



**High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Meeting #2**  
**August 30, 2017 at 6:00 PM**  
**441 4<sup>th</sup> 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)
- **Tom Brown** (Executive Director, Training Grounds, Inc.)
- **Julie Camerata** (Parent, DC International, Executive Director, DC Special Education Cooperative)
- **Latisha Chisholm** (Special Education Coordinator, Anacostia High School)
- **Naomi Rubin DeVaux** (Deputy Director, DC Public Charter School Board)
- **Celine Fejeran** (Deputy Director, Raise DC)
- **Larry Greenhill, Sr.** (Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)
- **Cosby Hunt** (Teacher & Senior Officer of Teaching & Learning, Center for Inspired Teaching)
- **Dwan Jordon** (Senior Advisor, Friendship PCS)
- **Sandra Jowers-Barber** (Director, Division of Humanities, University of the District of Columbia-Community College)
- **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)
- **Jimell Sanders** (Parent, Houston Elementary School)
- **Jahari Shelton** (Student, Sidwell Friends School)
- **Jane Spence** (Deputy Chief, Secondary Schools, DC Public Schools)
- **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:**

- **Erin Bibo** (Deputy Chief, College & Career Programs)
- **Senovia Hurtado** (School Counselor & Parent, School Without Walls)



- **Carol Randolph** (Chief Operating Officer, DC Students Construction Trades Foundation)

**Absent:**

- **Jerome Foster II** (Student, Washington Leadership Academy)

**SBOE Staff:**

- **John-Paul Hayworth, Executive Director**
- **Paul Negron, Program Support Specialist**
- **Jamikka Briscoe-Kendrick, Staff Assistant**

**Executive Summary**

The Task Force (TF), led by Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor, held its second meeting on August 30, 2017. Group members participated in an icebreaker activity and discussed revised norms.

The TF then heard presentations from six individuals to assist TF members in defining the scope of the problem with current graduation requirements. A question and answer period followed the presentations.

TF members split into five groups to draft a problem statement that the TF seeks to solve related to high school graduation requirements. Groups shared the outcomes of their discussion with the full TF as well as any questions related to the draft problem statements.

The next meeting of the task force will be on September 13, 2017.

**Welcome and Setting Norms**

At approximately 6:00 p.m., TF members were welcomed by State Board of Education (SBOE) and TF co-chairs Ms. Laura Wilson Phelan and Mr. Markus Batchelor. TF members participated in an icebreaker activity to get to know one another. Mr. Batchelor thanked the group for their participation and commitment. Mr. Batchelor pointed out the revised norms and space to record tabled topics in the “parking lot.”

Ms. Wilson Phelan noted that the norms for the TF had been revised based on the discussion from the previous meeting and that members of the TF should keep them in mind for further revision if needed throughout the TF’s work.

**Panel Presentations and Discussion**

The panel began with Darryl Robinson, a former DC student. Mr. Robinson graduated from DC schools and entered Georgetown University. While at Georgetown, Mr. Robinson wrote an op-ed for the Washington Post describing his experiences as a student in District public schools, with a particular focus on what could have been better and what affected his future development. Mr.



Robinson noted that a student's self is heavily tied to school: their friends and activities are usually school related. He also said that we need to recognize the needs of vulnerable students and how to best meet those needs. Mr. Robinson noted that he felt that his education was often by rote, rather than critically thinking about ideas and concepts. He believes that the insecurities that come with not seeing achievement through education can amplify negative consequences. It was not until his sophomore year at Georgetown that he felt ready to fully participate in college level education.

Celine Fejeran, Deputy Director of Raise DC, provided an update on the findings of the Graduation Pathways Project. The Project conducted research in three areas: a high school diagnostic, recovery students and the educationally disengaged. Utilizing the data from these areas, Raise DC has developed four goals in two areas: increasing graduates and reducing dropouts. Her presentation, together with the others who submitted presentations, may be found [here](#).

Dr. Jane Spence, Chief of Secondary Schools at DCPS, provided an overview of DCPS' efforts to raise student preparation and engagement levels. Dr. Spence also provided data that showed that the graduation rates at DCPS have been increasing and that dropouts are decreasing. DCPS has also developed a Pathways program that served over 500 students that were not on-track to graduate by creating individual intervention plans. She noted that DCPS recognizes the growth demonstrated is positive, but insufficient and that it will take more time for the full effect of the many efforts underway to be realized.

Naomi DeVeaux, Deputy Director of the DC Public Charter School Board, noted that the diversity between offerings at the District's high schools is great and the TF should keep that in mind when reviewing graduation requirements. She also highlighted that the functional requirements for graduation varied from sector to sector and from school to school based on a number of variables including educational model. Ms. DeVeaux confirmed that the University of Maryland, College Park requires only sixteen credits for admission: four years of English, four years of math, including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II, three years of history or social science, three years of science in at least two different areas, with at least two lab experiences and two years of foreign language. She hopes the TF can determine a common denominator that set our schools up to provide success for students. Finally, she urged the TF to provide additional flexibility within the graduation requirements to permit students to explore opportunities.

Tom Brown, Founder & Executive Director of Training Grounds, Inc., began his presentation by noting his history as a teacher in the KIPP network and a graduate of District schools. He noted that when he was in the school system, he had to navigate challenges on his own. He was concerned that as a student with barriers, he never felt supported or that anyone had a plan or program designed to assist him. These challenges, including academic deficiencies, lack of proper nutrition, limited exposure to college or career pathways, a lack of family support and environmental conditions, led many of his peers down paths that led away from college or careers. He urged the system to share with students the ends (e.g., careers, college) in meaningful



ways so that students see from the beginning what the advantage is to following a college or career pathway.

Dr. Sandra Jowers-Barber, Humanities Division Director at the University of the District of Columbia-Community College, provided data that shows that nearly 100% of District high school graduates who enter the community college require additional support before they are ready for basic courses. The data illustrated that students from both the traditional public and public charter sectors are affected.

After the presentations were completed, the floor was opened to questions from the TF. A sample of the questions and responses are below. Questions from TF have been aggregated and should not be considered to be consensus or agreed to by all TF members. Responses are in parentheses below.

1. How can we involve “soft skills” in the graduation requirements? (Dr. Spence cautioned about including too much in the requirements bucket and suggested that expanding opportunities or flexibility might be a better approach to including non-academic skills. Ms. DeVeaux echoed these comments and noted that additional requirements can actually reduce the ability of students to explore and be prepared for college or careers. She also noted that not all students need additional soft skills.)
2. Would an exit exam be a beneficial addition to the requirements? Does it solve the preparedness gap? (Ms. DeVeaux said that an exit exam could potentially assist in knowing which students are prepared or not for additional education. Mr. Robinson was not in favor of an exam that would restrict the ability of students to graduate. Regurgitation of information, he continued, was not an adequate measure. Ms. Reilly said exams can reinforce a minimum thinking for students, i.e. “I only have to know enough to pass this exam so why bother reaching.” Ms. Fejeran said that research shows that grade point averages are the most highly correlated variable to college success beyond tests, but there is a major divide between schools on what each grade actually means in terms of student knowledge. Ms. DeVeaux suggested that subject specific SAT or nationally normed college entrance exams could potentially serve as an exit exam. Dr. Jowers-Barber said it should not be a surprise for students to pass an exit exam and that if students are not passing, that shows a major problem in the system.)
3. Should we be concerned about setting too low a standard for our requirements? Does that provide a perverse incentive for students to NOT achieve as the mindset for students is often to find the easiest and quickest path out of high school? (Dr. Spence noted that school systems are not nimble. It often takes years for a change to be fully implemented and a change in student performance to be noted because of a change. She believes we are starting to see the benefits of the last revision of our requirements. Continuing, Dr. Spence said that in DCPS, the focus is very much on what is happening in the classroom and that graduation requirements come after those considerations.)
4. How close are our requirements to other states? (Ms. DeVeaux related that the District’s requirements are higher in terms of credits required than most states by a few credits. Dr. Spence also explained that our requirements also provide greater specificity in the



particular classes required than most other states; requiring particular courses rather than general subject areas.)

### **Small Group Break Out and Reporting**

The TF divided into five small groups to discuss, “What is the problem we seek to solve related to high school graduation requirements?” The small groups were also to develop a problem statement that reflects the problem they seek to solve. It was also requested that small groups record any outstanding questions that the group had in relation to the problem.

Group 1 reported that our current requirements are so specific that we may prevent some students from exploring their passions and interests, meeting social emotional potential or examining the full extent of their educational capacity.

Group 2 reported that the requirements do not offer sufficient flexibility nor are they aligned for success in collegiate or workforce environments.

Group 3 reported that a majority of students are not prepared for college, career or citizenship outcomes by our current measures. They also noted that because of the diversity of schools in the District, our diploma often has an inconsistent meaning or value.

Group 4 reported that the graduation requirements may be too rigid or prescriptive and may lead to greater course flexibility. They also noted that there may be a “false advertising” problem in that students that receive a diploma may not be prepared for higher education.

Group 5 reported that given the data demonstrating that our students are not prepared for high school, the challenge with our current graduation requirements is that they do not allow for schools to create a culture of assessing and supporting incoming ninth graders to transition effectively to tenth grade and implement a 4-5-6 year graduation expectation to ensure college and career readiness.

Discussion about the problem statement reports began with exploring the idea of the 4-5-6 year graduation expectation. Mr. Mitchell, a member of Group 5, explained that the focus for their group was more on the assessment and support of ninth graders and how to ensure that students only move on if they are prepared for high school. Mr. Tansey provided information about his experience at a comprehensive high school where students have been consistently promoted from grade to grade without having the requisite knowledge. He noted that this continues throughout high school so that schools can meet a four-year graduation rate accountability measure.

A number of TF members noted that students that arrive unprepared often find educators that are not trained to bring them to grade level. As an example, a student who arrives in ninth grade without reading or writing skills is put into a classroom where those skills are assumed to exist. The system itself is designed so that skills and knowledge build upon previous lessons; without learning those lessons at the appropriate time, students become discouraged and tend to dropout.



Dr. Spence noted that she feels there is not consensus about what the problem is. She believes that much of the discussion has pointed to classroom behaviors and instruction as being the greatest point of action to affect graduation rates. She cautioned the group about focusing a solution on adjusting regulations that may not affect the problem that the TF has identified.

Co-chair Wilson Phelan attempted to synthesize the group responses utilizing the similar aspects of each as well as the subsequent discussion. The draft problem statement is:

The majority of students who graduate DC with a high school diploma are not prepared to succeed in college or a career (citizenship?). For example, nearly all students who enter UDC community college require special support in separate courses before they are able to enter college-track courses. Across the city, less than 20% of DCPS students who enter college graduate six years later. The role that graduation requirements play in this is xxx.

Outstanding questions in relation to the problem statement include: Should we include citizenship as an expected outcome? What is that data for District students entering a career pathway following graduation and who is tracking that pathway? What role do the requirements themselves play, if any, in these macro challenges?

### **Closing**

Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor moved the group toward the closing and noted that the draft problem statement and questions would guide future TF meetings and panels. They also provided a scope and sequence document to the TF.

SBOE staff will follow up with minutes, any requested reading, and next steps. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

