

DELAWARE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Student Education Forum Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2020
10:30am

Dover Public Library
35 Loockerman Plaza
Dover, DE 19901

Members Present: Dorcas Olatunji; Wali Rushdan II, and Whitney Sweeney.

Others Present: Jenna Ahner, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education; Theresa Bennett, DDOE; 8 students.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Sweeney welcomed attendees and thanked them for their interest in the event. She introduced Ms. Olatunji, Mr. Rushdan and Ms. Ahner.

II. Overview of Agenda and Objectives

Ms. Sweeney provided information on the objectives for the meeting, including to engage students on key issues in education related to the Board's roles and responsibilities, to identify issues and challenges from the student perspective, and to provide a spotlight on youth voice in education.

Ms. Sweeney provided a brief overview of the State Board of Education, including an overview of the background and experiences of Board members. She highlighted that the Board added a student member for the first time in 2019. Ms. Sweeney also highlighted the vision and mission of the Board, the roles and responsibilities, Board priorities, and upcoming meeting dates and locations.

Ms. Olatunji provided information on her experience in joining the State Board of Education.

III. Discuss Student Perspectives on Education Topics

Students completed a survey individually about their personal educational experiences and the experiences of their classmates.

Attendees participated in an icebreaker activity.

Attendees then split into small groups and were asked to consider the following questions:

- How has your school experience helped you explore your passions/interests? How hasn't it?
- From your perspective, what are the top 3 things you would improve about your educational experience?

The group reconvened to discuss major takeaways from each small group. Feedback included, but was not limited to:

- Pressure on administrators, teachers, and students takes away from the motivation of learning. More supports could be provided to alleviate these pressures;
- There are insufficient resources to address school needs;
- Teachers are leaving the profession and there is not sufficient coverage when teachers leave mid-year;
- Students would like their learning to be more hands-on, applied, and engaging. They would like to go deeper on topics. It's not always clear how material is relevant;
- Large class sizes and early start times negatively impact student learning;
- Access to technology for homework can be a barrier for some students;
- It would be beneficial if there were more opportunities for student input.

IV. Hold Small Group Conversations and Report-Out Key Takeaways

Attendees split into small groups to discuss the following topics, related to the State Board's roles and responsibilities:

- Career pathways and courses that prepare me for college, careers, and engagement in my community;
- Student assessments;
- Health, safety, and well-being of students;
- Equity across schools.

Attendees were asked to consider the following questions:

- What do you think is going well in your school/community related to this topic? How could it be improved?
- What feedback do you have for teachers, administrators, or policymakers (Department of Education, State Board, legislators) about this topic?
- Is there anything else you would like us to know?

The group reconvened to discuss major takeaways from each small group. Feedback included, but was not limited to:

- Career pathways and courses that prepare me for college, careers, and engagement in my community and student assessments;
 - Courses are too structured to allow for meaningful student learning;
 - Grades are prioritized over student learning;
 - Very little freedom to explore interests in high schools;
 - High expectations outlined for "next" level of education causes stress or doubts about what will come next;
 - Different structures should be considered for different learning styles;
 - Pathways require students to choose one career, classes don't allow students to shift or be flexible.
- Health, safety, and well-being of students and equity across schools.
 - Priorities should be to address drugs, safety, and cleanliness of schools;
 - There is pressure to attend school when sick, there are no breaks to get better. This can lead to stress and anxiety;

- Schools should consider opportunities to build breaks or flexibility within the schedule to better support mental health;
- Student Assessments
 - The pressure of assessments causes stress;
 - Assessments take away from the time that can be used to learn skills that are important to an individual's future;
 - Assessments cause school staff to see students as a number (i.e. class rank, score), not as an individual.

V. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Ms. Olatunji provided an overview of next steps, to include: attending an upcoming State Board of education meeting, helping to spread the word about upcoming student forums, and participating in a voluntary video project for social media.