflecting independently on a draft problem statement designed to accurately capture the problem the TF will address. They broke into small groups to edit the document collectively, and then each group shared their recommendations. The TF then honed the next steps to ensure they would lead to the creation of high-quality recommendations on the District's graduation requirements. TF members indicated the next steps they were each interested in pursuing before the next meeting.

At this point, the TF adjourned until its sixth meeting on October 25, 2017.

Agenda Items**Welcome**

Ms. Wilson Phelan opened the meeting by asking the members of the TF to look at the current draft problem statement and note any thoughts or questions they had. She then explained that the two objectives for the meeting were to finalize a problem statement and identify next steps, ideally including division of labor. She added that the TF had gotten feedback to manage talking time, and everyone had been allotted post-it notes to help build individual awareness of their participation levels.

She then asked if anyone had clerical questions about the draft problem statement. A task force member asked if they were supposed to note parts of the statement they didn't like or desired additions to the document. Ms. Wilson Phelan said that this was encouraged and reminded the group that the statement was not created from her opinions, but instead reflected TF input from the last meeting. As there were no questions, the task force broke

into smaller units for discussion. These groups each took a laptop computer to make edits to the problem statement.

Iterate on Draft Problem Statement in Groups

The task force broke into three in-person groups and one remote group and began to discuss suggested edits to the problem statement.

Finalize draft problem statement as a TF

After a lengthy work period, Mr. Batchelor called the groups back together and asked each group to share its feedback on the problem statement. The first group suggested removing the word “trade-off” from the problem statement, believing that it has negative connotations about students’ current educational experiences. The next group to present emphasized the urgency of the fact that many students enter high school unprepared, and also suggested that the final recommendation include specific language around any courses that would replace existing requirements.

Another group suggested shortening the document into a one-sentence statement that honors the District’s deep support for education. This group felt they needed more information on the specific problems District students are facing before they could adopt a fitting problem statement. The final group, remote participants, then shared their view that the information used to create the problem statement was not necessarily reflective of all District schools, adding that the problem statement assumed differences between high schools are necessarily negative, when that may not be the case.

Dr. Spence cautioned that some of the issues in the problem statement would require significant resources to address, which was outside of the TF’s purview, and she also worried that the TF was attempting to usurp teacher and LEA authority. She noted that the State Board of Education (SBOE)’s Competency-Based Education task force solved some of the issues addressed in the problem statement, and others were outside of the scope of high school graduation requirements. Ms. Wilson Phelan responded that one of the issues Dr. Spence suggested was not in the scope of the task force, how credit is awarded to high schools students, is well within SBOE’s jurisdiction. Dr. Spence noted that members of the TF may not understand SBOE’s purview, and Dr. Bibo agreed with this statement. Dr. Bibo added she believed that the TF would take a very long time to bring recommendations to the community, and she wondered why that might be the case. Ms. Rubin DeVeaux added that she was confused about the role of the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) versus that of SBOE or the Public Charter School Board (PCSB).

Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested that SBOE provide information on different organizations’ roles after the meeting, urging the group to return to the matter at hand. Ms. Reid-Witt asked which of the next steps related to recommending specific courses for students, and Ms. Wilson Phelan said this was the first item, defining the purpose of the diploma. Ms. Reilly added that everything falls under this item, in her opinion. Ms. Camerata added that while she found the second proposed next step, pre-requisites to entering high

school, to be important, she found it outside of the scope of the task force. Ms. Fuller agreed with this statement, recommending that the TF focus on the best solutions for current high school students.

Mr. Tansey disagreed with this approach, saying that without high school entrance requirements, education decision-makers must ensure high school is accessible for those who enter below grade-level. He added that his research showed that 75% of white students enter high school at or above grade level, as compared to 25% of black students. He stressed the importance of making high school meaningful for those students who were significantly below grade level.

Ms. Reid-Witt said that while pre-requisites to high school might be outside of the TF's scope, District students who are not achieving at grade level need support. Ms. Reilly added to the complexity of the issue, saying that entrance requirements in the past had resulted in teenage elementary students, and she was interested in finding a way to help students catch up to grade level more quickly. Mr. Brown noted that several TF members had weighed in to comment on the importance of elementary and middle school to the high school experience. He suggested that these opinions needed to be incorporated into the final recommendation document to ensure they are on record.

Dr. Jowers-Barber reminded the group that unprepared students do not typically persist through college, and she felt concerned about changing requirements without discussing potential causes – whether they might be rigid requirements, teaching quality, or other issues. She added that she was frustrated by the limitations of the scope of the TF.

Ms. Wilson Phelan empathized with this frustration and clarified that teacher quality is outside of the scope of the TF. Mr. Tansey said these extra-scope issues should nonetheless be addressed, and the District needed to continue to innovate.

Mr. Mitchell shared that as a college counselor, he is charged with ensuring that his students have postsecondary opportunities. He spoke with colleges about the District's graduation requirements and said that colleges gave him the feedback that the existing, rigorous requirements indicate that District students are prepared. He suggested identifying policies that clearly identify how to assess important 21st century skills, adding that the high school experience and number of credits should then reflect the necessary steps in helping students obtain these skills. Mr. Tooley asked if the graduation requirements limit the number of remedial courses students can take, and Mr. Mitchell replied that his school, Thurgood Marshall Academy, is able to work around remediation. He was not sure that other schools had the necessary flexibility. Mr. Tooley suggested DC Public Schools (DCPS) could look into this issue.

Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested moving the conversation forward, asking if the group should focus solely on the importance of a diploma. Ms. Reilly asked if she could receive information on the District's policies around middle school credit, and Mr. Tansey seconded this request. He also thought the TF should address what happens when students move from one LEA to another, and requirements differ between the two.

Ms. Reid-Witt said that it is important that colleges continue to feel confidence in the value of a District diploma.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said that the TF could continue to move the work forward between meetings, but she added that while the entire TF was asked to weigh in on the problem statement in advance, only half had done so. She added that perhaps the co-chairs were taking ownership away from the group, and while she had no interest in doing that, the work would not be successful without full participation.

Ms. Hurtado asked why the TF was not digging into more data, adding that it would be helpful to understand how students at schools across the District are performing. She said this would help answer the question of whether the current requirements are adequate for students across the city.

Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested that the upcoming research could help answer this question. She asked TF members to move into groups based on which of the next steps they were interested in addressing between this meeting and the next. TF members moved to indicate their preferences; there was significant interest in the first question of the meaning of a diploma, and a handful of group members were interested in the third and fourth questions, awarding credit for high school coursework and awarding credit outside of high school coursework. None of the TF members indicated that their preferred area of research was pre-requisites to entering high school. SBOE staff noted TF members' preferences as members exited upon adjournment.

Closing

The group will hold its next meeting on October 25, 2017, from 6:00 – 8:00 PM. TF chairs and Board staff will follow up with minutes, next steps for the work groups, and an agenda for the next meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.