

Annual Report for School Year 2021-22

The Student Advisory Committee of the D.C. State Board of Education

07/20/2022

Overview

The Student Advisory Committee (SAC) is a committee of students from DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools around the District which meets twice a month to discuss issues that are prominent in DC schools. The SAC is one of seven committees of the District of Columbia State Board of Education. The Student Advisory Committee is chaired by the Board's student members. In previous years, the SBOE only had 2 student representatives, however, in the 2021-2022 school the shift to 4 student representatives was made. The shift to 4 student representatives has allowed more student voices to be brought to the DC State Board of Education. The shift to 4 student representatives allowed more room for ideas on how to lead the Student Advisory Committee. For instance, in prior years the SAC only met once a month and in the 2021-2022 school year the Student Advisory Committee was able to meet twice a month. This committee has been co-chaired by a total of 6 different student representatives over the course of the 2021–2022 school year: Alex O'Sullivan, Skye-Ali Johnson, Juliana Lopez, Neveah Bright, Ean Bowie, and Liv Birnstad. It is currently co-chaired by Skye-Ali Johnson, Juliana Lopez, and Liv Birnstad. A special thanks to Alex O'Sullivan, Ean Bowie, and Neveah Bright for co-chairing the committee throughout this year.

This year the SAC focused on two main projects: a City-Wide Survey, and work done around COVID-19. As the committee is an *advisory* committee it also had many responsibilities outside of these two projects. For instance, one of the bylaws of the State Board requires that the SAC is consulted, and gives their opinions on any resolution before it is passed. So some meetings centered around presentations/discussions on resolutions. The Student Advisory Committee also frequently has guests who either share opportunities with the committee, or ask for student feedback on different projects around the District.

City-Wide Survey

The City-Wide survey was created by the Student Advisory Committee and focused on four sections: demographics, safe passage, mental health, and COVID-19 and safety protocols. Each consisted of a total of 5–10 questions. This survey received a total of 150 responses. The survey was directed towards students in D.C. and was created to learn about what D.C. students are currently experiencing. Questions were multiple choice, short response, long response, or asked students how much they agreed with a statement on a scale of, “strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree.” All questions were optional and no names, email addresses, or other personal identifying information were collected. The responses collected will both affect the work of the Student Advisory Committee and its recommendations for SY22-23.

In the fall of 2022, the Student Representative and Board staff will present at the Aurora Institute Symposium about empowering and elevating student voice in policy development and discussions in a post-COVID system. Students will share, in-part, about the City-Wide Survey and other things related to student advocacy within education policy.

Safe Passage

This year's discussion on safe passage was intertwined with both the work of the State Board of Education as a whole and with the SAC. In this context, safe passage refers to a student's ability to get to and from school, home, and work safely. Some factors that affect safe passage are traffic accidents, interpersonal interactions, and access to consistent public transportation. Safe passage includes being safe from physical violence *and* verbal harassment.

The section of the City-Wide Survey dedicated to safe passage asked students about their experience traveling to and from school. This included both how students traveled (i.e. which

method of transportation), and how safe they felt while traveling. Most students either walked, traveled by car, or by public transportation. 16.2% of respondents said that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I feel safe around public means of transportation.” This tells the SAC that students in the District need more support in order to feel safe when traveling around the District. One of the questions asked, “How can safe passage be improved?” some students responded that they have gender-based safety concerns and that they weren’t sure how to combat this. The SAC will dedicate time next year to brainstorm and take action regarding preventing and responding to gender-based safety concerns. It is important that students are safe not just inside schools but also as they navigate around the District of Columbia too. So, the SAC recommends that initiatives that aim to facilitate safer passage receive more support (from groups involved in education and transportation across the District) in both the growth and recognition of these programs.

The SAC recognizes that safe passage begins in the school; for students to truly have safe passage, schools must be a safe place. This is physical *and* emotional safety for *all* students regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, race, nationality, sexuality, physical ability, or any other factor. The SAC is dedicated to fighting for safety in school and will provide additional recommendations for creating safe schools further in the report.

Mental Health

The section of the City-Wide Survey about mental health focuses on asking students about their experience with their mental health during the pandemic during the school year 2021-2022. For instance, one of the questions asks, “When you go to an adult for help and need to talk about your mental stability, how often do you feel like you are being listened to?” 51.64%

of students reported that they are only listened to sometimes, and 29% of students said that they are always listened to. When they are asked about the actions taken when they talk to someone about their mental health, 24.17% of students answered that there is insufficient community support or organized events, and no actions are taken after they share their concern.

For students who are learning virtually, they were asked about the changes made to increase awareness and support for student's mental health than the previous year, and 39.53% of students agreed that they received more support.

When students were asked what could be done to feel supported about their mental health in the "other please specify" option a student said, "Stop calling students lazy or procrastinators without knowing why they may be in that dormant state." This is a sentiment that many students have echoed throughout the school year. Many students feel as if their mental health is not being taken seriously. Although, 20.35% of students said that even having a trusted adult would not help them feel supported with their mental health, 16.81% of students reported that just making the resources known would help them feel more supported with their mental health.

Using both the responses from the survey, and other conversations and discussions at SAC meetings, the committee has made two recommendations specific to mental health. Every single school should be staffed with at least one (but more depending on the size of the student body) licensed mental health professional who is available – in the building – to support students five days a week. Students should be encouraged by all adults in the building to participate in activities that strengthen mental health. Schools should have more mental health activities such as practicing gratitude, end-of-class check ins, and defying stigma for students to participate in, at least once a week in a class.

COVID-19

The section of the City-Wide Survey about COVID-19 asked about the COVID-19 regulations in schools and how well they were being followed. One question asked students how they agreed with the statement, “My school’s infrastructure (toilets, sinks, etc) is suitable to support hygienic standards in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic.” 21.93% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Infrastructure has been a major point of many conversations that the SAC has had this year and thus creates the recommendation: LEAs should ensure that schools have well functioning infrastructure including (but not limited to) toilets, sinks, and HVAC systems.

Another question asked students to share their biggest concerns regarding COVID-19 in their schools. Many students responded that they noticed a lack of transparency and consistency in COVID-19 testing. While some students noted that their school *did* have testing it was confusing to receive results or receive notifications when they have been in close contact with a positive person. Other students noted that their schools did *not* maintain or have a consistent testing schedule that serviced all students. The SAC recommends that COVID-19 testing, and the process by which it occurs, should be more consistent and transparent to students, staff, and family. Increased transparency allows students to build trust in their schools and school community.

COVID-19 and Vaccination Initiative

Much of the work of the Student Advisory Committee centered, or related to, COVID-19 in some capacity. Some of the work surrounded vaccines and the creation of youth led vaccination initiatives. The goal of the SAC is to help spread factful and useful information about the COVID-19 vaccine. This initiative will take place virtually over the summer through

the SAC's and the Board's social media pages. The Student Advisory Committee hopes to encourage unvaccinated students and their families to get the vaccine and/or have additional knowledge about the efficacy of the vaccine. Not only does social media provide a quick way for the youth to receive factual information about the vaccine, it also provides another way to share the information rapidly amongst the youth. In June, Student Representative Liv Birnstad testified with President Jessica Sutter on behalf of the SBOE at the D.C. Council's "No Shots, No Schools" roundtable. Representative Birnstad shared some of the findings of the city-wide survey and other issues that students face in regards to receiving the vaccine.

Additional Recommendations for SY22-23

As a group, the Student Advisory Committee has created a list of recommendations to inform the work of the State Board, SAC, and other education-related groups for the school year 2022-23. Some of these recommendations were included in previous sections of the report, the rest will be shared here.

Distance learning schools need to be more organized and have increased support. Students in virtual schools have raised concerns about teacher retention, student accountability and attendance within the programs as well as the experience for students transferring into the program. As virtual schools become a more permanent structure in D.C. schools, it is important that they uphold the same standards of education as other schools in the District.

The SAC should increase its social media presence to share about the work of the committee, the Board, and other education-related issues and opportunities. While the SAC does have some social media, the committee feels that it is not being utilized to its fullest potential.

The Student Advisory Committee should utilize Instagram, Twitter, and Tik Tok to reach out to students across the District. This would not only give a platform for the committee to share content but also engage with students where they are. It will create a low-stakes environment for students who are not on the committee to engage with the work of the SAC and to raise awareness for those within the committee. This will also raise awareness of the SAC's work among students who are not in the committee.

All education-related agencies across the District should work to create meaningful guidelines to support students facing identity-based harassment. Many students explained that they feel that their schools are not responding well to issues of identity-based harassment (racism, antisemitism, homophobia, etc) and that their needs to be better responses to these incidents. The SAC believes that staff should be well equipped with training to counter these events. The Student Advisory Committee feels Gender-Sexuality Alliances, Black Student Unions, and other student-led groups surrounding identity should be encouraged in schools and should be consulted by staff when incidents occur.

Members of the Student Advisory Committee 2021-2022

Name	School	Graduation Year
Alexander O’Sullivan, Co-chair	Basis Public Charter School	2022
Skye-Ali Johnson, Co-chair	Richard Wright Public Charter School	2022
Liv Birnstad, Co-chair	Capital City Public Charter School	2023
Neveah Bright, Co-chair	Coolidge Early College Academy/Trinity College	2023
Ean Bowie, Co-Chair	Ron Brown Early College Preparatory	2023
Juliana Lopez, Co-chair	Columbia Heights Educational Campus	2023
Amira Jones	Bard High School Early College DC	2024
Clarke Dickens	Capital City Public Charter School	2022
Gabriel Kraemer	School Without Walls High School	2023
Hallie Munsat	Duke Ellington School of the Arts	2023
Haven Gilchrist	Jackson Reed High School	2022
Imania Sheikh	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	2022
Iyana Williams	Bard High School Early College DC	2023
Janiya Brenae Charity	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	2022
Jenae’ Preddie	Bard High School Early College DC	2023
Julian Wardlaw	DC International School	2023

Kendall Shields	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	2022
Penelope Morris	School Without Walls High School	2024
Reagan R. Allvin	Jackson Reed High School	2022
Segen Mebrahtu	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School	2022
Taron Lawson	Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts	2023
Vance Gootman	School Without Walls High School	2022
Willa Roemer	Washington Latin Public Charter School	2024
Andrew Michael Wilson	Duke Ellington School of the Arts	2024
Aniya Jabria Coffey	Phelps ACE Highschool	2024
China Jones-Burgess	Bard High School Early College DC	2024
Darlin Rivera	Jackson Reed High School	2022
Daya George	School Without Walls	2023
Dylan Park	School Without Walls	2024
Ean Bowie	Ron Brown College Prep High School	2023
Edith Alexandra Gonzalez Gonzalez	Cardozo Education Campus	2023
Emilie Kpadea	Calvin Coolidge Senior High School	2023
Gary Murray	Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School	2022
Kayla Park	Washington Latin Public Charter School	2022
Kyriah Carmicheal	Richard Wright Public Charter School	2024
Leah Michele Sloan	Kipp DC College Prep	2023

London McPherson-Dews	Anacostia Senior High School	2022
Lordes Weston	Jackson Reed	2022
Perion King	Richard Wright Public Charter School	2024
Sophia Hosford	Jackson Reed High School	2022
Sophia Ibrahim	Jackson Reed High School	2023
Titilope Omole	Theodore Roosevelt high school	2023
Yohanna Mbedgue	Cardozo Education Campus	2023