



Report of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) for School Year 2020–2021

Executive Summary

The Student Advisory Committee is a group of DC public and charter high school students that meets monthly to discuss issues pertaining to education within and without the school building and advises the DC State Board of Education based on the experiences of students in the group. The committee is co-chaired by the two current Student Representatives on the State Board, Shayla Dell and Alex O’Sullivan. The committee hosted two virtual town hall events for students to share their virtual learning experiences in a forum setting. The events can be found on YouTube and are titled ‘Student Voices: Distance Learning Town Hall.’ During the monthly meetings, the committee hosted guest speakers from outside organizations, students, and advocacy groups. State Board members would frequently attend meetings to listen to students, give presentations on resolutions they are taking up, receive feedback, and pose questions to the group. Going forward, State Board members are required to first present their resolutions and seek an official statement or opinion from the SAC on the proposed resolution before it is introduced at a public meeting. Additionally, this will be the final year where the Student Advisory Committee is co-chaired by only two student representatives because starting next school year, there will be four student representatives, at least one coming from a school in Ward 7 or Ward 8.

The below report is a summary of the most important issues the SAC tackled this past school year and the recommendations the committee made based on a three-week period in June where the committee met weekly and went through each topic, sharing final thoughts and suggestions. From there, the two Student Representatives wrote up the summary and subsequent recommendations from the recordings of the meeting and the meticulous notes taken during the meeting. The report will be presented at the State Board’s July public meeting via a PowerPoint presentation by the Board’s two Student Representatives with the help of a few SAC members. The topics covered by the report are outlined below, and the list of Student Advisory Committee members can be found at the bottom of the report.

- Distance Learning
- Mental Health
- In-Person Learning
- Safe Passage
- Inequities in Funding
- Recruiting Applicants for the SAC/Student Representative positions





A special thanks to the Student Advisory Committee for their fantastic engagement this past year in the virtual setting, attending one and a half hour meetings which sometimes ran over the expected time limit, after sitting in front of a computer for school eight hours that day. The SAC's ambitious drive and dedication to amplifying student voice while constantly seeking to improve the District's education system for all is both inspirational and a further example of the leadership potential of students and youth everywhere. We want to give another thank you to the Executive Director of the State Board, John-Paul Hayworth, for his constant engagement, leadership, and assistance to the operations of the Student Advisory Committee. None of the efforts of the Committee would be possible without him, Caitlin Peng, Milayo Olufemi, Darren Fleischer, Alexander Jue, and all of the staffers and interns on the State Board who helped the committee organize, plan events, advance recruitment efforts, and edit this report. Thank you to all the Board members who engage with the Committee, attend our meetings, and promote our efforts! Finally, thank you to President Parker and Vice President Gasoi for their leadership and willingness to support the voices of students and the Student Advisory Committee!

The Student Advisory Committee wants this report to be sent to the offices of the DCPS Chancellor, Deputy Mayor of Education, State Superintendent of Education, and City Council's Committee of the Whole, via a letter signed by all members of the State Board calling on these offices to take appropriate action on implementing these recommendations.

Distance Learning

Students generally reported that consistency and uniformity among online learning platforms were valued and most conducive to learning. The fewer platforms that students had to use daily to access assignments and submit homework lessened confusion and unnecessary work-related stress. Students reported occasional performance issues with online sites that were problematic, but these issues were not the most concerning for students. Instead, lack of access to high-speed internet connection and properly-functioning, usable computers were more of an obstruction to learning.

Additionally, communication between school, teachers, and families was ineffective and made SAT and AP exams more stressful for students. As the school year progressed, communication among teachers and students generally improved, but for some students, the workload never lightened. The worst learning experiences happened for students in classes where teaching and communication was subpar. Examples of this include when teachers failed to make the necessary adjustments from teaching in-person to virtually, relying too much on lecture learning through presentation and notes, and failing to adequately make assignments clear or engaging to the student. However, teachers did improve through trial and error as the year progressed, and positive





changes to learning were made. *The most effective changes were made by teachers at the class level because this was where feedback and response were most direct, but also gave teachers the opportunity to coordinate together to make necessary adjustments.* 4x4

Some students noted that school-wide policies addressing certain topics like synchronous vs. asynchronous balance and workload were less effective than class-by-class policies because it limited flexibility for teaching/learning styles, and thus stifled certain learning developments. One student was particularly frustrated with DCPS' communication with schools and families regarding in-person learning, citing that she was only updated on the situation through a civic-engagement extracurricular activity. Some students lamented their 4x4 AP classes because of the inconveniency of their learning period versus their exam date. *4x4 classes is when students would take a course for one semester, or one half of the year, and then would take a different class the rest of the year, but would then be tested at the end of the year on that original class in addition to that new class in the form of an AP exam or final exam. They would essentially be learning two courses in the span of half a year each, and then they would be forced to recall all of that information for each class for the final exam at the end of the school year.*

Students also disliked when teachers used grading leniency as an excuse to be less understanding and empathetic of students' situations. Handling problems with teachers was an ongoing issue that was never solved across DC schools—many students felt that after they attempted to find solutions to their problems with teachers, things went nowhere and the problems continued.

The asynchronous Wednesdays were a massive success, however, and should be implemented next year in some capacity.

Mental Health

Many students' mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic over the course of the past year. Students cited loneliness, family issues, heightened anxiety, technology troubles, and excessive workload as contributing factors to lower rates of class participation, engagement, and productivity.

Some tools provided to students from their school that were effective at alleviating stress and isolation included: more optional extracurricular activities, spaces for students to interact with one another, free mental health services, and optional in-person events involving physical activity such as bike rides, kickball games, and photography. Some schools established weekly and biweekly school enrichment activities for students to enjoy in replacement of virtual learning





for that day. Students stated that the more lenient schools and teachers were towards its students, the more manageable school was for high schoolers. *Mental health services provided by psychologists and social workers were effective in some cases, but students cited a lack of knowledge about these services being offered.* Some students were not aware of the services offered by their schools, and others felt disinterested in receiving this type of help. Clubs aimed at addressing student mental health were minimally effective because they could not lower their school workload.

More asynchronous class work provided students more control over the structure of their school day, which empowered students to incorporate more healthy habits and practices into their lives, such as exercising and napping. Teachers and counselors making extra efforts to get to know their students and provide opportunities for them to enjoy made students more engaged and interested in school. In general, students want more psychologists and social workers, and *they want their schools to do a better job making their services more prominently known within the school building.*

In-Person Learning

Assuming the diversity of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) reflects the diversity in student opinion in the city, the issue of in-person learning is a contentious one. While many students' anxieties upon re-entering their school buildings has been eased by the widespread teen access to vaccines, others are very hesitant and less comfortable learning in an in-person setting. Vaccines are available to most high school students but not all high schoolers are planning on receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and those students may not feel safe from the virus in-person. Considering the vaccine is not mandatory, this concern must be addressed in a manner that does not punish students who feel unsafe going back into the school building. ***That is why the SAC recommends that a virtual option is in-place for students who do not want to attend school in-person, and insists that in-person learning should not be a requirement for all students.*** Additionally, SAC members noted that some students benefited academically from learning at-home in the online setting. However, members of the SAC do believe the advantages of in-person learning should not be overlooked, as many students are longing for the opportunity to be around their peers again. *Members of the SAC suggest that DCPS and public charter schools encourage high school students to get the vaccine in an informative manner, so as to reduce risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their school buildings. Further, some members of the SAC recommend that schools be required to collect data on the vaccination status of all students in the city.*





*Students also want to ensure that the proper safety precautions will still be in-place in the fall, and that school leaders will not be lax about maintaining necessary safeguards that will help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, simply because teachers and some students are vaccinated. Already students are reporting that from their current experience entering their respective school buildings, that soap dispensers are breaking, sanitation stations are failing, and sinks are not working. **Unsanitary bathrooms are a non-starter for reopening schools; it is absolutely necessary that school leaders treat sanitation and hygienic practices with the utmost importance.** Mask-wearing, social distancing, and handwashing are the three most important elements that students and teachers are responsible for in order to maintain the health of their school buildings. However, **the proper facilities being in-place—including working sanitation stations, sinks and soap dispensers, access to clean drinking water and healthy food options, and improved HVAC systems—are just as important for students and teachers to be safe, and that relies on DCPS and other LEAs setting up systematic practices across all DC schools.***

*The question of how to ensure buildings are in a safe enough condition for students to learn without their health being compromised is the essential dilemma. The answer is that students and families must be informed of exactly what is in place in the building ahead of their first day in school, and all students and families should be welcomed to walk through the building and see the precautions first-hand. **SAC members recommend that each school offers walkthroughs because it will ease concerns that students and families have about reopening and it will enforce a level of accountability on the school to deliver upon its promises.** After students and families are given the option of visiting their school in-person and attesting to the precautions in place, students and families should be given the opportunity to opt-out if they feel they will not be safe. There should be levels of accountability set-up within schools and their respective LEAs for maintaining these precautions and procedures throughout the school year, including scheduled maintenance checks, HVAC system evaluation, and family feedback. **Further, the SAC recommends that the State Board call upon each individual LEA to conduct regular cleaning inspections, and release those results to the public or the State Board and City Council.***

*During the school day, students should have access to cleaning and sanitary supplies such as hand sanitizer, extra masks, disposable wipes, and disinfectant. These features are empowering and reassuring for students who want to feel as safe as possible while learning. The SAC also feels strongly that there should be a day of the week designated for deep cleaning. **Additionally, schools should consider using that same day for students' mental health, volunteer opportunities, make-up work, deep-cleaning within the school, etc.** SAC members welcome mask requirements and they feel much safer with that in place, as opposed to easing masking restrictions just because*





cases are decreasing. SAC members feel that generally high school students will be able to abide by the health and safety guidelines provided to each of them, but they do worry about elementary school students and their propensity to follow the guidelines.

Also, SAC members note that high school students are able to voice their own concerns, *but who will take on this role for the elementary school students and advocate on their behalf?* Instead of simply insisting for as many elementary school students to be in-person as possible, it is critical that schools do not leave our youngest students vulnerable to infection simply because they cannot advocate for themselves to the same degree that high school students can. It is likely that most elementary school students will not be vaccinated by next fall, and this will apply to some middle school students too, so ***the SAC recommends the State Board identify ways that LEAs can engage elementary school students and families in the reopening process.*** Elementary schools should be run with the same level of accountability, and students and their families should be granted the same opportunities to see for themselves that their school building is safe to learn in. Engagement includes receiving input and feedback from these students themselves, their parents, their siblings, and their school administrators.

SAC members have many questions about how learning will be operated in an in-person setting: “*What will class periods and rotations be like?*”, “*Will students be able to travel to the cafeteria, go outside for lunch?*”, etc. ***Students feel adamantly that in-person school should not be used just to continue virtual learning.*** In-person learning this past year was not an effective form of schooling because it was simply virtual learning being conducted in the school building. ***Students want in-person learning to resemble school as it was before the pandemic, not during it.*** Attendance should be operated as it was pre-COVID. Students want to be in the school-building to learn with pencil and paper, not keyboard and computer. That is not to say that aspects of virtual learning cannot be useful for improving the quality of learning, but schools should not rely on computers and digital learning to teach students the content they need to succeed. Overuse of computers and blue light has noted detrimental effects on children’s cognitive state and development, and using computers at the rate students have in the past year will only further exacerbate these effects.

However, platforms used this past year can help improve the overall quality of education in other manners. Canvas and Microsoft Teams were the two best platforms for students in the SAC, and they can be used effectively to maximize convenience for students. For example, if a student misses a day of school, the power points for that day can be posted on Canvas for a student to access. Students appreciate the opportunity to use online meeting platforms and turn in





assignments digitally or communicate with their teacher at home through an app like Remind. These platforms can also be helpful for organization and preparation for the possible event of schools being closed again. ***If there is a COVID-19 outbreak at a school or across the city that results in students being forced to learn virtually for an extended period, there needs to be a contingency plan in place for students to pick up learning in a virtual environment seamlessly. Schools should be prepared to go virtual if it is no longer safe to learn in-person, and a way to plan for that ahead of time is to use online platforms to hold class files and assignments just in-case.***

There should be protocols and processes in-place in the event of COVID-19 infection across the school level. There should be meticulous detail and thoughtful planning based on community engagement and feedback that goes into health and safety protocols set up by LEAs. Schools need to be ready for the moment of outbreak and have plans for different scenarios.

Safe Passage

Some students addressed concerns with traveling to and from school using public transportation on two different fronts. The first is the spread of COVID-19 on the Metro, particularly the train, because thousands of people will be riding the same metro stations and spreading their germs indoors. Students would feel more comfortable with hand sanitizer and other protective equipment available in each car. Additionally, the SAC **recommends** that the State Board seeks a collective written plan from the Mayor's Office, OSSE, and/or WMATA detailing a comprehensive plan to keep students safe riding public transportation to and from school. Further, the SAC **recommends** that the State Board call upon WMATA to release the results of their regular safety inspections throughout the school year to ensure that public transportation continues to be a safe method of travel for students commuting to and from school. Community transmission leads to school transmission, and vice versa. ***So, if school leaders want schools to remain in-person for the entire year, they must stay vigilant about adhering to their safety standards.*** The second concern students have is safe passage, specifically violence and harassment. **Young girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence**, and some of the broader societal problems affecting people will inevitably remain issues for students in the fall. ***Thus, the SAC recommends that the State Board find ways to raise awareness on the issue, seek community feedback and engagement, collaborate with its sister office of the DC Student Advocate to come up with solutions, notify DC City Council on its importance, and request the necessary funds to implement solutions on this issue.***





Inequities in Funding

Inequities in funding disproportionately impact schools in Wards 7 & 8, and those funding differences breed damaging long-lasting consequences for students who attend these schools. During the pandemic, inadequate funding provided to schools led to disparate access to technology, unreliable computer service, and lower performance during virtual learning. Inequity, specifically inequitable funding, is an issue that has long existed before the pandemic and will continue to exist as schools resume operating in-person.

One of the most important aspects of equitable learning is equitable access to learning opportunities including arts, sports and libraries. Each of these opportunities must be provided to every student in every school across all three levels of education, and any failure to provide these to students is a microcosm of a larger statewide failure. So, librarians being reassigned from an L1 position to an L2 position is both concerning and harmful. Librarians play a vital role in shaping students' future, and they are integral to school culture and the learning environment. Students use libraries to find good books, print papers when they cannot access a printer at home, and to find a quiet place to study and relax, and librarians are essential to making libraries run and to prevent them from turning into chaos. ***Librarians are essential workers in the school building and need to be treated as such, and schools need enough funding to ensure they can have at least one librarian in their school.*** Some schools are forced to choose between keeping a librarian or a staff member or paying for certain school renovations, but principals should not be forced to make this decision and choose between essential aspects of children's learning.

Similarly, schools should not be forced to downsize their arts and performance department because of lower funding being allocated by DCPS. Education is a necessity and a fundamental American right, not a privilege, and the city's funding should reflect that. Schools do not simply need better instruction on how to spend their money, but they need more money so that they do not have to make tough budgetary decisions that will worsen the experience of children's learning.

Recruiting Applicants for Student Representative/ Student Advisory Committee: Increasing outreach to high school students

A recurring focus of the Student Advisory Committee the past couple years has been finding ways to diversify student voices with an increased emphasis on gaining an actual representation of our student body. From direct experience, the SAC has found that oftentimes schools are only represented by the top-academically performing students or those who are already active participants in multiple other political-minded groups. However, the Student Advisory Committee has the role of representing the entire student body and coming up with solutions to the issues





affecting all students, not just the top-tenth of students, and thus, the SAC needs to do a better job at engaging the students who are closest to the problems. ***It is no longer acceptable to have a few schools make up most of the committee, and there is a limit to how much the committee will be able to do in the future if more students are not represented. That is why it is the most pressing issue facing the committee, and one of grave concern for the State Board.*** It is on each State Board representative to prioritize the following recommendations, and to work with the committee to make them happen. The following **recommendations** will not all be able to be completed over the summer, and some aspects will be a part of a longer ongoing process, but some will be quick changes that will provide dividends in the future.

The first important step to gaining more interest in the Student Advisory Committee is ***the proper messaging that will accurately portray the work the SAC does, and the benefits of being a part of the group.*** While the community service hours granted to members is intriguing, the most valuable part of the committee is the **empowerment** that the group provides you. The opportunity to have a **voice** in a judgement-free group of students who are there to **uplift you and listen** is invaluable for young people who are constantly neglected and forsaken. The SAC is a place for students to advocate for solutions on any of the issues they care about that affect their school. You can bring your own experience and input, and have that experience valued, and see something done about it. The group is positive, productive, inclusive, progress-minded, open, encouraging, supportive, understanding, and efficient. ***These are the types of adjectives that should be used to describe the atmosphere of the committee.*** Additionally, the SAC has real clout due to the fact that there is power behind the committee with the State Board of Education backing it. ***When students hear about all the good the committee does and that there is real influence behind the group, students will feel they might have a real opportunity at change, and that faith is empowering for students and will further enhance the quality of our schools.*** Students can gain a nuanced understanding of education policy, the inner workings of DCPS and public charter schools, and the best ways to affect change at their own school. Additionally, they get to interact with elected officials who want to listen to them and hear what they have to say.

The Student Advisory Committee has potential to be a trailblazing group that can lead students of the next generation forward. ***However, there needs to be enough community engagement for every high schooler in the city to know about the SAC.*** Here are some ways to increase engagement:

- Use the State Board's social media accounts to post the application and the work of the SAC





- Consider organizing a public SAC meeting
- Create a montage of students describing why they appreciate the Student Advisory Committee
- Create a short promotion for the SAC by creating a highlight clip of students talking about education issues from recorded meetings & town halls
- Use Student Advisory Committee Instagram in the future to keep public up to date on what the SAC is doing
- During school year, have a feature on the State Board website that allows students to put their email and automatically send an email to the current Student Representatives to indicate that other students have requested to join the committee
- Send SAC/Student Representative Application to every Public & Public Charter High School in DC, and ask them to post flyer & information on social media, school website, and school newsletter
- Send SAC/Student Representative to partners of State Board, other education groups, youth groups, and groups with high school students
- Create 3 SAC Events:
 - 1) Ward-specific, get to know your SBOE rep event, aimed at high school students, with SAC members at each location
 - 2) City-wide outdoor activity day, with games and competitions like tug-of-war, football, capture the flag, etc
 - 3) Pop-up tents outside metro stations on weekends in each ward with SAC Members & Student Reps, to hand out pamphlets and let people know about SAC

“The Student Advisory Committee is an inclusive group of DC high school students who meet monthly to discuss any, and all issues in their school or that are affecting their education. We are open to all DC high school students, and we want to hear from as many of you all as we can. The SAC is a place for students to share their experiences and bring up their concerns, no matter how big or small, school-wide or District-wide. We pride ourselves on our positive and supportive nature where student opinion and feedback is prioritized and actually valued by other students who understand the importance of addressing student concerns. We are backed by the DC State Board of Education, the only publicly elected education body in the city, and are represented by four Student Representatives who are appointed by the State Board. Additionally, you gain community service hours for attending our meetings and participating in our events. You can apply for both the Student Representative position and to be a Student Advisory Committee member [here](#).”





List of Student Advisory Committee Members

Position	Name	School	Grade
Co-chair	Alex O’Sullivan	BASIS DC PCS	11th
Co-chair	Shayla Dell	Duke Ellington School of the Arts	11th
Member	Winston Wardlaw	DC International School	12th
Member	Anna Brosowsky	DC International School	12th
Member	Jessi Thompson-Brown	DC International School	12th
Member	Walker Price	Wilson High School	12th
Member	Giulio Iacoviello	School Without Walls Senior High School	12th
Member	Camille Jones	Capital City PCS	12th
Member	Jordynn Goins	Paul Laurence Dunbar High School	12th
Member	Londyn Napper	Wilson High School	11th
Member	Reagan Allvin	Wilson High School	11th
Member	Vance Gootman	School Without Walls Senior High School	11th
Member	Alyssa Richardson	Duke Ellington School of the Arts High School	11th
Member	Shaniyah Robinson	Ballou High School	11th
Member	JP Roberts	Wilson High School	11th





Member	Segen Mebrahtu	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	11th
Member	Janiya Charity	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	11th
Member	Kayla Park	Washington Latin PCS	11th
Member	Luke Johnson	BASIS DC PCS	11th
Member	Gary Murray	Paul Laurence Dunbar High School	11th
Member	Haven Gilchrist	Wilson High School	11th
Member	Lordes Weston	Wilson High School	11th
Member	Sophia Hosford	Wilson High School	11th
Member	London McPherson-Dews	Anacostia High School	11th
Member	Tamia Murphy	Washington Leadership Academy	11th
Member	Emilie Kpadea	Calvin Coolidge Senior High School	10th
Member	Jenae Preddie	Bard Early College High School	10th
Member	Iyanna Williams	Bard Early College High School	10th
Member	Juliana Lopez	Columbia Heights Educational Campus	10th
Member	Leah Sloan	KIPP DC College Preparatory	10 th
Member	Julian Wardlaw	DC International School	10 th
Member	China Jones Burgess	Bard Early College High School	9th
Member	Amira Jones	Bard Early College High School	9th

