

Report to the District of Columbia State Board of Education

**By the Student Advisory Committee to the District of Columbia State Board
of Education**

**For the Purpose of Creating an Improved System of Administrative
Accessibility and Responsibility in the District of Columbia**

Membership

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Background on the Student Advisory Committee

The Student Advisory Committee (SAC) to the District of Columbia State Board of Education (SBOE) was created by Brian Contreras in 2015 with the purpose of increasing student voices and input in the District of Columbia public schools (DCPS) and District of Columbia public charter schools (DCPCS) systems. In its second year, the SAC was co-chaired by Alex Dorosin and Jamiah Hall, who also both served as Student Representatives to the SBOE. Throughout the school year, the SAC met a number of times, first picking general topics of interest and then focusing on creating solutions to the problems that face the students of the District of Columbia.

Meeting Agendas

During the Student Advisory Committee's first meeting of the year (November 7, 2016), members brainstormed several topics of interest. These topics of interest spanned a wide variety of subjects, from school security to school vending machines. At the close of this meeting, members voted to pick Administrative Responsibility, Accessibility, and Improvement as the umbrella topic for the 2016-2017 SAC. Additionally, members voted on the topics of interest outlined in this report as specific areas of administrative policy that needed to be addressed in District public schools.

During the second meeting of the year (January 30, 2017), SAC members participated in a roundtable discussion about their views and perspectives on these topics of interest. Members were also asked to spend time before the third meeting to speak with students in their respective schools to garner more student perspectives on administrative improvement.

At the Committee's third meeting (February 27, 2017), members shared the information that gathered from the students they had met with at each school represented on the Committee. The rest of the meeting was spent discussing solutions to the variety of issues that many students faced at their schools. Members were asked to write a paragraph of recommendation about a topic of their choice for the final SAC report before the final meeting.

In the final meeting of the Student Advisory Committee (May 8, 2017), members spent time finalizing the draft of the SAC report. Members also spent time discussing plans for the SAC moving forward, and proposing ways to increase student involvement and diversity of perspective on the Committee.

Selection of Topics

In the initial stage of brainstorming for the seven topics of discussion for the 2016-2017 school year, members were prompted to contemplate the institutional injustices experienced by students in their schools on a daily basis. A list of these topics was presented by the Student Representative, who directed discussion through each of the topics. As the meeting drew to a close, members agreed to pick the wide umbrella of Administrative Responsibility, Accessibility, and Responsibility as the overarching theme for the 2016-2017 SAC and also selected a number of more specific topics for which they felt passionate.

The topics that generated the most discussion during the first meeting were the revamping of graduation requirements and online grading systems used by the DCPS and DCPCS systems. When the discussion reached the topic of school environment, members of the Committee agreed that it was paramount to have some focus on socialization in schools and parts of the students' daily experience (such as food and security). Members also discussed the courses that they felt were necessary for producing a well adjusted student during this time.

A number of ideas were discussed by the Student Advisory Committee during the 2016-2017 school year, but were not ultimately included in this report's recommendation section. These ideas included: revamping school lunches, creating more outdoors time for students during breaks, fixing school bus timing, improving student experiences on the Metro, creating more accessible extracurriculars, and holding required student/teacher conferences. These ideas may be useful in creating next year's report or generating discussion on next year's SAC.

Recommendations to the Board

The final recommendations of the Student Advisory Committee to the DC State Board of Education for the 2016-2017 school year were created with the purpose of improving the student experience in the DCPS and DCPCS systems.

1. **Graduation Requirements** - Generate more flexible graduation requirements for students that reflect the needs of high school graduates in a competitive and modern world.
 - a. During its research, the Committee has found that graduation requirements in their current state do not cater to the multifaceted needs of District public students. As a result, the Committee recommends that:
 - i. Students who participate in a varsity sport for two or more years of high school be allowed to forgo the one credit Physical Education requirement.
 - ii. Allow more flexibility in the determination of music and art credits, particularly in crossover between the two.
 - iii. Reward students who participate in DC student abroad with a ½ foreign language or social studies credit, depending on the participant's program.
2. **Hall Sweeps** - Devise a system to replace widespread hall sweeps that does not penalize underachieving students.
 - a. The Committee has found that hall sweeps in their current form do not fulfill their purpose as a deterrent to showing up late for class. Instead, hall sweeps hurt students for factors that are often out of their control. Students are removed from the classroom environment for prolonged periods of time, increasing the likelihood that they will be unable to achieve at the same levels as their peers. As a result, the Committee proposes that hall sweeps be replaced with a system that incentivizes students for consistently showing up on time and does not hurt those in most need of help.
3. **Humanities and Civic Engagement Courses** - Make more humanities and civic engagement courses available to students in DCPS and DCPCS schools.
 - a. The Committee has found that there is a severe deficiency in humanities and civic engagement courses available to District students and recommends that more of these courses be made available to students. A plan for an example of such a program, created by the Committee's Tavian Southall, is attached at the bottom of these recommendations.
4. **Security** - Work to end the unprofessional culture and corruption present in the security personnel in many District public schools.
 - a. The Committee has found in its research that the culture of the security details present in many District public schools (particularly large DCPS schools) is unacceptable, and must immediately be addressed in order improve the student

experience in these schools. During its meeting, the Committee heard of instances of security favoritism, inappropriate actions by security, and general disrespectful behavior and retaliation towards students, all of which compromise the safety of District students. As a result, the Committee recommends:

- i. The creation of a joint student/administration/security coalition for the purpose of oversight of DCPS security personnel.
 - ii. Running mandatory, school administration led meetings at the beginning of each of the four school year advisories for security personnel, in which school and DCPS officials will highlight the bounds of acceptable security behavior and answer all questions of security personnel. During these meetings, security will be reminded of their jobs to protect District students.
 - iii. Appointing a school administration representative (and possibly a student representative) in each school responsible for receiving student complaints about the actions (including retaliation) of security personnel. This administrative representative will report to school officials and the joint security coalition, and will have the power to reprimand security personnel and/or initiate the dismissal process highlighted below.
 - iv. Creating a defined procedure for the dismissal of security personnel based on student complaints, with elements of due process and administrative involvement in order to ensure accuracy.
5. **Food and Nutrition** - Work to make more healthy food options available to District public students throughout the day, whether it be through healthy vending machines or other methods.
- a. The Committee recommends that healthy food is made available throughout the day in order to ensure that students are able to concentrate in their studies. The Committee believes this could be achieved through healthy vending machines, or baskets of healthy food made available during hall transitions.
6. **Grading Systems** - Improve the accuracy and accessibility of the grading systems used in District public schools so that students are easily able to obtain information regarding their performance in school.
- a. The Committee has found that many of the online grading systems used in District public schools (such as Aspen) are flawed, and too glitchy to allow students to track their performance. As a result, the Committee recommends that these systems be improved to the point that they are somewhat reliable, or be discarded in favor of different or better providers. Additionally, the Committee recommends that the Board work to balance the equality of the AP and IB systems, to ensure that there is not favoritism for either system within District public schools.

7. **Student Socialization** - Work to improve the means of student socialization in District public schools.
 - a. Through hearing the perspectives of many District public students, the Committee has found that the current programs in place to ensure student socialization in DC schools are somewhat inadequate, and should be improved to ensure that DCPS and DCPCS produce well adjusted individuals. The Committee recommends that the Board create a subcommittee focused on the socialization of students in DC schools, and that that committee work to ensure that students have access to socialization programs in DC schools.

Plan to Increase Civic Engagement - Tavian Southall

In many schools across DC, there is an imbalance of academics and civic engagement policies/curricula. Providing youth with ample opportunities to learn social skills will increase sociability in communities across DC. Policy makers should sharpen the mission of these schools to make sure it includes the knowledge, dispositions, virtues and skills of responsible citizenship. Creating curricula that focus on service-learning and character education can demonstrate success in improving student engagement in school and community life. This knowledge that can be taught in schools will ensure that students know how the community works and what it means to be civically engaged. Which should be conducted in *and* out of the classroom setting. This action plan will outline the missions and strategies to support engaging civic education in public schools.

A successful structure contains the following (but is not limited to):

- Clear expectations and goals
- Supportive education policy
- Create an accountability system -- measuring outcomes and implementation
- Planning and funding for professional development for educators
- Funding to secure a coordinator to facilitate collaboration between schools and communities.
- Active awareness and sensitivity to school culture in academic performance
- Commitment to a programmatic approach that focuses on students, their needs and the needs of the students' community is made; and
- Communication and public relations efforts to inform all stakeholders involved

This plan is not one that can be implemented within a short period of time. It will take various conversations, plans and resources to structure a vibrant system that supports civic education in schools/communities. The Committee proposes a plan that not only requires adult oversight, but includes the voices of students and youth who will be benefiting from such program.

For an example, a new organization under the SBOE would primarily focus on promoting civic education across schools, creating teams of students who are passionate about helping their peers become more engaged in the democratic society in which they live in. An executive team would create agendas with action items for students (from all backgrounds) to collaborate on and begin to solve, while another team of students and educators would initiate academic discussions -- increasing awareness on different subjects. A final team of students would coordinate actions steps that will take place outside of the academic space.

This organization/program would be conducted in three main stages. These stages are intended to keep an organized structure for day-to-day operations. For example:

Stages	Details	Explanation/Reasoning
Planning Stage	In the Spring, the organization will plan for the upcoming SY. This may include: new members, agendas, or a constitution.	The Planning Stage is needed to brainstorm ideas and to collaborate with peers in efforts to build solid resolutions in order to solve related issues
Production Stage	In the Fall, all plans and agendas should be created and followed through.	The Production Stage carries out plans/agendas to act on positive change
Analysis Stage	In the Summer, participants will be able to reflect on success and failures to conduct a more innovative session moving forward.	The Analysis Stage is used to measure outcomes and increase accountability within the organization/program

Additionally, incentivizing the workload for students in the form of community service hours will most likely increase full participation during the school year, since students will be able to contribute to their communities while being rewarded for doing so.

In the success of this organization/program, many youth in DC -- from all different backgrounds -- will be given opportunities to engage in academic discussions with peers, learn civic education and duties, be informed and thoughtful, grasp fundamental processes of American democracy, understand and become aware of public and community issues, think critically, negotiate ideas, and use argumentation and research to advocate on everyday issues that affect them. Inally, most importantly, students will be able to increase empathetic communities by reflecting their own actions and those of others, thereby creating more empathetic and compassionate leaders.

Report Production and Usage

While this report was created for the District of Columbia State Board of Education, the Student Advisory Committee also recommends that this report be shared with other administrative actors responsible for the embetterment of DC education. This report should be shared with the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, the Chairman of the District of Columbia Charter School Board, the Chairman of the District of Columbia Council Committee on Education, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the Principals of DCPS and DCPCS schools, and other educational organizations in the city, in order to increase student voices in creating policy.

The student authors of this report are listed below.

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