

June 2016

Report to
The DC State Board of Education
By
The DC SBOE Student Advisory Committee
Concerning
Proposed Solutions for Increasing Teacher Accountability

The Committee

The DC SBOE Student Advisory Committee is a committee of the DC State Board of Education designed to expand the influence that the District’s student community has over the education policies that impact their lives on a daily basis. Co-chaired by the two serving student representatives of the State Board, the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) is composed of up to fifteen additional members representing a variety of public and charter schools. The members meet several times over the course of the school year to discuss issues of importance specific to the student body and ultimately propose solutions aimed at improving the capacity for the District’s students to get the most out of their education.

The Members

The Committee in this, its inaugural year, was co-chaired by Brian Contreras (School Without Walls SHS) and Destinee Whittington (Richard Wright PCS). Seven

additional members: Joseph Adams (Friendship PCS - Tech Prep Academy), Jack Nugent (School Without Walls SHS), Nate Green (KIPP DC College Preparatory), Natalie Seablom (Woodrow Wilson HS), Mykaila Lofton (BASIS DC), JaRhonda Roberts (Friendship Collegiate Academy PCS), and Alex Dorosin (Woodrow Wilson HS) completed its membership.

The Process

The Student Advisory Committee met four times over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, with each meeting representing a distinct step in the process of developing a set of policy proposals for the State Board of Education. Meeting One took place on October 6th, 2015 and involved the SAC members discussing a wide variety of issues they had with the current state of education in DC, and ultimately voting on which one to spend the year focused on. Meeting Two took place on December 8th, 2015 and went further into depth on the chosen topic, with members sharing peer testimonies and published articles to inform an educated discussion of the topic. Meeting Three took place on April 27th, 2016 and involved members bringing in and discussing ideas for specific policy changes that could help resolve the issue being discussed. Finally, Meeting Four took place on May 31st, 2016 and involved the members formulating a report of their work over the year prior to be presented to the State Board of Education, including suggested policy changes the SAC had arrived at as solutions to their area of focus.

Topic of Discussion

By a unanimous vote in their first meeting, the Student Advisory Committee selected the topic of Teacher Accountability as their area of focus for the year. Elements of this topic that they felt needed resolution via policy change included: students not knowing their grades early enough to improve them, students having no input in the teacher certification and evaluation processes, insufficient or nonexistent systems of online grading, inadequacies in the Master Educator evaluation system, and skewed weighting of grades across classes and disciplines.

Other issues that got brought up in the first meeting, and which the SAC may choose to focus on in the years to come, included: absence policies, start and dismissal times, school food, security and student safety, physical and mental health, gender parity in dress codes, gender-neutral bathrooms, equality in school holidays, and class credit policies. Subsequent to the first meeting, some of these topics would be addressed in other State Board of Education venues, especially concerns over student health and credit policies.

Furthermore, the issue of grading policies was raised, but ultimately was grouped under the larger issue of teacher accountability methods.

Final Proposals

The Student Advisory Committee ultimately developed a list of nine recommended policy changes that they, as students, felt would improve teacher accountability in DC and thus allow students to more consistently receive high-quality education. Those nine proposed changes are as follows:

- 1. Implement city-wide usage of online grading systems with time requirements on how often teachers are required to update them.**
- 2. Add questions to the yearly student climate survey that address social issues like sexism in dress codes, racism/homophobia/transphobia by teachers and substitutes, feedback on PARCC testing, and other school climate issues.**
- 3. Have Master Educators go to classes halfway through a particular class period rather than at the beginning (so that teachers don't teach a different lesson than they would otherwise) and ensure that teachers do not know on what days the MEs are coming to observe, or otherwise reform the ME system to better represent what actually goes on in classes.**
- 4. Require teachers to provide office hours outside of class time as well as make available some sort of contact information so students can communicate with them.**
- 5. Put more information on the school report cards regarding available classes, extracurriculars, facilities, student-teacher ratio, and school climate.**
- 6. Implement end-of-semester (twice a year) student reviews of teachers as part of the accountability framework.**
- 7. Recommend that schools or LEAs make available a counselor for teachers themselves to help them deal with the stress of their jobs.**
- 8. Recommend the implementation of teacher mentorship programs between newer and older faculty members, or other teacher-centric support groups.**

9. Implement an education/media program to educate students and families about what the PARCC is, what it is used for and who it affects, and what rights they have with regards to opting out.

Report

The Student Advisory Committee decided, through a unanimous vote, to use a written report as the means through which to distribute their findings and ultimate proposals on the topic of teacher accountability. This report is primarily intended for use by the State Board of Education, but could also be sent to a variety of stakeholders across the District, including: the Chairman of the District of Columbia Council Committee on Education, the Deputy Mayor for Education, the State Superintendent of Education, the Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools and the Chairman of the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board. It may also be distributed to any other individual or organization that has a hand in crafting or enacting DC education policy, so that their decisions going forwards may be informed by the opinions of those who are most directly affected; namely, the students.

This report was developed and written jointly by the members of Student Advisory Committee, and represents the consensus of their many discussions over the course of the 2015-2016 school year.

Brian Contreras, Co-Chair

Destinee Whittington, Co-Chair

Joseph Adams

Alex Dorosin

Nate Green

Mykaila Lofton

Jack Nugent

JaRhonda Roberts

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