DATE:	June 6, 2017
TO:	Board of Trustees
FROM:	Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT:	Student Senate 2016-2017 Work Plan
ORIGINATOR:	Nancy Petersen, Executive Director (Acting For)
RESOURCE STAFF:	Marnie Beaudoin, Regan Holt, Bill Howe, Sean Jones, Karen Mills
REFERENCE:	Public Board meeting April 5, 2016 Public Board meeting October 4, 2016 item 2 Public Board meeting February 28, 2017 item 3

ISSUE

The Student Senate is presenting a summary of the Senate's 2016-2017 work plan to the Board of Trustees. The Administration is presenting a summary of the evaluation of this year's implementation of the Student Senate model of District youth governance.

BACKGROUND

At the public board meeting on April 5, 2016, the Board of Trustees approved a youth engagement model to promote active student participation in youth governance within education and to provide the Board of Trustees with a means to access student voice. As a result, the District established a Student Senate for the 2016-2017 school year. This model of student engagement was comprised of up to two students per District high school and the election of three student trustees within the Student Senate.

At the public board meeting on October 4, 2016, Student Trustees presented the Student Senate's 2016-2017 work plan which addressed the priority topic areas identified by the Student Senate, based on input from their school peers. The Student Trustees presented an update to the Student Senate work plan at the February 28, 2017, public board meeting.

The 2016-2017 Student Senate work plan was comprised of the following priority topics areas:

1. **Student Health and Wellness:** reflecting alignment to Priority 2, Goal One: *A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship,* this priority topic area received the most interest from District students, with stress, mental health and preventative supports highlighted as key concepts. A committee was formed in support of this priority area and chose to plan a student mental health conference as this year's outcome. The committee's work was supported by staff from the District's Comprehensive School Health unit.

2. **Curriculum:** reflecting alignment to Priority 1, Goal Two: *Success for Every Student,* this priority topic area focused on the importance of student voice in Alberta Education's development of future Kindergarten to Grade 12 provincial curriculum, as well as emphasizing the importance of learning experiences that are meaningful and engaging to students. The Student Senate struck a Curriculum committee to work on an advocacy plan to encourage student voice in curriculum development. This committee was supported by Central staff from various units, including Curriculum and Resource

Support, Governance and Strategic Support, Research and Innovation and Board and Superintendent Relations.

3. **Preparation for Life Beyond School:** reflecting alignment to Priority 1, Goal Three: *Success Beyond Schooling,* this priority topic area reflected the strong awareness and connection from students between what they do in school now and what they will need to be successful once they complete Grade 12. The Student Senate struck a Preparation for Life Beyond School committee to identify and develop helpful resources for District students to support them in the transition to post-secondary education and in the development of essential life skills. The committee was supported by staff from Career Pathways, in the Research and Innovation unit.

4. **Successful Learning in School:** reflecting alignment to Priority 1, Goal Two: *Success for Every Student,* this priority topic area generated discussion regarding how students learn in school today, with flexibility and strong teacher-student relationships emerging as key themes. As the 2016-2017 work plan was being developed and implemented, it was recognized that the work of the three committees were all contributing towards successful learning in school. It was therefore determined by the Student Senate that Successful Learning in School would be addressed through the work of the committees in the other three priority topic areas.

5. **Municipal Voter Age:** reflecting alignment to Priority 3, Goal Three: *Engaged and Effective Governance*. In February 2017 the Student Senate identified this priority topic area to be added to their 2016-2017 work plan. To gain broader youth perspective from across District high schools, the Student Senate developed and distributed a survey to District high school students asking for their opinion about the voter age for municipal elections.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Student Senate is providing a summary of their accomplishments relative to the 2016-17 work plan, highlighting the following activities:

- The Student Health and Wellness committee planned and facilitated a student conference to promote mental health. The conference was held on April 28, 2017, at Harry Ainlay high school and was attended by 120 District students from Grades 8 to 12. The goals of the event included providing student leaders with opportunities to promote healthy school cultures, increasing mental health literacy, and enhancing students' understanding that "healthy brains make healthy learners".

- The Curriculum committee continued their work to advocate for student voice in provincial curriculum development through two key strategies:
  - Inviting the Minister of Education to participate in a dialogue with Student Senators around the development of the new curriculum. On March 8, 2017, the Minister attended a Student Senate meeting, presented to the whole Senate and then had a lengthy curriculum-focused discussion with committee members.
  - Developing and implementing a survey to gather District student voice relevant to curriculum, with the intention to share rolled up District results with the Minister.

- The Preparation for Life Beyond School committee envisioned a series of resources to assist students in transitioning to life after high school. The committee engaged with Senators to gather questions from their peers related to life after high school. The committee used themes from these questions to develop a set of videos and is preparing a report to transition these resources over to support the District's Career Pathways initiative.

- The Student Senate examined the issue of municipal voter age, and engaged with peers across the District to respond to three relevant questions including the question, "Do you support lowering the voter age for municipal (City) elections to age 16?" 850 students from 15 District high schools responded to the survey. Of these, 54.7 percent indicated that they were in favour of lowering the municipal voting age to 16 and 45.3 percent indicated they were not in favour. The Student Senate used the data from the survey to support a collective discussion around this topic and then

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participated in a private ballot vote to determine the action to be taken by the Student Senate. The outcome of the vote resulted in a decision to report to the Board of Trustees a summary of District youth voice related to the voting age, but not to request that the Board of Trustees advocate to the City of Edmonton to consider lowering the voter age to 16. A full summary of the municipal voter age survey can be found in Appendix I.

Administration walked alongside the Student Senate to inform an evaluation of the model. The evaluation was conducted by staff from Research and Innovation, who attended and observed the majority of the Student Senate activities and elicited stakeholder feedback from the Board of Trustees, the Student Trustees and Senators, and supporting District staff from schools and central administration. Overall the evaluation concluded that the Student Senate model was a desirable and successful means of youth governance, voice and engagement for the District. As expected, valuable recommendations were also identified that will help to further inform the model and next year's Student Senate. A complete summary of the evaluation can be found in Appendix II.

With this in mind, administration intends to facilitate the 2017-2018 Student Senate using the current structure, functions and protocols that are in place. This year was one of significant learning and development. The first few months were focused solely on establishing what a Senate is and how a Senate functions both as an entity and within the context of the District. With this work already in place, next year will provide a more realistic experience of how the model functions and supports the work of the student governance over the course of a full school year. Lessons learned from this year will be shared with next year's Student Senate as they continue to develop a model of student governance in the District.
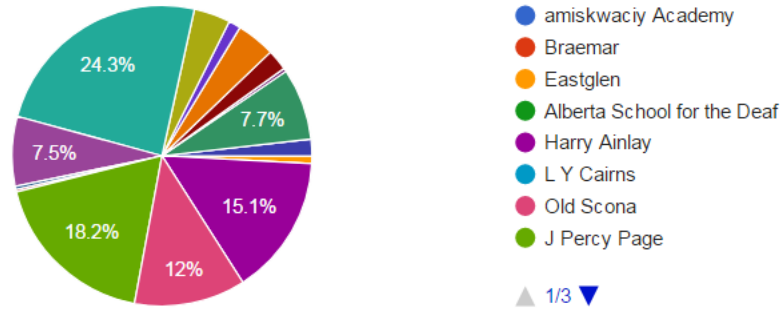
ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES
APPENDIX I   Summary of Survey Data: Municipal Voter Age
APPENDIX II   Summary of Student Senate Evaluation
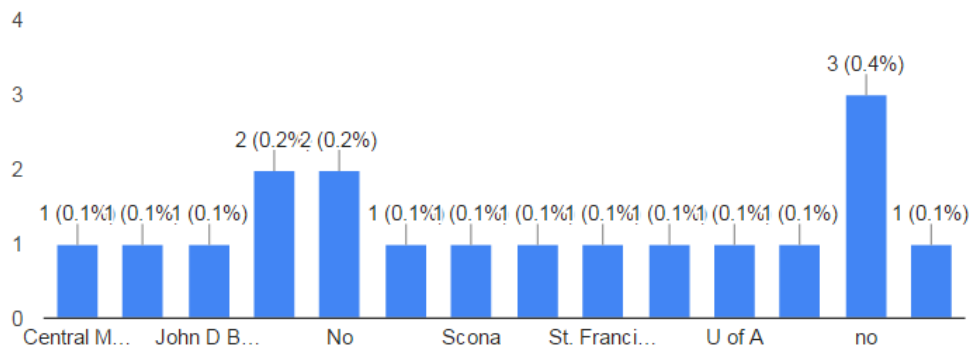
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Summary of Survey Data: Municipal Voter Age

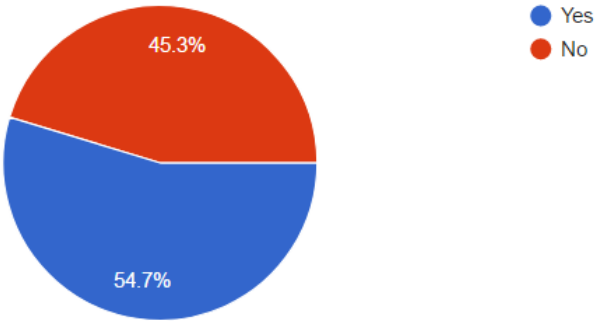## Which high school do you attend?

841 responses

- amiskwaciy Academy
- Braemar
- Eastglen
- Alberta School for the Deaf
- Harry Ainlay
- L Y Cairns
- Old Scona
- J Percy Page

▲ 1/3 ▼

Other high school:

18 responses

Do you support lowering the voter age for municipal (City) elections to age 16?
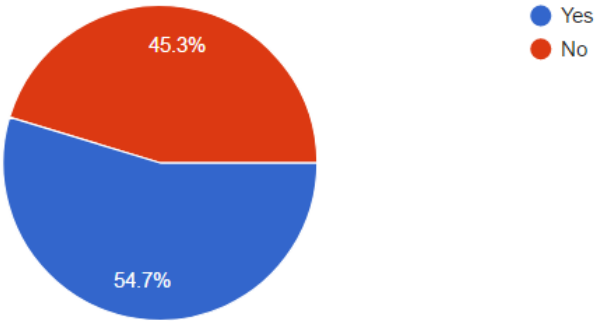
845 responses

- Yes
- No

45.3%

54.7%

If you were eligible to vote starting at age 16, do you believe you have an adequate understanding of municipal issues to vote on these issues?

848 responses
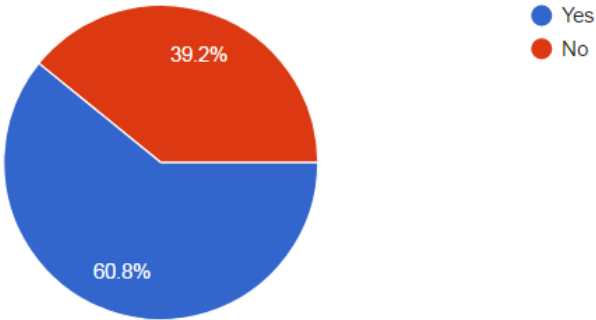
- Yes
- No

39.2%

60.8%

Do you support lowering the voter age for municipal (City) elections to age 16?

845 responses

- ● Yes
- ● No

45.3%

54.7%

SUMMARY OF STUDENT SENATE EVALUATION

Background Information

The Student Senate model was approved by the Board of Trustees at the April 5, 2016, public Board meeting. After that point, a Student Senate was established in the District.

An overview of the current of the current Student Senate model:

Number of Students in Senate	33
Number of Student Trustees	3
Number of Schools Represented	21
Number of Meetings Held Since June, 2017 (does not include informal meetings with Board of Trustees)	9

Overview of Evaluation

This evaluation of the Student Senate model is built upon key points put forward in the recommendation report from April 5, 2016, "Engaged and Effective Governance: Student Leadership". These key points included:

- District staff will support an evaluation of the model that includes input from the Student Senate members, the Board of Trustees and staff connected to the model.
- A summary of this evaluation will be brought forward in June 2017 to the Board of Trustees in a collaborative effort between District administration and the Student Senate.
- The question, "How do we build upon the synergy and excitement of the initial year's Student Trustee pilot to find an authentic model of youth voice and leadership that supports our District's cornerstone values and Strategic Plan, is relevant and engaging to youth, is sustainable, and holds the potential to build youth engagement across our system and beyond?"
- The proposed model of student governance has been designed to engage students from across District high schools to ensure the diversity of student voice represents the diversity of the District's student body.

The primary sources for this evaluation included short surveys and feedback forms, dialogue with relevant stakeholders, direct observation and immersion within the regular Senate meetings and the use of archived Board reports and discussions at public Board meetings. Feedback from stakeholders was also solicited periodically over the course of the year.

This evaluation of the Student Senate model includes an overview of the following:

- Identification of Student Senators
- Election of Student Trustees and Student Senate Executive
- Establishment of Student Senate Work Plan
- District Resources to support Student Senate
- Youth Engagement
- The role of the Board of Trustees

This evaluation includes an overview of stakeholder feedback from the following groups:

- Student Senators and Student Trustees
- Board of Trustees
- School staff supporting Student Senate
- Central staff supporting Student Senate

Identification of Student Senators

Each school established a process to identify Student Senators, determined by the school's unique context. Examples of processes used in District high schools include the following:
- One District high school held a general information session regarding the Student Senate initiative, posting details on a daily bulletin and sending home notices to parents and guardians. Students applied for the opportunity through submitting an essay explaining why they should be selected. Student Senators were selected by a selection committee, comprised of a teacher, school leader, parent-council member and two students in consultation with the school's student council.
- A similar process at another District high school included an information session during the school faculty meeting and posting information on SchoolZone. Students applied for the opportunity by submitting a written response to questions and providing references. Prior to the application deadline, lunch hour information sessions and an additional session to help students with their application were provided. Student Senators were selected by a committee of six faculty members using a blind adjudication process and pre-established criteria.
- At a District high school where students did not immediately volunteer for the position of Student Senator, school leadership approached students they felt would both benefit personally and be able to fulfill the responsibilities of the role of Student Senator.
- A District high school used the role of Student Senator as an opportunity to represent a wider diversity of perspectives. Students who were not already involved in leadership were encouraged to pursue the opportunity. Student Senators were selected by staff members based on written submissions from students.

Stakeholder feedback

- Students acknowledged that the process varied significantly from school to school and this was a reflection of school culture, size and demographics as well as, in some cases, pre-established student leadership models.

Election of Student Trustees and Student Senate Executive

Three leadership opportunities within the Student Senate model included: three Student Trustee positions, four Senate Executive positions (Chair, Vice-Chair and two Secretary positions), and Committee Lead positions. Democratic processes for Student Trustee and Senate Executive positions were held in the fall of the 2016-2017 school year at two consecutive Senate Meetings.

For the Student Trustee and Student Senate Executive positions, the process included the following strategies:
- Student Senators were provided with information about each leadership role, including responsibilities and time commitment.
- Senators submitted their names if they wanted to stand as a candidate for a position.
- Each candidate presented to the Senate using prepared speeches.
- Ballots were distributed, collected and counted as part of a confidential and supervised vote.

Stakeholder feedback

Student Senators shared that:
- The election process was fair and appropriate.
- The same procedure should be followed next year.

● That they recommend Student Trustee and Senate Executive elections be held earlier in the year.

Establishment of Student Senate Work Plan

To establish a 2016-2017 work plan, the Student Senators engaged with students at their schools to identify topics based on the question, "What is an important topic or area of interest related to learning and school success for the students at our school?" As with the selection of Student Senators, the methods used to gather youth voice related to this question varied from school to school.
Strategies to gather youth voice included using the following:
● Social media (Twitter and Facebook)
● School announcements
● Lunch hour meetings and presentations
● Surveys
● Classroom visits
● Word-of-mouth

Senators used the level of interest, potential impact, plausibility of achievement and the District Strategic Plan and Cornerstone Values to identify key priority topics for the 2016-2017 work plan. Committees were established to determine a plan of action for how their priority topic would be addressed and how they would engage with other students in the District. Subsequent Senate meetings included reports of progress and requests for input from each of the subcommittees from the Committee Leads, with all student senators supporting each other's plans of action.

Stakeholder feedback

● Although the time and energy Student Senators invested in Senate or Student Trustee commitments was, at certain points in the year, higher than they had anticipated, many agreed that they would like to see the number of formal meetings increase. Some Senators commented that official meetings held once a month were not sufficient to achieve all the goals they set out for themselves, while others found it challenging to attend all Senate meetings due to other commitments.
● Student Senators shared that it would be recommended that Senators from the same school have representation on different committees.
● Some Senators questioned if they should have tried to complete major projects in the spring, as this is a very busy time in District high schools.

District Resources to Support Student Senate

Schools identified staff to specifically support the Student Senate. This nature of this support included supporting student engagement for Senate activities at the school level and supporting the leadership of the school's Student Senators.

Though we did not hear back from all high schools, based on a mid-year focus group and year-end survey of staff and leadership from the respective schools, there was considerable variance in how schools worked with and supported their student senators. This can be explained, at least in part, by the sheer differences in size and nature of student populations ranging from very small specialized schools such as Braemar, L.Y. Cairns and Alberta School for the Deaf, to very large schools such as Jasper Place or Harry Ainlay.

Of the schools that provided explicit feedback, numbers involved ranged from one to four staff members, with combined time commitments of one to two hours a month. As schools pointed out, student senators tended to be very independent and staff involvement was only required as requested by the students

themselves. In other cases, student senators were also involved with the established school council, meaning that there was already a mechanism in place for supporting the student senators.

Stakeholder feedback
- Without exception, staff members at schools were in agreement that the Student Senate enhanced student voice in the District, Student Senators were committed to the work and objectives of the Senate and that time expended to support student senators at the school was worthwhile.

Staff time represented the largest District resource to support the Student Senate. The following Central units supported the work of the Student Senate.
- Communications:
  o Prepared promotional materials, including print materials and a video.
  o Established a Student Senate section on the District's external-facing website and internal Staff Room site.
  o Arranged photography of the Student Senate;.
  o Provided ongoing media training for Student Trustees and the broader Student Senate.
  o Served as a point of contact and support for media requests regarding Student Trustees and Student Senators.
- Governance and Strategic Support Services organized, prepared and maintained the ongoing operations of the Student Senate, including:
  o Establishing Senate processes and procedures.
  o Managing logistical details of Senate meetings and activities.
  o Maintaining ongoing communications with Student Senate and other District staff members as necessary.
  o Involving the District Support Team as appropriate.
  o Preparing Board reports.
  o Providing ongoing mentorship of Student Trustees and Student Senators.
- Comprehensive School Health:
  o Provided ongoing mentorship to the Student Health and Wellness committee.
  o Contributed expertise and resources to ensure the successful completion of the committee's work plan.
- Career Pathways:
  o Provided ongoing mentorship to the Student Health and Wellness committee.
  o Contributed expertise and resources to ensure the successful completion of the committee's work plan.
- Research:
  o Provided on going evaluation.
  o Provided input regarding student survey for Curriculum Subcommittee.

While these groups provided ongoing support to the functioning of the Student Senate, other central units also provided support to specific activities of the Senate.

The following table shows the approved budget from the April 5, 2016, Board report and actual costs incurred during the first year of the Student Senate model, up to May 30, 2017.

Expense Item Description	Projected Budget	Description of actual costs (up to May 30, 2017)
GSS Staff and other Central Office Staff Support	.15 FTE Total $21,200	.265 FTE* Total $37,500

Transportation, Food, Child Care to Support Equitable and Inclusive Student Participation	Total	$4000	Catering Transportation Sign-Language Interpreters Total	$5900 $360 $1800 $8160
Additional funds for Student Trustees related to fulfilling of their duties	Total	$500	Total	Nil
Senate Orientation / Training (e.g. Media, Advocacy)	Total	$900	** Total	$1500
Total Budget		$26,000		$55,220

*This FTE is approximate for two staff members, up to May 30, 2017. It does not include the hours of additional Centre for Education Consultants who supported the committees or School Staff Supports who contributed to the Student Senate back in the high schools throughout the year.
** Based on approximate time contributions by Communications staff

Stakeholder feedback
● As one central staff member pointed out, "in spite of following a full day in the office, Senate meetings were, without exception, occasions I not only looked forward to, but which nourished my sense of pride in our youth."
● The consensus of central staff supporting Student Senators was overwhelmingly positive.

Youth Engagement
A unique aspect of the Student Senate model is the structure in which Senators can gather input on a range of topics from the peers at their schools and leverage this into the broader context of the Student Senate. The manner in which, and degree to which, the Student Senate engaged other students in the District to contribute their voice and perspectives varied considerably from school to school. Overall, it is difficult to account for the total number of District students involved in youth engagement from the Student Senate because of the varied nature of the tools and mechanisms employed to reach out to the other students.

The Student Senate used a variety of structures, processes and strategies to engage other youth, including:
● Forming a Senate Council with other students in the school willing to support the work of the Senate.
● Utilizing student leadership classes as ready participants and champions for Student Senate work.
● Collaborating with 'room representatives' to help disseminate information and gather feedback.
● Lunch hour meetings for all students.
● Widespread communications through multiple outlets, including SchoolZone, e-mail, school announcements, school assemblies, student events and social media.

As part of youth engagement processes, the Student Senate conducted a number of surveys. The following data represents the scope of these surveys:

Title of Survey	Date Opened	Number of Schools Represented	Number of Respondents
EPSB Student Senate Curriculum	April 30, 2017	7	187
Life Beyond School	February 17, 2017	8	67
Youth Voting Age	February 24, 2017	16	851

Stakeholder feedback
- A school staff member commented, "In upcoming years, student senators will be able to find their footing and engage the school more effectively. As the Senate was new this year, sometimes we were working under severe timelines with no prior history to rely upon. In the future we will be better able to communicate with the whole of the student body."
- Student Senators expressed the desire to engage with youth in schools in their catchment areas, beyond their own high school.
- Some Student Senators in larger high schools expressed feeling overwhelmed by the challenge of engaging a greater number and diversity of students across the entire student body.

The Role of the Board of Trustees
The Student Senate engaged formally with the Board of Trustees through presentations at public Board meetings three times in the 2016-2017 school year. The Student Senate had several opportunities to interact with the Board of Trustees through Board-hosted receptions, informal suppers and visits to Senate meetings. These informal gatherings provided opportunities for Trustees and Student Senators to meet, ask each other questions and share their perspectives around issues of mutual interest.

Stakeholder feedback
- By all accounts, the Trustees considered their interactions with Student Senators and Student Trustees as positive.
- At least one Trustee expressed eagerness to see even more interaction with the students in the coming year and wanted to see the "Student Trustee roles evolve to where those students are more engaged at the Board table."
- Student Senators recommended providing opportunities for meaningful engagement between the Board of Trustees and the Student Senate earlier in the school year and suggested adding additional pathways for connecting the Board of Trustees the Student Senate, beyond above and beyond public Board meetings.

Further Reflections
In addition to the feedback and recommendations shared in this evaluation, stakeholders shared the following reflections:
- Many staff members noted the growth they observed in the students involved in Student Senate not only with respect to the specific leadership skills they learned but in their overall sense of confidence, self-efficacy and pride in working towards goals that mattered at such a high level.
- School staff expressed agreement that the District should continue to support the Student Senate and Trustees. They expressed that the model provides a means for insight into decisions that impact the ultimate receivers: "Schools are for kids and kids need to have a place to give feedback. I feel the

senators at our school felt they could make a difference even if it's small. Governance is an important step but it takes time."

- A staff member commented that Student Senate was a positive asset to the District through "providing our students with leadership opportunities and opportunities they may not have received elsewhere, such as attending Board meetings, presenting at Board, meeting the Education Minister, attending the provincial budget announcement, leading youth engagement at their schools, chairing formal meetings, leading a committee, etc."
- In summing up their experience, many Senators decided that because of the relative novelty of having a means to express concerns or provide input on such high-level issues of governance, it has not really 'sunk in' just what a privilege and opportunity serving as a Student Senator actually is. As this message becomes more widespread in the years to come and news of Provincial Student Councils and other District Student Councils spreads, many anticipate student involvement will increase dramatically.
- Some school staff members expressed less certainty that the Senate fully represented the diversity of perspectives and student voices at the school or that other students in the school were as fully engaged as they had hoped. This will be considered, as is also mentioned in the students' recommendations, as an area for growth in the coming years.
- Although cited as one of the key successes, engagement of other students as well as the full diversity of student voices was also the most commonly stated challenge. As one Senator pointed out, "it is hard to get the voice of someone who doesn't participate." Whether it be student apathy, lack of time or lack of access, even when such obstacles were successfully circumvented, Senators still felt it was their biggest ongoing challenge. However, they also believed that as word got out about the importance of voice in democratic decision making, the fact that the Board of Trustees is truly listening to student input and the privilege and responsibility that goes with contributing input on matters that affect all students, more and more students will likely take advantage of such opportunities.

Key Recommendations
- **Resources:** In spite of the already higher than expected allocation of staff time, students were generally in agreement that they would have liked to have had more scheduled time together to achieve the goals they set out for themselves. As some mentioned, even if every second meeting was strictly for committee work, it would provide consistency and steady progress without the lag times in between, during which it was difficult to find mutually available meeting times outside of the Senate. The challenge of time will help to inform the development of next year's work plan.
- **Communications**: Student Senators felt the need for holding themselves more accountable for consistent messaging and task expectations back to schools. This was corroborated by feedback from school staff who sometimes encountered differences in interpretation between two Senators or gaps in information. School staff felt that clarity of key points would provide them with the means to more fully support the Senators in their school. One suggestion offered was that at the end of each Senate meeting, key messages and tasks would be clearly recorded and fully agreed upon by all Senators. This would also serve to ensure equity across the District in that all schools would receive the same key messages and that information passed through social media would be more consistent across school sites. One additional recommendation from students was that they would like to increase advocacy. Suggestions included additional training early in the year and an increase in common, accessible and consistent messaging to all students in the District, including through social media, to help promote the work of the Board and Senate and emphasize the importance of their participation and the value of their voices.
- **Engagement:** Across all stakeholder groups there appeared to be general consensus that the work in the coming years should consider ways of increasing student engagement at the schools and catchment level. Though there were definitely success stories and some schools, with the aid of

additional student supports, managed to engage nearly the entire student population, others felt more could be done in their schools. Enhancing communications would be a good start. But in deference to workloads demanded to reach significantly higher student populations in larger schools, several students recommended that we consider more proportional representation, starting with consideration to having three Student Senators in larger schools. An additional suggestion included providing some training in advocacy work.