



## **Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)**

### **PROJECTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2003-Present**

*BSAC actively engages students in decision-making in the Boston Public Schools.  
BSAC is a partnership between Youth on Board and the Boston Public Schools.*

#### POLICY CHANGES

- 1. Climate Change** – BSAC's work on the issue of climate change and climate justice began with our support of the Reject & Protect Rally against the Keystone XL tar-sands pipeline last April. During the summer of 2014, members of BSAC met once a week as a part of a Climate Team to discuss potential campaigns/actions, complete trainings, and make alliances with other climate organizations. We focused on climate injustice- how current and future climate crises have a disproportionate impact upon young people, people of color, and low-income communities. Members of BSAC attended a conference in New York City, held by the youth-organizing group UPROSE, for youth of color in preparation for the largest climate march in history, The People's Climate March. On September 21st, BSAC joined allies REEP/ACE, Student Immigrant Movement, and other youth-led organizations in NYC for the People's Climate March- which was attended by 400,000 other protesters demanding action on climate change. BSAC aims to improve the sustainability and efficiency of Boston Public Schools (through solar energy, retrofitting buildings etc.) and continuing to educate our peers on the issue of climate justice. BSAC has worked with Councilor Michelle Wu and other city councilors on her resolution to divest the city of Boston from fossil fuels that cause climate change. This resolution was approved by Boston City Council in November 2014.
- 2. Superintendent Search** – BSAC, along with the Boston Truth Coalition and the Youth Organizers United for the Now Generation developed a set of criteria for Boston's search for a new Superintendent. In the original process identified by the search firm, students were excluded from the search process, despite being one of the largest constituencies in the school system. Students hosted a forum which brought together close to 300 students, parents, and community members to share their criteria for the new Superintendent. They also demanded for a student to be part of the search committee, the use of BSAC criteria to inform the search process, for students be part of the interview process, and for students to develop interview questions. By leveraging their relationships in the district and with community partners, BSAC students were able to secure some student voice in the search process. Students will now have the opportunity to interview the top three finalists and have contributed to the interview questions.
- 3. Code of Conduct (formerly Code of Discipline)** – BSAC requested and was granted an extension of BPS's review of its Code of Discipline to ensure that their voices would be heard. Students met with the administration to share their concerns regarding student rights, disciplinary actions used for minor offenses, and the uses of suspension and exclusion of students from instruction. Students studied the document and participated in a focus group and other meetings with Boston public schools administrators to ensure that the Code of Discipline was one that represented students' opinions and worked well for students. The Code of Discipline has since been renamed the Code of Conduct. BSAC continues to serve on the Code of Conduct

Advisory Council (COAC), an advisory council of district stakeholders that aims to promote the practice of alternative and restorative discipline in the district. Most recently BSAC became part of the Chapter 222 Coalition, a group of lawyers, advocates and community organizations focused on the implementation of new groundbreaking state legislation aiming to make discipline more equitable and mandating alternative means for disciplining students before turning to suspensions and expulsions.

4. **New School Discipline/Dropout Reform Law** – BSAC testified at a hearing to pass Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012, which would improve school discipline and decrease dropout rates in Massachusetts public schools. On August 6, 2012, Governor Patrick signed into law amendments to the Massachusetts General Laws that address the subject of school discipline and school dropout, an act relative to students’ access to educational services and exclusion from school. Some of the improvements this act includes: a) schools must have documented proof that they have taken every other disciplinary measure before resorting to out-of-school suspension or expulsion, and b) students have the right to access all tests, quizzes, and materials administered during the time of their out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Currently BSAC is represented in a state-wide coalition to address the implementation and enforce the police power of the legislation.
5. **Student Rights & Responsibilities Campaign** – BSAC designed and distributed student rights and responsibilities posters in order to educate students on their rights regarding specific BPS policies and non-BPS policies such as: Homework, Cell Phone, Punctuality, Student Government, Physical Education, Military Opt-out, Student-Teacher Relationships, Dress Code, Metal Detector, and Transportation. These posters were created *by* students *for* students in School Year 2007-08. BSAC also designed and distributed student rights and responsibilities pocket-sized pamphlets in School Year 2012-13. BSAC designed a curriculum on SR&R to be included in the district’s Civics Curriculum and implemented in all 12<sup>th</sup> grade Civic Classes. Since SY 2012-2013, BSAC has supported schools in a month of action to raise awareness of student rights through school-based campaigns. BSAC is currently working on developing a phone application detailing student rights and responsibilities. The phone application will also be a way for students to report grievances.
6. **Student Vote** – The mayor of Boston appoints one student representative to the Boston School Committee. Unlike the other members of the School Committee, the student is a non-voting member. Ironically enough, the student who sits on the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is a member with full voting rights. BSAC is seeking to pass a home rule petition to change law in the City of Boston so that the student member on the Boston School Committee will become a voting member.
7. **Student Feedback in Teacher Evaluations** – Following the success of Constructive Feedback in the district, BSAC lobbied the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to include student feedback as an official component of teacher evaluations. In a set of regulations passed by the DOE in July 2011, all districts in the state must include student feedback in educator evaluations beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. BSAC’s success at the state level trickled down to the Boston Public Schools where BSAC is currently leading a Student Feedback Working Group with the BPS Office of Human Capital to monitor the tool and process used to collect student feedback in educator evaluations. BSAC has also

actively engaged with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a model survey tool and develop best practices in implementation for all Massachusetts districts.

- 8. Student to Teacher Constructive Feedback** – In May 2010, the Boston School Committee passed BSAC’s “Student to Teacher Constructive Feedback Policy” mandating that all high school teachers administer the “Constructive Feedback Form” in their classrooms which allows students to give their teachers constructive feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and is proven to improve classroom culture by promoting positive relationships. Every full time high school teacher will administer the constructive feedback survey at least once per year beginning in the 2010-2011 school year. The initial implementation was piloted using the paper survey that allows for anonymous completion and an online version will be considered for the future.
- 9. Boston School Committee’s Format and Rules** – BSAC and the Youth Organizers United for the Now Generation YOUNG members provided public comment at the Boston School Committee to speak against the proposed format and rules for school committee meetings that would prohibit signs, cheering, and clapping in the chambers. The Boston community was at risk of losing its right to voice their support or discontent at School Committee meetings—a right that BSAC students decided to defend. BSAC’s student representative to the Boston School Committee asked for feedback from BSAC and YOUNG members. He then brought that feedback to his fellow School Committee members while serving on the School Committee’s subcommittee on the proposed new format and rules. The student representative helped draft a new proposal that took into account the community’s concerns regarding their lack of voice. BSAC helped push for the final recommendations on the format and rules.
- 10. Student Government mandated in high schools** – BSAC worked with the Student Engagement Advisory Council (SEAC) in writing the Student Government Circular and reinstating it in the Boston Public Schools, mandating that all BPS High Schools are required to have a functioning student government, a student council, a student leadership team, or other student leadership structure. Student Government advisors from different schools met at district-wide centralized trainings as needed. An annual conference has been established for members of the student governments across the district to attend. Both the Mayor and the Superintendent were in attendance at this conference.
- 11. Punctuality Policy** (formerly known as the Tardiness/Lockout Policy) – BSAC lobbied the schools, Headmasters, School Committee, and the Superintendent to reevaluate the BPS Tardiness Policy, particularly the prevalent practice of locking tardy students out of the school building for the rest of the day. The School Committee, which agreed to remove the lockout component from all tardiness policies in all BPS schools, quickly accepted BSAC’s proposal; this became effective in the fall of 2006.
- 12. Military Opt Out & Peace Rally** – BSAC members had over 2000 conversations with BPS students on the issue of military recruitment and opting out during the Spring of 2007. They conducted an open training for BPS students on how to organize and advocate around the military opting out issue. Students also participated in a rally on June 1, 2007 to deliver over 1300 opting out cards to the Superintendent.

- 13. Cell Phone Policy** – BSAC drafted a district-wide policy on cell phone use in schools and developed it with feedback from the Superintendent. The School Committee approved this new policy, which retained much of the original wording proposed by BSAC. The policy states that students have the right to use their mobile devices *before* and *after* school. Students now have the right to carry them during the day in the building, but cannot use it.
- 14. School Start Time** – BSAC gathered opinions on school start time from current students, parents, and students who have dropped out. Students created a proposal and educated people about sleep and time management, and then conducted informal focus groups that led to BSAC’s rethinking of the current BPS schedule. BSAC presented their recommendations to the School Committee and a later school start time was piloted at 10 BPS high schools in the fall of 2007. The later school start time is now permanently in place at some schools.
- 15. Dual enrollment funding from the state** – BSAC worked with Jobs for the Future (JFF) and other collective groups to lobby the state legislature to bring dual enrollment back to the Massachusetts budget funding. Dual enrollment allows for students in their senior year of high school to be simultaneously enrolled in high school and college. Due to the lobbying work of BSAC and other groups, there is now an official line item in the state’s budget dedicated to dual enrollment for high school students.
- 16. Graduation Requirements** – BSAC developed recommendations for the policy on the most effective way to implement and communicate the new Graduation Requirements Policy and presented the recommendations to the School Committee and Superintendent. The new policy allowed schools to choose from three different tracks of requirements. BSAC was also responsible for communicating these changes to the student body.



## ADVOCACY

- 17. Youth Affordabili(T) Coalition (YAC)** – BSAC joined YAC in 2011 to help in advocating for the Youth Way on the MBTA campaign. BSAC believes that every young person should have affordable access to the MBTA. Given that it serves as a major form of transportation for students and their families to travel to work and school. The goals of this campaign are to stop the MBTAs 100% fare hike proposals, proposed service cuts, place pressure on the state to fund MBTA, and create a \$10 monthly youth pass. BSAC has participated in the biweekly Saturday YAC Coalition & planning meetings, sent letters to State legislators & School Committee representatives, rally and march at the State House, Lobbied Chairmen of MBTA & House speaker DeLeo, etc. YAC was successful in influencing MassDOT Board which approved MBTA fare hike proposal for a 23% increase, a reduction from the initially proposed 100% increase. In 2014, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Board of Directors voted to pilot a university/youth pass, allowing 1500 youth between the ages of 12 to 21 residing in Boston, Chelsea and Cambridge to purchase a monthly pass for \$26 or a weekly pass for \$7 beginning in July 2015.
- 18. National Student Bill of Rights (NSBR)** – BSAC believes that ensuring youth and student rights will cause systematic change in education. NSBR is an national movement bringing together youth from across the country to define youth vision for education and social justice. Youth from different cities are developing local bills and working together to write a national bill that will become a unifying document for youth nation-wide and a driving force for the youth movement. BSAC has played a major role in providing feedback and recommendations for the document. In March 2012, BSAC co-hosted an NSBR workshop with the Baltimore Algebra Project at the Harvard organizing conference to raise awareness around NSBR. BSAC is continuing to increase awareness around NSBR in Boston and is also assisting in the implementation of the national youth voting week.
- 19. Listening Project** – As an affiliate organization of the national Dignity in Schools Campaign, BSAC participated in two national weeks of action in October 2011 and October 2012. During the Listening Project, BSACers and other youth-led organizations staked out at Forest Hills Station, Roxbury Crossing Station, and Ruggles Station during the peak hours after schools let out to listen to and collect data on young people’s experiences with school discipline in the district. The data has been collected, analyzed and fed back to the Boston School Committee as well as the BPS Code of Conduct Advisory Council.
- 20. Friendly Feedback Form** – BSAC believes that students should be involved in some form of teacher evaluations. Nearby school districts have a more formal process for students to evaluate their teachers. The Friendly Feedback Form is BSAC’s first step to initiating one for the Boston Public School district. It was first piloted at the Community Academy of Science and Health (CASH) in the Hyde Park Educational Complex. Students were able to provide anonymous evaluations for teachers in the Math Department. The findings were presented to the Headmaster at CASH in January 2009.
- 21. Class size** – BSAC made public students’ desire for small class sizes. BSAC is against averaging class size requirements across the district, and strategized a plan for opposing the policy. BSAC aided the Boston Teachers Union with the circulation of a document that justified smaller class sizes across the district.



- 22. Dimensions for Effective Teaching and Learning** – BSAC added to the existing “Dimensions for Effective Teaching” and created “Dimensions for Effective Learning” to make sure the essential perspective of young people was represented in this widely-distributed and used publication.
- 23. Metal Detectors** – BSAC developed a proposal that outlined students’ concerns about metal detectors in schools and recommended ways to make metal detector searches more efficient, more effective, and more respectful of students. Students presented the proposal to the Superintendent, who agreed to ask the security department to act on these resolutions.
- 24. Sexual Harassment in Schools** – With leadership from the Hyde Square Task Force, BSAC approached the question of sexual harassment in schools. Students conducted informal focus groups with their peers to find out how common they believe sexual harassment is in their schools. There are discussions going on in a number of schools about policy. The Office of Equity has decided to include student voice in their discussions about these policies.
- 25. Food and Nutrition** – BSAC met regularly and advised a group over the course of a year with representatives from BPS Food and Nutrition Services to discuss issues related to school food and vending machines. Students advised a group of doctors working with the Nutrition Group on how to create healthy snacks that students will actually eat. BSAC is also exploring the possibility of working with the Boston Food Project to bring local and seasonal food to schools.
- 26. School Dress Code** - BSAC met with a City Councilor to discuss the possibility of a district-wide dress code. Students were in agreement that this should not be a “uniform policy,” but a dress code that holds students accountable for the clothes they wear at school. This movement is still happening at individual schools but has been dropped as a district-wide policy.
- 27. Establishing a Student Union** – Like the Boston Teachers Union, BSAC is hoping to have Student Union representatives in place in each school where the student body expresses interest. There is a need to advocate for students, to stand up for student rights and, more importantly, to listen to students. There are particular issues in the classroom and in other school settings that only students are aware of and it is important to bring these issues to light. There needs to be formal processes for students to file grievances and to recommend solutions.
- 28. District Budget Cuts** – BSAC is working with a budget coalition made up of eight youth organizations from around Boston to rally against budget cuts across the school district. Students feel strongly that there should be student input in the process. BSAC has facilitated meetings between students and the Mayor, and helped organize students for a march to a School Committee meeting. They want the City to know that students are invested in their own education and can provide great input to the budget cut process. The coalition organized a forum with an estimated 350 students and many BPS officials in attendance. BSAC worked with the coalition to create a platform with an emphasis on lobbying to increase revenue to the city and the school system. This platform has been signed by the mayor, four school committee members, and

two city councilors.

## RESEARCH/ADVISING

- 29. Health and Wellness** – Driven by the belief that all students deserve a holistic education which includes issues of health and sexuality, BSAC is working with community groups and BPS to improve the quality of health education, in the district and across the state BSAC students lobbied State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz around legislation that pushed for comprehensive health education in Massachusetts. While the bills did not make it out of committee, they made it further in the process than they ever have before. BSAC was also instrumental in editing the Boston Public Schools’ new health curriculum, dubbed the “Health Frameworks,” which has since been used to train teachers in the district. In 2014, BSAC students
- 30. Homework Task Force** – Following the work around effective teaching, students are hoping to rid the “busy-work” assigned by teachers that is irrelevant to course material. Students were part of a formal Homework Task Force along with nominated teachers and staff from the Academic Superintendent’s office to establish a policy to increase the quality of homework and access to school resources that will make for more effective learning. It is BSAC’s goal to help teachers understand the importance of meaningful and engaging homework. BSAC’s current recommendations include 1) starting homework clubs with peer leaders, 2) setting aside time during each class to explain the night’s homework assignments, 3) professional development time for teachers around homework and factors affecting the completion of homework, and 4) extending library hours at schools. These recommendations were developed from 777 surveys and input from 148 elementary, middle, and high school teachers. BSAC’s next steps include aligning the homework deliverables to the district’s curriculum and professional development.
- 31. Anti-Bullying** - Students began looking at anti-bullying policies and working with the district to look at anti-bullying from all perspectives. BSAC provided feedback on the BPS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. BSAC wants support for families and students, both aggressors and targets, throughout any discipline procedure. Students want non-exclusionary methods considered first, especially restorative justice approaches. Prevention is key, which requires training all school staff in prevention and intervention and incorporating empathy and diversity training in the K-12 curriculum.
- 32. Research on Drop-out Rate** – With the drop-out rate increasing steadily, BSAC found it necessary to get to the root of the problem. They surveyed over 300 BPS students about what makes students drop out of, and stay in, school. They presented the results to the School Committee and school administrators. BSAC also presented the results of the survey to Boston Private Industry Council’s Boston Youth Transitions Planning Group, as well as on local cable television and other venues. Solutions were outlined in a living document and a video was produced and sent to the Oprah Winfrey show.
- 33. School Climate Surveys** – BSAC collected 500 responses to the 2005-2006 Drop-out Survey which indicated the drop-out rate should be addressed by increasing student engagement and providing greater student support through changes to the curriculum and school structure. BSAC worked with the Youth

Transitions Task Force to create a survey that looked at analyzing how student-student, student-teacher, and teacher-administration relationships were affecting school climate.

- 34. Truancy** – BSAC investigated why students do not stay in school and become disengaged. BSAC created a survey, interviewed students, collected data and presented their findings to the School Committee. BSAC has combined their solutions with those of the dropout rate research and created a document that is still used.
- 35. Social Emotional Learning National Conference for the Dignity in Schools Campaign** – May 17-19, 2012, BSAC hosted a national convening around Social Emotional Learning, where members of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (teachers, students, parents and advocates) discussed the importance of SEL in schools, as well as learned how to practice SEL.
- 36. Superintendent Search** – The Boston Public School district began its search for a new Superintendent in 2007. BSAC co-sponsored a youth forum with the school district, where students felt there should be a youth voice in the process. BSAC lobbied to include students in the hiring process. They did not succeed in this endeavor but were able to meet with individual members of the hiring committee to present our platform and what qualities the students would like to see in a Superintendent. Students also prepared a list of expectations to be used in the hiring of the new Superintendent, and widely circulated those materials through the community partner Community Matters, at School Committee presentations, and at a forum they held.
- 37. Voter Registration**- Worked with the League of Women Voters during the 2004 presidential election to ensure that 18-year-olds had access to voter registration. BSAC students went into over 10 BPS high schools and set up registration tables. They also raised awareness about the presidential election and registered people to vote.
- 38. Downtown Planning Process** – Boston’s Downtown has traditionally been seen as a place for students to hang out after school. Business owners have expressed concerns to the City about youth loitering by storefronts during after-school hours. Some merchants have even voiced a fear of student presence. As the Downtown is currently being redeveloped, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) wants to incorporate youth voice into the planning process. Students participated in focus groups run by the BRA.
- 39. BPS District-Wide School Climate Survey Focus Group** – The Academic Superintendent conducted a focus group with BSAC students on the topic of a district-wide student survey. The survey, which is scheduled to be conducted in school year 2009-2010, will focus on School Climate. This survey will be distributed to both students and parents. BSAC students provided input on the nature of questions that will be asked on this survey.
- 40. Ed Vestors** – Four members of BSAC participated in EdVestors' Education Review Team Youth Panel, a new extension of EdVestors' grant review process. Students read and reviewed several grant applications describing projects within the Boston Public Schools. Students' opinions were an important part of the





decision-making process. Of the proposals reviewed, the Youth Team recommended two initiatives, BPS Credit Recovery and Debate Across the Curriculum. EdVestors is currently raising the \$260,000 needed to fund these initiatives which will directly impact high school students in the Boston Public Schools.

**41. Technology** – BSAC actively advised the BPS Office of Instructional Technology on the types of technology that should be available in schools, and worked with the Office of Instructional Technology to determine best practice for student access to the internet while at school. BSAC created an advisory committee to work with the Office of Instructional Technology on the issue.