

Name: _____

JANUARY
2024

STUDENT & COMMUNITY ADVOCACY WORKBOOK

 DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA



This Toolkit Can Help! Start Here:



ABOUT OUR OFFICE



THE OFFICE OF THE STUDENT ADVOCATE

is committed to ensuring that all families can navigate public education in the District of Columbia. Knowledge of and access to our public education system should not be limited or restricted by race, economic status, language, mobility, or awareness of how our government structures work.



School safety and the safe passage for our students – as they travel to, through, and from school each day – is paramount, yet our students deal with a myriad of issues regarding their safety on almost a daily basis.



While we are fortunate to be resource-rich in the District of Columbia, families are not always aware of available resources thus creating additional barriers to access. This toolkit is a collection of helpful resources focused on student safety and safe passage tips, tools, curricula, and national best practices. This resource is designed to support the needs of students, families, and educators. We hope that by placing all of this information in one helpful toolkit, students, families, and educators will have access to vital resources and support to promote the safety of our students in all spaces as they travel throughout the District.



In addition to the 60+ local education agencies (LEAs or school districts), there are several offices and agencies in DC responsible for getting students to and from school safely. This map lists several key agencies and offices that support students and families. More information and contacts are available in this toolkit and on our website studentadvocate.dc.gov.

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UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

STAGES OF CHANGE

Nothing in this universe is perfect, therefore, everything can always improve. Change is inevitable. Though change is often feared, change is necessary. Without it, we would never grow as individuals or move forward as a society. Rather than fearing what is inevitable, how can we embrace individual change for the collective good?

There are many ideas about how people can change their habits and behaviors. Extensive research describing phases people may go through when making health-related changes is known as the “**Stages of Change Model.**” This model outlines stages that people may go through to make long-term changes:

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation - People do not plan to change. They do not even see a problem with their actions.

Stage 2: Contemplation - People start to see that a problem exists, but are afraid to change their behavior.

Stage 3: Preparation - People here can easily identify their problematic behavior and will commit to fixing it. People who make it to this stage start to collect information from many places.

Stage 4: Action - People who work through stages 1 - 3 now have the confidence to stop harmful behavior and change.

Stage 5: Maintenance - People who were able to change their behavior start to develop new habits, but work must be done to keep the change in behavior in place.

Stage 6: Termination - The final stage where people completely change their behavior with zero temptation going forward.



NAVIGATING THE STAGES OF CHANGE:

Moving through these stages requires a long-term commitment to change and an understanding that a relapse may occur. Stage 6 is the most difficult to reach, but it is okay to recycle previous stages if regression occurs.

Sources:

- 1 Raihan, N., & Cogburn, M. (2023). *Stages of change theory*. StatPearls: NCBI bookshelf. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556005/>

WHAT IS NEEDED TO CHANGE?

It takes significant force to move a still boulder, but it takes a consistent push to keep it rolling. Researchers suggest that those who are stuck in Stage 1 of the Stage of Change Model may require **constant pressure** from others in their lives to identify a problem and act on it. Those stuck in the pre-contemplation stage often may have no reason to change because they believe a change will cause more harm than good.

“At times, they may even exhibit elements of change as long as the **pressure from others remains present and constant.**”¹

Oftentimes, if the pressure of others to change is removed, or is no longer present, an individual's progress may completely stop, or revert back to the original harmful behavior. While peer pressure can be perceived as harmful to an individual's growth, peer pressure can also be used to influence positive change. This is often the case when advocating for larger changes within our communities. Change throughout society occurs when communities consistently pressure policymakers to make changes.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

Many problems that we experience as a community are the results of policies and laws that have been made on a larger scale. These decisions create a pattern of relationships between individuals, groups, and larger institutions (ex: schools, hospitals, courts). These large-scale relationships are often referred to as “**systems**” within our society (ex: education, healthcare, criminal justice). Your **school** is a part of a larger **educational system** that is shaped by students, families, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and many more parts.

Simply changing one small piece within the larger educational **system** may not change the problems experienced within your school's community. For example, expelling a student may not solve disciplinary issues in your class, or hiring one teacher may not help every student graduate from high school. Also, voting for one elected official may not increase the funding that your school district receives. To inspire change on a “**systemic**” level, we need to shift how the parts within a system work together.

ADVOCATING

A TOOLKIT FOR FAMILIES & TH



FOR CHANGE

FOR STUDENTS, THE COMMUNITY

ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

The safety of our children should always come first. Unfortunately, we know that instances of harassment and violence persist which jeopardizes the safety of our children. Community driven approaches must be strengthened to protect our students and their families across the District.



WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, advocacy is defined as gaining "**public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.**" Whether you are a student, family member, or a member of the community, you can affectively advocate for change.

CREATING A PLAN OF ACTION

The most effective advocates are able to listen to those in need, clearly define an issue, and provide solutions based on the needs of the people they serve.

The following pages will help you organize an effective plan of action based on the needs expressed support by the community you wish to serve.



Part 1: Identify a Problem

Part 2: Understand the Landscape

Part 3: Know the Stakeholders

Part 4: Connect the Problem to Policy

Part 5: Propose Solutions

Part 6: Craft Your Message

YOUR VOICE MATTERS



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS:

Youth voice has always been central to inspiring positive change. You do not have to look far back in history to learn from successful youth-led advocacy campaigns. Here are 4 local examples of how the youth have organized successful advocacy initiatives:

Banneker High School (2019):

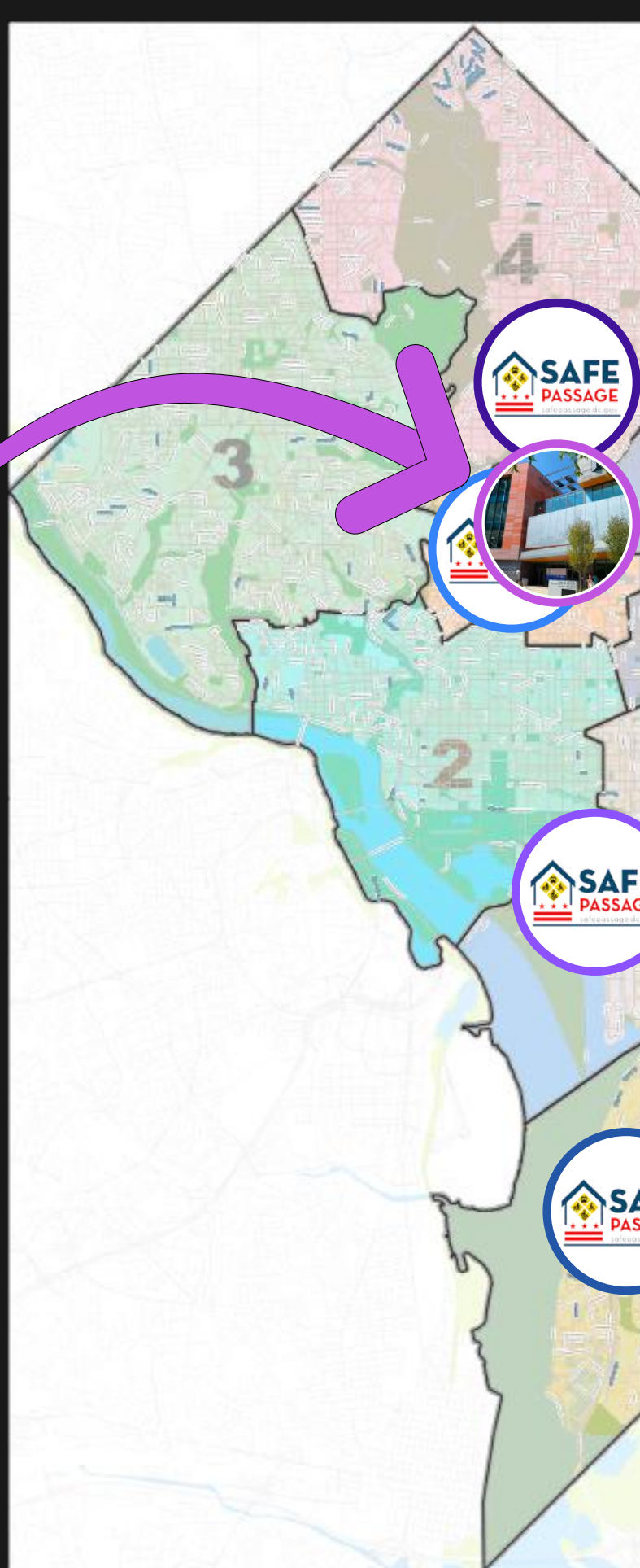
In 2018, it was announced that Banneker High School would move to a new modernized building, but no funds were allocated. In 2019, Banneker students organized and advocated for money to build a new building for the school. More than 100 students showed up at the Wilson Building and advocated for a new Banneker. Students now attend classes in their new school building.

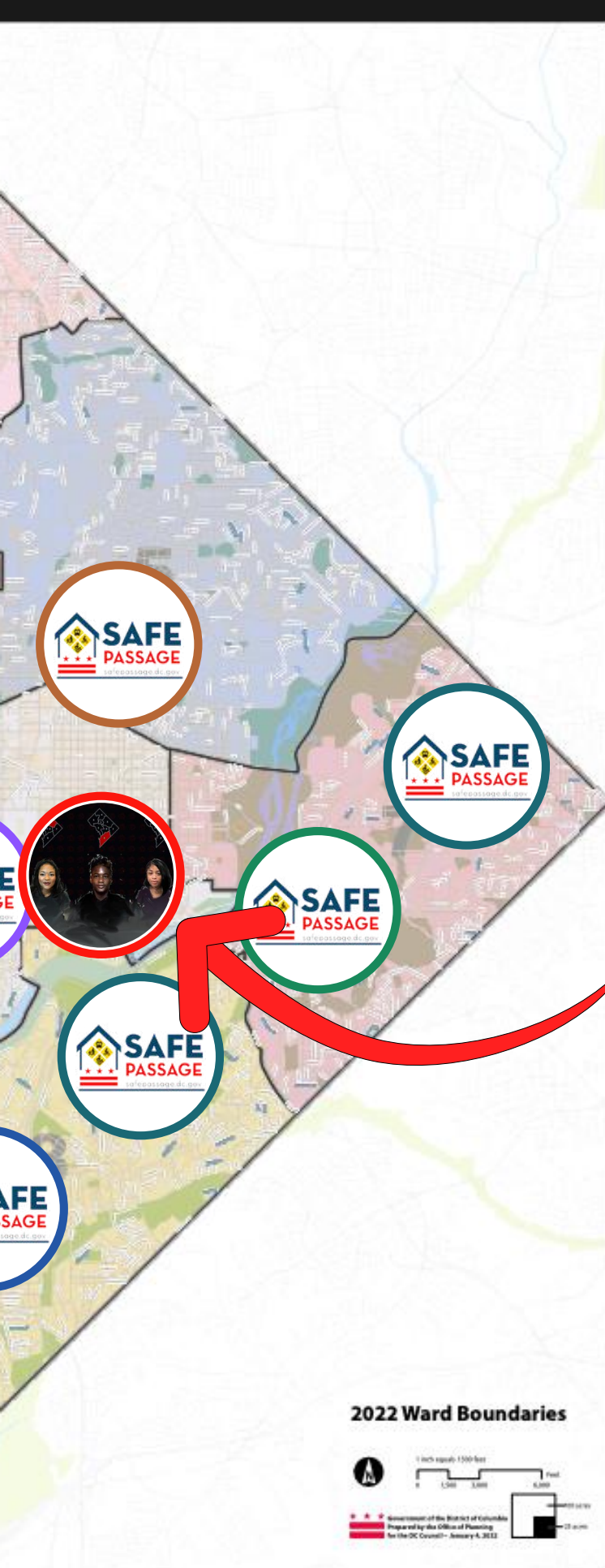
Learn More: <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/banneker-hs-students-demand-new-school-building-during-protest-at-wilson-building/65-51b06d6b-f832-4ed7-99c4-315df3fbf5be>

Feminine Hygiene Products in Schools (2021):

In 2020, students across the city testified to DC Council that menstrual education is lacking in DC schools. Students also advocated for the availability of free feminine hygiene products for every school. Youth Voice pushed the passage of the “Expanding Student Access to Period Products Act of 2021,” which will require all DC public and charter schools to provide free period products.

Learn More: <https://thedcline.org/2022/01/04/press-release-councilmember-brooke-pinto-announces-passage-of-bill-to-provide-free-period-products-in-all-public-private-and-post-secondary-institutions-and-to-expand-menstrual-education/>





Safe Passage (2020):

Current and future programs related to student safety while traveling to and from school are referred to as "Safe Passage." Input from youth leadership groups across the district helped develop and steer two specific Safe Passage initiatives in DC:

- 1. Safe Spots** - Local businesses that volunteered to provide safe spaces for students.
- 2. Safe Passage Workers** - Community members are placed to walk with students on their path to and from school.

Safe Passage operates in the following priority communities:

Ward 1:

- Columbia Heights

Ward 4:

- Georgia Avenue
- Petworth

Ward 5:

- NoMa

Ward 6:

- L'Enfant Plaza
- Water Front

Ward 7:

- Minnesota Ave Metro
- Ely Place SE
- East Capitol St.
- Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave.

Ward 8:

- Congress Heights
- Anacostia / Good Hope Rd SE

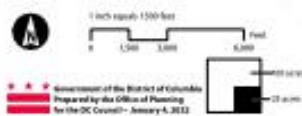
Learn More: <https://safepassage.dc.gov/>

Limestone of Lost Legacies:

Pathways 2 Power, a youth-led advocacy group, has been actively advocating for policies and laws to better protect youth from gun violence. Pathways 2 Power also raised \$13,000 to fund a mural to honor 5 teens who were shot and killed in DC. This mural can be found in the rear alley at 516 8th Street SE.



2022 Ward Boundaries



ARTIST CONCEPT DESIGN (Copy)

(From Left to Right) In Memory Of: Paris Brown, Jamahri Sydnor, Steve Slaughter, Taiyana Thompson, Zaire Kelly

Learn More: <https://www.pathways2power.org/limestone-of-lost-legacies-mural-project>

PART I: IDENTIFY A PROBLEM

Before any solutions can be made, **a specific problem must be identified**. Broad conversations about a problem often lead to generalized approaches to improve that issue, which may lead to minimal results. The more specific you can define a problem, the more specific of a solution can be created to address it.

The first step towards defining a clear problem to address is to actively engage with your community.

STEP 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Advocacy can fail when solutions are not centered around the voices of those affected by the problem. Therefore, active engagement with community stakeholders is essential to addressing any problem. Authentic engagement requires effective communication. Communication requires much more than speech, it requires active listening. The Oxford English Dictionary defines communication as the "sending or receiving information," so be sure to **listen** to the problems and the needs of those you serve **before you talk** about your own perceived problems and solutions.

WHAT CAN AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

- Organizing Focus Group Discussions
- Canvassing / Surveying
- Operating a Hotline/Whatsapp Group
- Hosting Community Conversations
- Creating realistic opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback





STEP 2: GATHER EVIDENCE

The more people who share the same concern, the better you can justify a policy change. When gathering evidence to help identify a problem, don't just gather quantitative (numerical-based) data, be sure to capture the lived experiences of the community you serve.

Examples:

- Facilitate a focus group discussion with students about their experiences with the problem
- Create a survey using a free online platform and distribute it online through your networks or on social media.
- Work with a community based organization or government agency to have community based conversations around safety concerns.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY COMMON THEMES

As you engage with more community stakeholders, pay attention to any common theme that you notice:

IS THERE A TREND?

- Are there shared concerns on a school level?
- Are there shared concerns in a specific neighborhood or ward?
- Are there shared concerns city-wide?
- Is this a national issue?

Examples:

- A significant number of families express traffic safety concerns during drop-off times at their elementary school. Several parents mentioned cars speeding past specific intersection where crossing guards are not present.
- Many students expressed dealing with sexual harassment at a specific metro station. A number of students said they are more concerned traveling to that metro station when leaving after school activities later in the day.
- Students taking multiple bus lines to get to school express higher rates of violence along their path. Continuous altercations occur when passing through specific neighborhoods.

PART II: UNDERSTAND THE LANDSCAPE

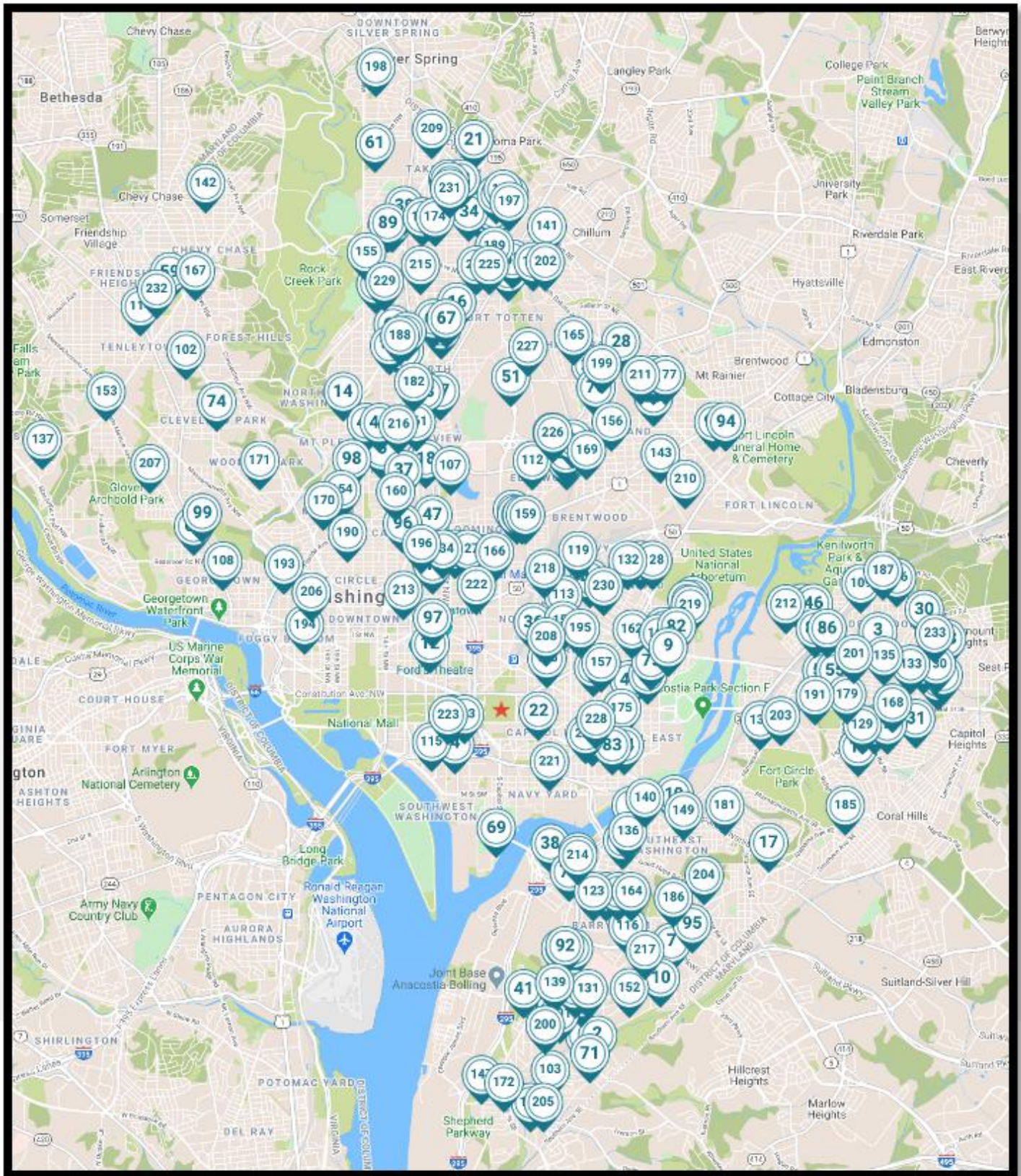


Image Credit: My School DC School Finder: <https://find.myschooldc.org/>

Sources:

- 2 District of Columbia Public Schools. (2023). *DC Public Schools Fast Facts 2023*. <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/DCPS%20Fast%20Facts%202023%20FINAL.pdf>
- 3 Mayor's Authority; Rulemaking, 38 Stat. 172 (2023). <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/code/sections/38-172>

UNDERSTANDING DC PUBLIC EDUCATION

When trying to solve any problem, it is important to understand the landscape in which that problem exists. When trying to solve issues related to student safety, it is important to understand how schools in the District operate.

The District of Columbia has a unique and complex education landscape that allows families school choice. More than 90,000 students attend more than 250 traditional public and charter schools. These schools are divided among 70 Local Education Agencies (LEA), who operate as independent school districts.

- **DC Public Schools (DCPS)** is 1 LEA.

DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS):

- ✓ 117 total schools
- ✓ 50,204 total students

[LEARN MORE
HERE](#)

- There are 69 **public charter** LEAs.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS (PCS):

- ✓ 135 total schools
- ✓ 46,392 total students

[LEARN MORE
HERE](#)

DC Public Schools (DCPS):

DCPS serves as the District's traditional public school LEA where more than 50,000 students are currently enrolled. While DCPS is only one of DC's 70 LEAs, it is the largest in the city with more than 110 total schools.² With mayoral control, the Mayor has the power to govern traditional public schools and delegate any authority to a designee, like the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) or the Chancellor.³

Public Charter Schools (PCS):

Families in the District also have more than 130 public school options for their children to attend across 69 LEAs.⁴ Each charter LEA is allowed to function independently from one another. While all LEAs across DC must follow the same set of local and federal laws, some charter networks may differentiate their policies from one another. The DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB) is an independent government agency that provides oversight of all charter schools and is the sole authorizer of public charter schools locally.⁵

Did You Know: Filing Grievances

If you have a concern at your child's school, first contact your administrator for support. If you are still unsatisfied, you can file a formal grievance using the following supports.

DCPS: CARE Team

- ✉ dcps.care@k12.dc.gov
- ☎ (202)442-5405

PCS: DCPCSB Community Complaints

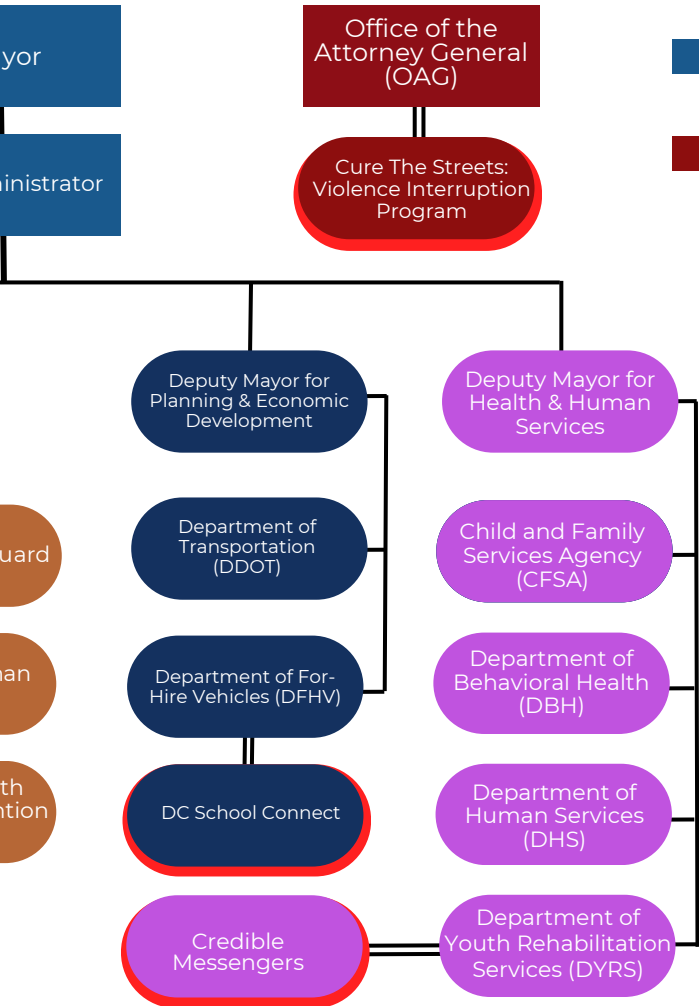
- ✉ complaints@dcpcsb.org
- ☎ (202)939-4913

Sources:

⁴ DC Public Charter School Board. (2023). *2023 Annual Report*. <https://dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/media/file/DC%20PCSB%202023%20Annual%20Report%20%28final%29.pdf>

⁵ DC Public Charter School Board. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://dcpcsb.org/about-us>

Reading the Map: Student Safety Support Programming



Mayor: The Mayor's office controls the traditional public school system (DCPS). The Mayor appoints DCPS Chancellor and the Deputy Mayor for Education.

City Administrator: As a mayoral appointee, the city administrator oversees day-to-day operation of all executive agencies, including DCPS and other agencies impacting students, families, and schools.

Office of the Attorney General: Enforces DC laws, works to protect residents, and provides the highest level of independent legal advice and guidance to government agencies.

Cure the Streets Violence Prevention Program: Cure the Streets is a pilot public safety program launched by OAG aimed at reducing gun violence.

Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services: Supports programs for students and families by overseeing the school health program in public and charter schools.

Child & Family Services Agency: This agency is the child welfare & and safety agency in the DC. They investigate claims of abuse or neglect and work to support families.

Department of Behavioral Health: They run school mental health programs. They provide training to all public school administrators and teachers on behavioral health support.

Department of Human Services: They seek to empower every resident by providing meaningful connections to work opportunities, economic assistance, & supportive services.

Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services: They are responsible for the supervision, custody, and care of young people charged with a delinquent act in DC.

Credible Messengers: This is a transformative, mentoring intervention program that takes a restorative approach for youth under DYRS supervision.

Deputy Mayor for Planning & Economic Development: Assists the Mayor in the coordination, planning, supervision, and execution of economic development in DC.

DC Department of Transportation (DDOT): Manages and maintains publicly owned transportation infrastructure and operations in DC.

Department of For-Hire Vehicles: Provides licensing, adjudication, enforcement, and Lost and Found services for drivers, taxicab companies, limousine operators, as well as residents and visitors who use public and private vehicle-for-hire.

DC School Connect: Provides students a safer alternative to get to and from schools for elementary, middle, and high school students enrolled in DC public and charter schools.

Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice (DMPSJ): Provides direction, guidance, support, and coordination to the District's public safety agencies to develop and lead interagency public safety initiatives.

Metropolitan Police Department (MPD): The primary law enforcement agency for the District of Columbia. One of the 10 largest local police agencies in the United States.

Office of Human Rights (OHR): Enforces local and federal human rights laws, including the DC Human Rights Act, by providing a legal process to those who believe they have been discriminated against.

Citywide Youth Bullying Prevention Program: aims to reduce incidents of bullying across the District by emphasizing prevention and proper procedures for responding when incidents occur.

Office of Victims Services & Justice Grants (OVSJG): awards and manages a portfolio of grants with annual funding levels that vary according to availability of funds allocated to states and programs.

Safe Passage: Supports students as they travel to and from school and in the community. Safe Passage programming includes conflict resolution, mediation services, and community relationship building to keep students safe.

Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR): Supervises many of DC's recreation/community centers, parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, spray parks, tennis courts, community gardens, dog parks, aquatic facilities, and features.

DPR Roving Leaders: Interact one-on-one with targeted teens and youth, and together develop a plan of action by matching individual's needs with program's priority.

WHO HAS THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGE?

It is important to understand if your problem is a **citywide** or individual **school-based** concern. Use the following chart to identify where to start your advocacy:

- Citywide policy or budget concerns start from the top of the page.
- Individual school-based concerns start from the bottom of the page.

CITYWIDE POLICY / BUDGET CONCERNS

MAYOR

The mayor in DC recommends the budget that must be approved by the Council of DC. The mayor also appoints key education stakeholders including the Deputy Mayor For Education, Superintendent, and the Chancellor.

DC COUNCIL

The Council enacts laws and has the power to create or organize local government agencies. The Council is also responsible for approving the city's budget or making recommendations to the mayor.

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION (OSSE)

OSSE monitors DCPS and charter schools to make sure they comply with DC and federal education laws and policies. They also distribute funding to public and charter schools.

DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (SBOE)

The SBOE advises and collaborates with various educational stakeholders toward the development of academic standards and policies on a district level. They also allow opportunities for individuals to express themselves publicly every month.

DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)

District Wide Leadership

Chancellor: Serves as the chief executive officer for DCPS by providing leadership and direction.

Instructional Superintendents: Oversees a cluster of schools and works with individual school leadership teams to improve the quality of education. Any attempts to appeal a decision made by a school's principal should go through the assigned instructional superintendent.

Individual Schools

Principals: In addition to leading instructional practices within school buildings, DCPS principals set their individual school's budget.

Local School Advisory Teams (LSAT): A group of parents, school staff, and community members who are elected or appointed. School LSATs work with principals to develop their school's budget.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS (PCS)

DC Public Charter School Board

PCS Board of Directors: Made up of seven members who are appointed by the Mayor. PCSB does not manage charter schools but can provide support related to health, safety, school closure and special education.

Executive Director of the PCSB: Is appointed by the Chair of the Board. The Executive Director directs the PCSB's daily operations and is accountable for their budget.

Individual Charter Networks

Board of Directors: The governing body for each individual public charter school network. Each charter network has their own grievance process that usually goes through their board.

Head of School / Principals: Leads the daily instructional practices in a school building.

INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL BASED POLICIES / PRACTICES

PART III: KNOW THE STAKEHOLDERS

Various stakeholders oversee **educational-related** issues across the District. These stakeholders directly impact education policy in the District:

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE):

OSSE is DC's state education agency (SEA) and the District's liaison to the U.S. Department of Education.



Phone: (202)727-6436

Email: osse@dc.gov

Website: <https://osse.dc.gov>

Roles & Responsibilities:

- Oversees all federal education programs and grants administered in DC;
- Ensures high-quality childcare and universal pre-K for eligible DC families;
- Provides transportation for DC students with special needs.

Deputy Mayor for Education (DME):

The DME is responsible for developing and implementing the Mayor's vision for academic excellence and creating a high-quality education continuum from birth to 24 years of age.



Phone: (202)727-3636

Email: dme@dc.gov

Website: <https://dme.dc.gov>

Roles & Responsibilities:

- Overseeing a District-wide education strategy;
- Managing interagency and cross-sector coordination;
- Providing oversight and/or support for various cross sector agencies.

Chancellor:

The Chancellor carries out the administration and supervision of the schools and central office staff, including the implementation of current reforms and systemic changes in order to affect continued positive improvement in DCPS.



Phone: (202)442-5885

Email: lewis.ferebee@k12.dc.gov

Website: <https://dc.gov>

Roles & Responsibilities:

- The chief executive officer of DCPS;
- Carries out the administration and supervision of the schools and central office staff;
- Implementation of current reforms and system changes.

DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB):

The DCPCSB approves, monitors, and evaluates schools, with an emphasis on equity and academic excellence. They also create policies and conditions for all public charter schools.



Phone: (202)328-2660

Email: dcpublic@dcpcsb.org

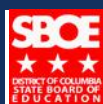
Website: <https://dcpcsb.org>

Roles & Responsibilities:

- Approves, monitors, and evaluates schools, with an emphasis on equity and academic excellence
- Create policies and conditions to empower educators to do their best work in service of students
- Actively engage families, schools, and communities to inform our decision-making.

State Board of Education (SBOE):

The State Board of Education continues to play key roles in maintaining and improving the quality of public schools.



Phone: (202)741-0888

Email: sboe@dc.gov

Website: <https://sboe.dc.gov>

Roles & Responsibilities:

- Help establish the goals and objectives of the District's educational program.
- Promote and support state-level education policies that address these needs; and
- Promote transparency that allows the State Board and others to ensure that schools adhere to state policies.

Learn More:

Office of the Student Advocate. (2023, January). *Navigating the DC public education landscape* [PowerPoint slides]. <https://studentadvocate.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/studentadvocate.dc.gov/DC%20Governance%20Updated%202023%20%28Public%29%20%281%29.pdf>



WHO MAKES THE LAWS?

THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC Council is the local legislative and chief policy-making body. The Council enacts laws and has the power to create, abolish, or organize any District agency. They are made up of 13 elected members. A representative is elected from each of our city's 8 wards, and 5 members, including the Chairman, are elected at-large and represent the entire city.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

CHAIRMAN / CHAIRWOMAN

The Chairman or Chairwoman of the council serves as the chief executive officer of the DC Council.

AT-LARGE COUNCILMEMBERS

There are **four at-large councilmembers** represent the District as a whole by serving residents from all eight wards.

WARD BASED COUNCILMEMBERS

There are **eight ward based councilmembers** that represent their respective ward.

COMMITTEES

DC Council currently has 11 committees that consider laws related to specific policy issues. Each committee oversees specific local government agencies. Click on each committee to learn more:

Committee of the Whole

Committee on Business and Economic Development

Committee on Executive Administration and Labor

Committee on Facilities and Family Services

Committee on Health

Committee on Hospital and Health Equity

Committee on Housing

Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

Committee on Public Works and Operations

Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Access Online:



HOW DO I CONTACT MY COUNCILMEMBER?



CONTACT INFORMATION

Since the Council provides oversight to publicly funded government agencies, it is important to know who your elected council members are. Use the following contact information to speak with your elected councilmembers:

COUNCILMEMBERS AT-LARGE

At-Large: Kenyan McDuffie

☎ Phone: (202) 724-7772
✉ Email: kmcduffie@dccouncil.gov

At-Large: Christina Henderson

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8105
✉ Email: chenderson@dccouncil.gov

Chairman: Phil Mendelson

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8032
✉ Email: pmendelson@dccouncil.gov

At-Large: Anita Bonds

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8064
✉ Email: abonds@dccouncil.gov

At-Large: Robert White, Jr.

☎ Phone: (202)-724-8174
✉ Email: rwhite@dccouncil.gov

WARD BASED COUNCILMEMBERS

Ward 1: Brianne Nadeau

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8181
✉ Email: bnadeau@dccouncil.gov

Ward 2: Brooke Pinto

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8058
✉ Email: bpinto@dccouncil.gov

Ward 3: Matthew Frumin

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8062
✉ Email: mfrumin@dccouncil.gov

Ward 4: Janeese Lewis George

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8052
✉ Email: jlewisgeorge@dccouncil.gov

Ward 5: Zachary Parker

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8028
✉ Email: zparker@dccouncil.gov

Ward 6: Charles Allen

☎ Phone: (202)724-8072
✉ Email: callen@dccouncil.gov

Ward 7: Vincent Gray

☎ Phone: (202) 724-8068
✉ Email: vgray@dccouncil.gov

Ward 8: Trayon White, Sr.

☎ Phone: (202)724-8045
✉ Email: twhite@dccouncil.gov

YOUR TURN: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

How can you **engage** with your community?

Are there **common themes** that emerged from the evidence you gathered?

What **stakeholders** can help solve your problem?

How can you best **communicate** your problem to those stakeholders?

Use the following template to assess the needs of your community and develop an effective plan of action

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Directions: Use the following template to assess the needs of your community and develop an action plan. Use the check list to keep track of your progress.

IDENTIFY A PROBLEM

What specific problem are you looking to address?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How will you communicate or engage with your community? (select all that apply)

- In-Person Group Discussions (Focus Group, community conversations)
- Canvassing or Surveying
- Social Media
- Phone-calls or Email
- Other: _____

What location(s) can you host an event?

Who can help you organize your engagement (organizations, agencies, people)?

GATHER EVIDENCE

How will you collect experiences shared by the community members you engaged with (select all that apply)?

- Informal Surveying (asking questions & taking notes)
- Formal Survey Tool (Survey Monkey, Google Forms)
- Social Media Polling
- Interviews
- Other: _____



IDENTIFY COMMON THEMES

This section should be completed after you collected your evidence from the previous page.

How many total people did you speak to? _____

How many total people did you collect information for? _____

Did any common themes appear? Circle: **Yes** / **No**

If yes, what themes did you notice?

TARGET STAKEHOLDERS

What stakeholders can help solve the problem you want to address? Who should you present your evidence to?

How can you best communicate your problem to those stakeholders?

Examples:

- Write a letter to Council members and SBOE representatives.
- Deliver information on social media and tagging elected representatives.
- Collaborate with a specific agency to raise awareness of Safe Passage programming.
- Testify at a public SBOE or Council hearing.



PART IV: CONNECT THE PROBLEM TO POLICY

STEP 1: RESEARCH POLICIES / LAWS

Before you propose any meaningful policy suggestions, it is important to know whether there are any existing proposals that address your problem. Sometimes, creating a policy from scratch is not necessary. Advocating for an existing policy or law may be easier to organize around.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Does any information exist about your problem and possible solutions?
- Are there any policies or laws that already exist that address your problem?
- Does it need to be funded, expanded, or supported?
- Did other school districts or states create a policy or law that addresses your problem?
- Is there a federal law related to your problem?
- Are there glaring deficits in a policy or law that does not fully address your problem?



RESEARCH TIPS

- Start with a simple question (Example: What laws prevent harassment in DC?)
- Sometimes, typing key words into your search engine can give you more specific responses (Example: Bullying Policy DC)
- Expand your search nationally, are there other states you can learn from (Example: Student Safety Policy US)

STEP 2: IDENTIFY GAPS

Across the country, many policies and laws are put into place to address many of the problems that we all experience. Unfortunately, many factors can determine whether those policies are effective or not. In some situations, a policy might not even exist or has not been updated.

Consider the following questions when addressing gaps in policy v. need:

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Are there policies or laws that address your problem?
- Is information about those policies / laws easily accessible?
- How is success measured for those policies / laws?
- Are those policies receiving enough funding / support?
- What happens if the policy / law is broken?
- How can those policies / laws be strengthened?
- Does a new policy or law need to be introduced?

GETTING STARTED: YOUR RESEARCH



What problem are you trying to address?

Are there existing policies or laws addressing the problem?

How can those policies be strengthened?

Do new policies or laws need to be created?

Who can help build solutions?

Use the following tear sheet to organize your research.



RESEARCH: GETTING STARTED

Directions: Use the following template to guide your research. You can utilize pages 21 - 28 to learn more about local initiatives addressing student safety in DC. Don't forget to use the information about stakeholders on pages 7 - 11 accordingly.

RESEARCH POLICIES / IDENTIFY GAPS

IDENTIFY A PROBLEM

What specific problem are you looking to address?

CONNECTING THE PROBLEM TO POLICY

Are there existing laws or policies **in DC** addressing the problem? Circle: **Yes** / **No**

If yes, what policies are in place? How can they be strengthened?

Are there existing laws or policies **in the US** addressing the problem? Circle: **Yes** / **No**

If yes, what policies are in place? How can it look in DC?



PART V: PROPOSE SOLUTIONS



STEP 1: PURPOSE

Before you try to create a solution for any problem, you must first identify the purpose of your solution.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Are you looking to inform people?
- Are you trying to connect the community to existing resources?
- Are you trying to advocate for new resources or expanded programming?

STEP 2: COLLABORATE & DEVELOP

Knowing the stakeholders related to your problem is important when trying to develop a purposeful resource or recommendation.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who are the subject matter experts?
- Who is connected to the audience you are looking to reach?
- What modes of communication will authentically engage your audience?
- What resources are available to develop physical or virtual resources?

Understanding your audience can help you develop the most effective resource or recommendation. Creating an online resource may be useful for students. Creating a physical document may be helpful for family members.

Examples:

- Work with a government agency and a school to promote an existing bullying resource guide for students.
- Create a survey using a free online tool and collaborate with a community based organization to distribute it to families.
- Write policy recommendations summarizing your research highlighting successful initiatives created by neighboring school districts.

STEP 3: CHOOSE METHODS TO DELIVER INFORMATION

It is important to know who your audience is so you can promote the solution that you recommend or have developed in the best way for them. Identify what methods of communication work best for certain stakeholders.

- Drafting a letter and testimony for DC Council or the State Board of Education may be beneficial when advocating for a policy change.
- Social media may be helpful when trying to engage youth.
- Printing out materials can be more helpful to inform older family members.

STEP 4: DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGE

Whether you want to write a letter to DC Council, deliver a testimony to the State Board of Education, or create an informative TikTok, having a clear message is important. Do not just point out what is wrong, but create a call to action for the audience that you identify.

Use the following steps to organize your message for your audience:

Part 1: Identify your audience(s).

Have a clear understanding of what role they play and how they can help.

Part 2: Open with a values-based message and use it often.

Hook your audience with something that speaks to what your audience cares about. Values like “our safety matters,” “no child should go hungry,” and “fairness across zip codes” may capture your audience's attention.

Part 3: Clearly articulate the problem(s).

Be specific about your problem and keep your message simple. You can then connect how this specific problem adds to a larger concern.

Part 4: Include a clear explanation of that problem.

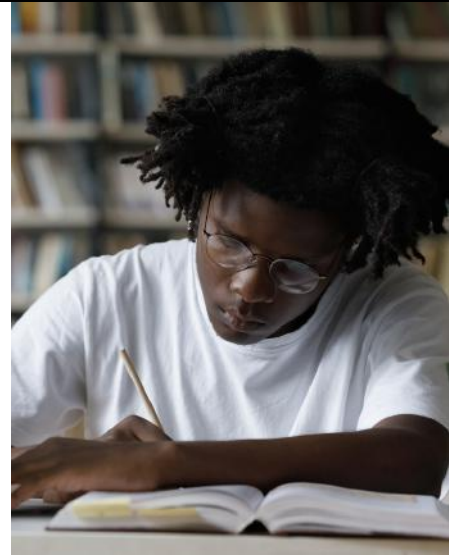
Provide more details/evidence about your problem. Tell your audience how your problem affects the community you are advocating for.

Part 5: Offer a clear solution that connects to the problem.

Clearly and concretely lay out the steps needed to solve the problem.

Part 6: Think back to your specific audience and make a call to action.

Keep in mind what they can do to help. Can they change a law in DC? Can they change a policy in your school district? Can they hold school staff accountable?



PROPOSE SOLUTIONS

Directions: Complete the following section to determine what solutions you want to develop. Please answer yes or no for each of the following questions:

Do you want to inform others?

Circle: **Yes / No**

Do you want to connect the community to existing programs?

Circle: **Yes / No**

Do you want to create new program?

Circle: **Yes / No**

If yes, what new program should be developed?

Do you want to expand existing programming?

Circle: **Yes / No**

If yes, what existing program should be expanded?

What organizations or government agencies have expertise about your problem?

Who is your audience? Who is your resource for? Who are you looking to inform? Who are you trying to get support from?

How is your audience connected to the problem? How can they help?



DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE



Values-Based Message: What's the hook?

What specific values can you use to capture your audience's attention?

Examples: "Our safety matters," "No child should go hungry," or "A zip code should not determine the quality of a school."

Clearly Identify your problem: Keep it short.

Be specific about your problem and keep your message simple.

Examples: Community-based violence jeopardizes students' abilities to get to school safely.

Offer a clear solution that connects to the problem.

Clearly and concretely lay out the steps needed to solve the problem.

Considerations: Combine the research from pages 22 - 23 with the information you created on page 26 to offer a clear solution.

Think back to your specific audience and make a call to action.

Keep in mind what they can do to help. Can they change a law in DC? Can they change a policy in your school district? Can they hold school staff accountable?

Example: Increase funding for an existing program or staff position at a school.



PART VI: PUTTING WORDS TO ACTION

STEP 1: KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

There are many ways you voice your perspectives to educational policymakers and leaders. Whether you prefer to write a letter or publicly testify, there are various ways to be heard. Use the following information to put your words to action.

WHERE CAN I SUBMIT FEEDBACK OR COMPLAINTS FOR MY SCHOOL?

DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)

Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity (CARE) Team:

You can file a formal grievance through the DCPS CARE Team **online here:** <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/grievance-form> or by **phone** at (202)442-5405.

Ask the Chancellor:

You can submit any questions or concerns you have to the Chancellor of DCPS by submitting the following form **online:** <https://dcforms.dc.gov/webform/dc-public-schools-ask-chancellor>



Did you know?

You can submit any school lunch related concern with DCPS by emailing food.dcps@dc.gov

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS (PCS)

DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB):

You can file a concern or complaint through the DCPCSB online **by emailing** complaints@dcpcsb.org or by **phone** at (202)4963-0968.

Submit Public Comments:

The public is encouraged to provide feedback and comments on policies, new charter school applications, requests to change charter agreements, and any other concerns.

Sign-up here: <https://dcpcsb.org/public-comment> or **email** public.comment@dcpcsb.org by 11:59pm the day before.

IMPORTANT!

- You have **2-minutes** to deliver your testimony to the DCPCSB.
- If you are unable to testify publicly, you can submit **written**, or **audio** testimony using the **Sign-up here** link above.

Sources:

- 6 Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). An easy guide to testifying before the council [Brochure]. Washington, DC. <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Guide-to-testifying-CP24.pdf>
- 7 DC Public Charter School Board. (n.d.). *Public comment*. <https://dcpcsb.org/public-comment>

WHERE ELSE CAN I PUBLICLY TESTIFY?

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (SBOE)

What opportunities does the SBOE have for public input?

SBOE seeks the voices of those who want to elevate their concern over an education-related issue or seeks to bring changes to the DC education system.

When and Where can I deliver my testimony?

When: Every third Wednesday of the month

Time: 5:30 PM

Location: 441 4th St. NW, Old Council Chambers, Washington, DC 20001.

Watch here: <https://video.oct.dc.gov/DKN/jw.html>

How can I sign up to present my testimony?

Sign-up here: <https://sboe.dc.gov/page/meeting-information> or **email** sboe@dc.gov at least 48 hours in advance.



Office of the State Superintendent of Education:

OSSE invites the public to provide feedback on various educational topics (ex: revised standards) with the SBOE.

THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

What opportunities does DC Council have for public input?

The DC Council seeks to hear from the public when a new bill is being introduced. Depending on the topic, proposed solutions are introduced and assigned to a committee. The specific committee that handles education-related policies is the **Committee of the Whole**. You can submit all testimonies by email to cw@dccouncil.gov at least 24 hours before the hearing.

When and Where can I deliver my testimony?

The DC Council's committee hearings vary depending on the committee type. However, you can expect to have hearings on program funding or school budgets or the following fiscal year in the month of October. You can find the public hearings calendar here: <https://dccouncil.gov/events/list/>

TIME LIMITS:

- You have **3-minutes** to deliver your testimony to both the SBOE and DC Council.
- There is **no limit** on submitting a **written** testimony.



Sources:

8 SBOE: District of Columbia State Board of Education. (n.d.). *Meeting information*. <https://sboe.dc.gov/page/meeting-information>

9 Council of the District of Columbia. (n.d.). *How to testify before the council*. <https://dccouncil.gov/how-to-testify-before-the-council/>

STEP 2: PREPARING YOUR LETTER OR TESTIMONY

Opportunities for the public to provide input to policymakers are a valuable part of the democratic process. The leaders who create policies and laws need to hear from you and the people impacted by their decisions. Your perspective matters and your message can influence law. Learn more about how you can deliver your message below:

WRITING TESTIMONY

Create an Outline

- Plan to write about 3 - 5 paragraphs for your testimony (each paragraph should be 5 sentences long).
- The length of your testimony depends on how fast you speak when delivering it (so practice delivering it).

Introductions Matter

- Your greeting is important, be sure to acknowledge the stakeholders in the room.
- Introduce yourself, state your name, and what ward you live in.
- You can give more information if you are comfortable with it (student, school, parent, organization).
- End your introduction with a short sentence summarizing why you are presenting (what's the hook?)

Clearly State the Problem & Solutions

- Be clear with your language (use words that are easy to understand).
- Provide evidence highlighting why your concern is a problem (This could be your experiences, it can be data).
- Describe how it affects you, or your community
- Clearly present your solution (be concise).
- Provide evidence showing how your solution works. Are there other places doing this? How is it helping those communities?
- You can even include information about how a program or policy can be improved.

Submitting Your Written Testimony

Once you write your testimony, you need to **submit it to the appropriate stakeholder:**

State Board of Education:
email sboe@dc.gov at least 48 hours in advance.

Council of District of Columbia:
email cw@dccouncil.gov at least 24 hours before the hearing



QUICK TIPS

for Delivering Your Testimony

- Practice reading your testimony out loud. Time yourself, and get comfortable delivering your message.
- Most people speak faster when they are nervous, so slow yourself down when delivering your testimony.

SAMPLE OUTLINE

I. Introduction:

- Greet the stakeholders
- Introduce yourself.

II. Identify your Problem:

- Clearly state what your problem is.
- Be concise.
- Provide easy-to-understand evidence highlighting your problem.

III. Propose a Solution

- Clearly state your solution.
- Be Concise.
- Provide details about how the solution addresses the problem you identified.

IV. Conclusion

- Summarize your problem.
- Summarize your solution.
- Acknowledge the Stakeholders.

Sources:

¹⁰ Office of the Student Advocate. (n.d.). *How to testify: A guide to prepare district residents to give official testimony.* [https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/page_content/attachments/How%20To%20Testify%20Guide%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/page_content/attachments/How%20To%20Testify%20Guide%20(FINAL).pdf)

“Identity encompasses the **memories, experiences, relationships,** and **values** that create one’s sense of self.”¹¹

Your Identity Matters

Your values and perspectives are often shaped by your lived experiences. Unfortunately, **systemic barriers** exist in our society that may shape the experiences you have been impacted by (positive or negative). Sharing those experiences has power.

Advocacy is often the tool used to combat these systemic barriers that disrupt our identities. Therefore, it is important to embrace your identity, allowing your advocacy to be centered around your experiences.



IDENTITY

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Race	→	Racism
Ethnicity	→	Xenophobia
Gender Identity	→	Sexism / Transphobia
Sexual Orientation	→	Homophobia
Age	→	Agism
Ability	→	Ablism
Religion	→	Islamophobia / Anti-Semitism



**This is not a complete list of how we may identify ourselves, or systemic barriers in place.*

The use of data and graphs is important when trying to persuade key policy-makers, but using examples of your own experiences is important when [developing your message](#) (on page 26). Acknowledging those experiences based on your identity is a valuable way to create a values based message for your audience.



WRITING TIPS

- Numbers and graphs are cool, but your perspective matters too. If you are comfortable with sharing, feel free to write about your own experiences.
- If you share similar experiences with the community you are advocating for, highlight that. Use your perspectives as examples of what your community is experiencing.

Sources:

¹¹ Psychology Today. (n.d.). *Identity*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity>

OUTLINING YOUR TESTIMONY

Directions:

Plan to write about 3 - 5 paragraphs for your testimony (each paragraph should be 5 sentences long). The length of your testimony depends on how fast you speak when delivering it (so practice delivering it). Use the **research** (pages 22 - 23) and your **proposed solutions** (pages 26 - 29) to outline your testimony.

Introduction (5 Sentences):

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Identify the Problem (5 Sentences): How does it affect your community?

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____





Propose a Solution (5 Sentences):

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

●●● **Optional:** There is no page limit on written testimonies. On a separate sheet of paper paper, you can write additional paragraphs focusing on the solutions you researched. Be sure to provide evidence.

Conclusion (5 Sentences):

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

For additional information or any questions related to this toolkit, please contact us using any form of communication listed below:

Phone: (202)741-4692

Email: student.advocate@dc.gov

Website: <https://studentadvocate.dc.gov/>

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Access Online Resources & Tools





OFFICE OF THE
STUDENT
ADVOCATE