

DSA Parent Issues List

Questions, Comments and Suggestions
Recorded Nov. 3, 2008 – Present

UPDATE: 11/14/2008

Recognizing that the challenges of transitioning to a new administration, a new schedule, new graduation requirements and other internal and external pressures have put strains on different sectors of the DSA community, the DSA Administration is working on initiatives to:

- More directly engage parents to clarify and address their concerns and
- Increase parent access to information about the challenges facing DSA, how challenges are being addressed and what parents can do to support their students and the school.

To further these objectives, the Administration is taking steps to openly solicit questions and suggestions from DSA parents and ensure related responses and clarifications are presented in mediums that are accessible and can be consistently updated as policies, practices and conditions evolve.

DSA's Community Communication Initiatives

To start, the Administration hosted a DSA Community Meeting on Monday, November 3, 2008. Over 30 DSA parents attended and participated in facilitated discussions of the following four questions:

1. How do we build on the current channels of communication to effectively outreach the DSA community?
2. What services do you and your student need to support the path to graduation? [i.e. requirements, internships, community service opportunities]
3. How does the curriculum support students' academic needs while maintaining their art major opportunities?
4. What does it take to attain and sustain students at DSA?

Following is a summary of questions, comments and suggestions that were collected during the 11/3 meeting. This initial summary is intended to evolve as DSA parents submit additional questions, comments and suggestions. Meanwhile, DSA is working on related responses and clarifications and will address new issues as they are raised. Related information will be posted and updated through a DSA web site link that is being developed and print outs of all materials will also be available.

Opportunities to Share Questions, Concerns and Suggestions

In support of this initiative, the parent representatives for DSA's Collaborative School Committee (CSC) have made a commitment to help collect comments, update the issues list and keep a record of where parents and students can find related responses and information, as it becomes available. To a large extent, the CSC Parent Reps are inventing this part of the process as it goes along and your ideas and suggestions for improving the set up are very welcome.

Adding Your Voice

Currently, you can add content to the Issues List and join related discussions by:

- Posting a comment on the related thread through the independently hosted Google discussion group at: <http://groups.google.com/group/DSACSC?hl=en>
- Leaving written comments in the CSC "mailbox" at DSA's Front Office
- Attending one of the CSC Parent Constituency Meeting [check the CSC web page for the meeting schedule: [http://dsa.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader\\$1490](http://dsa.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader$1490)]

Accessing Information

To help everyone monitor related responses and information from DSA, DPS and other sources, a reference document is being set up. The idea is to keep updated notes about when info for a particular issue is available and where to find related postings, links or other references. To support those parents that do not have ready access to the Internet, a binder is being set up with print outs of the materials. Contact the DSA Front Desk to locate the binder.

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QUESTION #1: HOW DO WE BUILD ON THE CURRENT CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION TO EFFECTIVELY OUTREACH THE DSA COMMUNITY?

Re: General Communications “Climate”

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What Needs Work

- Families report that they are often confused about where to take specific concerns or ideas
- Parents have a responsibility too and sometimes forget to respect areas where school personnel need space to do their jobs
- Families continue to report that they build their community around their student’s arts discipline and often do not develop a strong sense of belonging to DSA as a whole
- Trust is low right now, eroded by a lack of:
 - Transparency in decision making processes
 - Responsiveness and follow through on commitments
 - Advance notice of agendas and follow through on stated agendas (*for example this meeting was originally reported as being about SPF, but that is not the topic*)
- Right now, there does not seem to be any accountability; no consequence for whether DSA Administration is responsive or not
- *NOTE: see Topics #2 and #3 for responses related to class scheduling and other issues specific to arts and academic education*

SUGGESTIONS

- Communicate that parent and student input is valued and respected by creating a climate where input is acknowledged and responses are open and reciprocal (give and take)
- Don’t necessarily need to add more channels; rather, need to ensure the consistent, responsive, accurate use of existing channels
- Make sure that information is communicated: consistently and comprehensively by using:
 - The same channels/methods each time for each type of information
 - As many channels/methods as possible to ensure penetration
 - The same point person for each type of info (to promote consistency)
- DSA can communicate respect and unleash potential by communicating more proactively and openly
 - Tell us sooner. Need to give families a chance to understand what is happening in advance so they can plan and so they can understand.
 - Tell us more. Need to help families understand a situation
 - Honest communications includes:
 - saying “I don’t know” and “Here is the challenge, help us solve it”
 - telling the truth, even if it is unpleasant
 - returning emails (even if you have to say you are still working on something)
 - delegating to people who have the time to return the message (if there is anyone)
 - There is a lot of unnecessary tension caused when questions:
 - are met with silence or defensiveness and.
 - no details or context are offered.

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- None of this is meaningful unless there is some kind of formal accountability mechanism that can track whether DSA is fulfilling its communications commitments.
- Recommendations that the DSA Principal, help to “reset” the communications with DSA parents and students by:
 - Setting up a more deeply promoted public presentation
 - Making a “State of the School” presentation that can be updated in the same format at intervals (quarterly or annually)

Re: Internet E-Mail and Web Sites as Communications Media

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What is Working

- Internet communications work very well for our family
- Like the BLOG, E-mail, IC and Newsletter
- As long as it is accurate, the school calendar is very helpful
- New website is cleaner and more useful

What Need Work

- Not all families have computers or regular access to the Internet
- The DSA web site has areas that are “missing” information (no specifics)

SUGGESTIONS

- Find out which families do not have regular access to the Internet (set up a distribution system for paper newsletters, etc)
- Re: using the Internet even more effectively:
 - Make sure the distribution lists are working for at least one member of each family
 - Publish more FAQ’s (Frequently Asked Questions) Segments
- Use more google groups like the one that is currently being hosted by a DSA parent
 - Will promote transparency by allowing everyone to participate and to see all of the communications about issues
 - Do not restrict subject matter or at least make sure there is at least one group to handle every topic
 - Limit censorship by the moderator
 - Expand on the CSC group to address “non-CSC” issues and get responses from the DSA Administration
 -
- Re: improvements for the DSA web site
 - Appoint a parent, teacher, student and administrative reader to “shop” the site and identify areas with missing, outdated or incorrect info
- Use skilled parent volunteers to help as back up, if there are staff shortages on this

Re: General Communications “Tools”

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What is Working

- New “Roles and Responsibilities” page, which is under the ‘Administration’ tab on the DSA web site, is a helpful start

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- There are a lot more e-mails coming out of DSA, which indicates an effort to make more info available

What Needs Work

- Families often report that they are confused about:
 - where to take specific concerns or ideas
 - how decisions are made
 - where to seek specific information
- DSA suffers from an issue that is typical of many schools --- new parents and even some parents with longer tenure feeling disconnected, “out of the loop”
- Announcements for meetings, administrative requirements and other activities and opportunities are often late and do not offer enough details
- Current communications are conducted in way that seems to assume everyone looks at their email several times each day
-
- *NOTE: see Topics #2 and #3 for responses related to class scheduling and other issues specific to arts and academic education*

SUGGESTIONS

General

- Go back to daily announcements; fix the PA system so daily announcements can be effective
- If daily announcements are going to be delivered by major teachers, then make sure they do it
- Hire friendly office staff and give them the support they need to stay friendly

Timelier Announcements and Invitations

- Allow enough time for the message to “get through” to the families and to give them enough advance notice to plan and respond
- Put announcements into newsletters **way in advance** so that families have time to plan.
- Make newsletter items more timely

References

- Publish Parent “Survival” Guides (there were suggestions to publish both a new parent guide and a general parent guide):]
- Add more details to the Calendar and/or links to the agendas and other details
- At the first of each month, publish a list that notifies people about ALL meetings for that month. This should be e-mailed as well as posted on the doors , etc
- Set up a regular “sandwich board” in the foyer and set a habit of posting important events way ahead of time, as well as flashy reminders of close deadlines or events
- Publish a DSA “organizational chart: that”
 - Includes staff and non-staff groups and committees and
 - illustrates: how different types of decisions get made and identifies the final decision maker

Face to Face Communications

- Deploy more direct, hands-on, in-person communication methods,
 - Find ways to make administrators more known and visible to parents
 - Ensure administrators attend back to school night and get introduced
 - Put together a new parent forum (once each month for the first quarter, or something)

Newsletters

- Publish on a more consistent schedule
- Proactively solicit input from each major each issue

Re: Forums to Engage Parents and Students

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(e.g., Community Meetings, Parent Constituency Meetings, etc)

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

SUGGESTIONS

- Use nametags at meetings with parents
- Hold school-wide meetings monthly, on a regular day each month (e.g., third ____ of the month)
- Proactively encourage/recruit students to participate in Community Meetings and other forums
- Go beyond the requirements or accepted limitations of CSC roles and use CSC or other structures to promote open communication in the spirit of the District's (DPS) parental involvement policy
- Have a community meeting that is not pre-planned with a forum where parents can express concerns regarding issues that they are personally affected by

Re: Specific Roles for PTSO and CSC*****

**** PTSO stands for Parent Student Teacher Organization (see DSA website for more info)**

***** CSC stands for Collaborative School Committee (see DSA website for more info)**

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What is Working

- PTSO is adding reps from every arts parent group

What Needs Work

- Families are often confused about where to take specific concerns or ideas
- Families still tend to form their sense of community solely around their student's arts discipline, rather than also forming community connections with the school at large

SUGGESTIONS

- Find ways to make sure that people know the communications roles and responsibilities for each-school group like PTSO and CSC
- Make sure there is some meaningful way to move info through to students and teachers (e.g., liaisons or briefings to related groups that already have regular meetings)

Specific to PTSO

- Add even more school-wide social/community events to help people feel connected to the DSA community

Specific to CSC

- Expand on the CSC website to address "non-CSC" issues and get responses from the DSA Administration
- *(see related comments above, under the "Forums" topic)*

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QUESTION #2: WHAT SERVICES DO YOU AND YOUR STUDENT NEED TO SUPPORT THE PATH TO GRADUATION? I.E. REQUIREMENTS, INTERNSHIPS, COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

General

QUESTIONS

- Is it true that DSA is an “at risk” school in terms of high risk behaviors and psychological stress among students?

COMMENTS

- Whatever the solutions are, families must have some kind of recourse for families and accountability for DSA or DPS if a student ends up not having any reasonable way to attend DSA **and** fulfill their graduation requirements, whether it is due to a lack of resources (teaching or counseling), a lack of information, a use of bad information or a lack of competent assistance

SUGGESTIONS

- Keep students engaged in their own planning process. Suggestions included:
 - Setting up an individualized plan supported by a counselor or one of the student’s primary teachers as the advisor
 - Using Student-led Conferences that are supported by the teacher: (as advisor) where the student updates their parents and advisor on their progress and issues
- Hold more open informational meetings earlier in the students HS career for **both** parents **and** students

Re: HS Course Offerings

QUESTIONS

- Why does DSA offer **any** HS courses (whether they are taught by DSA faculty or CU) that do NOT meet: :
 - state or DPS graduation requirements or
 - the expectations of competitive colleges.

Re: Access to Sufficient Counseling Resources

QUESTIONS

Counseling Staff Time & Capacity

- How is DSA managing the shortage of counseling resources this year? What is the plan for subsequent years?
- How will DSA ensure that counselors have enough time to schedule meetings, keep those meetings and participate in those meetings for a meaningful amount of time?
- How will DSA ensure that counselors have the authority they need to help and the time to communicate with students whose futures rest in these decisions?

Counseling resources for 8th, 9th and 10th graders

- Where can parents learn more about the GAP process? It is not clear on what is coming home.
- How will DSA ensure that 8th, 9th and 10th graders have more proactive access to and engagement by counselors (earlier in their HS careers than the current set up emphasizes)

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COMMENTS

What is Working

- Strongly support current emphasis on starting to work with students while they are still in MS

What Needs Work

- Current system is not proactive enough about keeping parents in the loop re: planning
- Currently, our family is having trouble accessing counseling staff members that are both knowledgeable about issues affecting DSA students and accessible (because the more experienced counselor can only be accessed by families with last names in a certain part of the alphabet).

SUGGESTIONS

- Provide parents with a link to details about the GAP program

- Ensure that there are enough knowledgeable staff resources to follow up with/track progress, especially with students during their first two years (9th and 10th)
- Cross train older students (Jrs & Srs) to earn community service credit while providing basic peer-to-peer mentoring for younger students, starting in 8th grade
- Put a school psychologist on staff. A qualified person needs to be available to students full time.
- *(see related suggestions in next topic)*

Re: Correct, Consistent, Accessible Information

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What is Working

- Our family has been very satisfied with the support we received from the DSA counselor

What Needs Work

- Annual HS class planning (and by extension graduation planning) is currently encumbered because families need to get:
 - more direct control of the information they need (see next topic) and
 - more clarity about where the buck stops when there is conflicting info from different members of the DSA staff and/or DSA and DPS staff..
- re: graduation requirements
 - DSA and DPS websites and info sometimes offer conflicting information. So which source (DSA? or DPS?) should families use as the definitive source for info on requirements,?
 - Neither the DSA nor the DPS websites currently provide information that differentiates the requirements that apply to older HS students and the “new” graduation requirements that apply to younger HS students. Please specify a reliable source for each kind type of list..
- re: class scheduling in the Fall
 - Please clarify whether there is some reason that DSA cannot provide families with the same kind of class schedule that counselors are working with? Is there some way for parents to help address the related challenges, so that we can get access to such a schedule?

SUGGESTIONS

- Set up a more formal process for students to follow

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- Publish a handbook/guidebook for students to use throughout their high school career (one for students who qualify under the old requirements and one for students that qualify under the new requirements)
- Publish an annual DSA course catalogue with:
 - a brief paragraph outlining objectives and content of each required or elective course that will be offered that year.
 - a course schedule, so that students can coordinate with counselors more proactively in resolving scheduling conflicts
- Whatever the answers are to all of the graduation issues, make sure there is a complete and centralized set of correct information, forms, manuals, etc. These materials could be set up:
 - “Virtually” a one central link (e.g., a page of the DSA web site) and
 - Physically, as a set of printouts located in the counseling office

Re: HS Classes that are “Rotated”

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What Needs Work

- The current system of rotating certain classes in alternating years is not working very well, because:
 - Some of the rotations are arbitrarily changed without any regard for the impact that this change will have on students that have been planning two to three years ahead so that they would be able to take the class on its previously announced rotation
 - Even when rotated classes are offered, the access is often very limited, again without regard for the impact on students (as above)
 - Functionally this I more like a lottery and is having serious effects on some students transcripts and college plans

SUGGESTIONS

- At a minimum, DSA needs a much more disciplined approach in managing rotated classes so that there is consistency, predictability and transparent information for students
- Optimally, DSA would seek means to expand access to these transcript-critical assets

Re: CU Succeeds Classes

QUESTIONS

- How will DSA help to ensure that student schedules can be set up in a way that will allow them to attend CU Succeeds classes, while also taking necessary DSA classes?
- Which source (DSA? or DPS? or CU?) should we use at the definitive source for info on CU Succeeds courses? (since there is frequently substantial conflict between info coming from each of these sources)

Re: Alternatives to CU Succeeds Classes

- Are there alternatives that would work better than the CU Succeeds solution? If so, what are the challenges in using these alternatives and could they be addressed?

Re: Service Learning, Internships and other Experiences to Help Students Deepen their Resumes

QUESTIONS

Service Learning and Internships

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- What is DSA's history in terms of developing and coordinating service learning and internships for credit?
- Is it true DSA reduced the activities that qualify for community service credits? If so, why?
- What does currently qualify for community service? Can these options be expanded?
- How does DSA currently allocate resources/staff to find and coordinate HS internships and service learning opportunities?

Arts Or Academic Travel

- Is it true that DSA now forbids or discourages arts department trips or out of town performances? If so, why?

COMMENTS

- Need more freedom for students to participate in arts-related activities off-site without arbitrary penalties in academic performance

SUGGESTIONS

Service Learning and Internships

- Use parent volunteers to help identify and coordinate HS internships and service learning opportunities for all grades
- Set up partnerships in the community
 - Foster ties and set up on-going internship openings with related businesses, such as local fashion houses, architect firms, arts groups, etc
 - Example: set up long term partnerships with non-profits so that 9th graders know they have an avenue to community service

Arts Or Academic Travel

- Encourage and support arts and academic travel

Other Types of Experiences

- Increase the number of extra-curricular clubs available
- Reassess penalties that currently apply in situations where students miss classes, etc in order to participate in arts-related activities

Re: DSA Arts-Endorsed Diplomas

QUESTIONS

- Some families are still confused about the status of this option. What is the status of this option? If this option is still available: What is the same? What has changed?

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QUESTION #3: HOW DOES THE CURRICULUM SUPPORT STUDENT'S ACADEMIC NEEDS WHILE MAINTAINING THEIR ART MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES?

General

COMMENTS

What is Working

- What is in place is supporting many students extremely well
- What is in place works for our family.. My child seems to be doing great
- We have basically been satisfied with what is offered
- If students cannot meet graduation requirements or the expectations of competitive colleges, then they will seek other academic opportunities
- Not an issue – they are separate and should be

What Needs Work

- DSA has drifted from its emphasis two years ago which supported a college-prep oriented academic curriculum
- Academics should be the priority
 - Need more rigorous academic MS and HS curriculum
 - Recent changes in the GPA requirement has diminished DSA's academic rigor
- Arts education is variable and academics are poor
- We need to reconsider the historical pattern of penalizing students (through grades??) for pursuing activities off-site that can enhance preparation for an arts related career, but may conflict with scheduled DSA classroom activities

SUGGESTIONS

- Find a way to add resources so that students can have access to **all** levels of academic class.
- Add foreign language classes
- Redesign the approach to off-site activities, give students more freedom to participate in arts-related activities off-site without arbitrary penalties in academic performance

Re: Class Size

COMMENTS

What Needs Work

- Concern that class size is creeping up
- New schedule has increased class size for both academics and arts

Re: Math Curriculum

COMMENTS

What Is Working

- It is important to continued efforts to assess and monitor math curriculum; continue tracking related issues and progress

What Needs Work

- the IMP curriculum is not concrete and rigorous enough
- Unsatisfactory options for 6th grade students that are already proficient in 6th grade math

SUGGESTIONS

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- Math “acceleration” is essential to attract the many GT & HGTR students that would be attracted to DSA

Re: Schedule Design

COMMENTS

What Is Working

- Some parents report that the new schedule is working

What Needs Work

- Some parents report that the schedule is not working and needs to be revisited:
 - Now that we can compare the block schedule with the current schedule, it is important for DSA to acknowledge the pedagogical advantages of the block schedule for a school, like DSA, that emphasizes both academics and arts education
- Other parents report that it is challenging, but too early to tell

Re: Special Education (SPED)

Note, 11/10/2008: Comments for this topic were very detailed. To ensure the integrity of the summary, this work will be completed after the initial list is published. .

Re: Communications between Parents, Students and Teachers

SUGGESTIONS

- Redesign the approach to “parent-teacher” conferences by setting it up as a student-led conferences supported by the teacher: (as advisor). The student would make a presentation to the teacher and the parents about their plan, progress and issues, then the three would check in on related issues.

SPECIAL SECTION

Following are questions, comments and suggestions that were submitted as part of the next question, Question #4, regarding student recruiting and retention. However, these items have been moved here, at the end of the section for Question #3, because they share so many of the same points and themes.

Re: Academic Education as It Relates to Recruiting and Retaining Students and their Families

QUESTIONS

- Empirically, are DSA academically competitive or not? What are the statistics and the multi-year trends for GPA? College level proficiencies? Graduation rates? College acceptance? Post-secondary education levels? Other measures?

COMMENTS

What’s Working

- academics have improved overall during the last six years
- appreciate the way that many teachers incorporate arts into their academic curriculum
- the academics at DSA are already challenging enough

What Needs Work

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- the new schedule and new teacher allocation policies has resulted in **much** larger classes overall
- Need to increase academic expectations
- If students cannot meet graduation requirements or the expectations of competitive colleges, then they will seek other academic opportunities
- AP classes are sub-standard and many do not interest competitive colleges
- Even with the new schedule, there is still a high degree of uncertainty whether Jrs and Srs will be able to get into courses they need before they graduate. Need better careful planning, scheduling,. Need better communication about what is available (ahead of time) and why students are being shut out..

SUGGESTIONS

Smaller Classes (mentioned frequently)

- Rethink the way that the teacher allocation is managed – focus on total # of students per teacher versus total number of class sessions per teacher
- Reconsider the block schedule approach
- Need to reinstate academic standards as a requirement for staying at DSA
- Academics need to be strong and shaped to relate to the arts majors

Electives

Groupings of suggestions that touched on similar topics:

- Overhaul the academic electives to:
 - provide better, more predictable, more reliable access to necessary courses
 - compete better with other high schools
- Add more AP classes; improve AP classes

Academic Rigor

Groupings of suggestions that touched on similar topics:

- More complete compliment of science classes
- More access to accelerated math; more access to all levels of all academic classes
- Support for strong teachers; add stronger teachers; get of the way of strong teachers

Academics and the Arts

- Increase the degree to which arts is incorporated into academic curriculum
- Structure academics to compliment the arts majors

Re: Arts Education as It Relates to Recruiting and Retaining Students and their Families

QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges that are preventing DSA from allowing students to “minor” in another art form?
- What are the challenges that prevented DSA from having the all-school musical this year?

COMMENTS

What’s Working

- DSA is still helping kids learn important life skills through the arts
- DSA is still producing professional artists in every field

What Needs Work

- Hard to compete with East and other high schools when DSA students cannot “minor” or at least take extra curricular classes in other art forms
- Majors need access to different teachers; students stagnate, they cannot grow when they have the same teachers for a seven years in a row

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- Restrictions on auditions (only allowing audition for one major each year) and obstacles to changing majors can make it harder for some students to stay

SUGGESTIONS

- Need an Arts Principal
- Find a way to give students options:
 - for taking classes in other art forms during or after school
 - for switching majors more easily; auditioning for more than one major.
- DSA would really stand out if we could ensure that there are more “cross-arts” (*cross majors?*) projects – like the all-school musical
- Ensure that all majors offer access to a variety of teachers over the years

QUESTION #4: WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ATTAIN AND SUSTAIN STUDENTS AT DSA?

Re: Build on DSA’s Unique Strengths

QUESTIONS

- What do the statistics for the last five years tell us about the enrollment and attrition rates at DSA? Up? Down? Steady?
- What kind of research has been completed to determine why students have been leaving DSA for other schools? Does it include asking exiting families directly? What are the findings,?

COMMENTS

What Is Working

- the exhibitions, performances and arts and academic awards do continue to distinguish DSA

What Needs Work

- Art is what makes DSA stand out – it weakens DSA’s competitive position to act like it does not matter that the new schedule is eroding some of the arts education.
- Over the last year there seems to be an attitude that arts education is an after thought and “in the way” of DSA’s true purpose as academic institution. The entire school is built on the premise that it does not have to be one or the other.
- Even with the new graduation requirements, DSA needs to find a way to ensure the quality for both academics and the arts.
- If students cannot meet graduation requirements or the expectations of competitive colleges, then they will seek other academic opportunities

SUGGESTIONS

- **DSA will never beat East, GW, etc if it tries to be them.**
- **Suggested ways to set DSA apart:**
 - Establish unique HS opportunities and/or special HS traditions
 - Celebrate both arts and academic achievements; keep a balanced
 - Communicate success regularly (e.g., SPF trends, AP scores, etc) -- help parents, students, others appreciate how and when DSA does excel

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- Offer a whole experience, a unique culture that nurtures and support each youth as **both** an artist and a student with trust, respect and mutuality
- Increase publicity, awareness of DSA around community (e.g., issue press releases for each performance, free tickets to neighborhood schools)

Re: Effective Engagement/'Courting' of DSA 8th Graders and Their Parents

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What's Working

- appreciate DSA's student workshops about HS and college planning

What Needs Work

- 8th graders do not seem to have any particular sense of connection with the HS side
- Per-conception that DSA can not compete with East needs to be challenged with facts
- Why should they stay? Art is what makes DSA stand out – it weakens DSA's competitive position to act like it does not matter that the new schedule creates challenges and erodes the effectiveness of some arts curriculum..

SUGGESTIONS

- Hold info meetings/workshops for both 8th grade students **and** parents
- Set up a pre-HS "shadowing" program, pairing 8th graders with HS "hosts"
- Cultivate traditions: that MS students can look forward too; that help them "invest" in being at DSA for HS, e.g.:
 - Pre-HS traditions that give 8th graders a sense of already belonging "upstairs"
 - Reinvent the way DSA prepares for and conducts 8th Gr Continuation
 - prep for that event all year
 - assign HS "mentors" (or something like that) who can "host" the 8th grader during the year and "stand" for the continuing 8th grader at the ceremony

Re: Effective Engagement/'Courting' of All DSA Students and Parents

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

DSA as a School of Choice

Summary of comments expressing concern that DSA has work to do to increase its competitiveness as students and parents consider their options:

General

- Ultimately, it is the parents that need to be "impressed". .

Cultural Competency

- Current school climate needs an increased sense of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance for:
 - Racial minorities
 - Students with learning differences; special education students

Communications and School Climate

- Both parents and students need to know/feel that they are more respected
- Parents need to know that there is an open, confident administration handling things. This is not currently apparent.

Impacts of the New Schedule

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- New schedule eliminated “access” time, which was one way that DSA students built community with each other and their teachers
- New schedule eliminated or limited free time during the day, that was time that many DSA students used to complete homework before an evening full of classes or performances

SUGGESTIONS

DSA as a School of Choice

- Ensure that DSA is a place where existing students **want** to stay
- Ensure that DSA is a place where student **can** stay, because they can meet academic needs

Cultural Competency

- Increased Inclusiveness Training; Diversity Training

Communications

- Improved communication flow between administration and parents and demonstrating that parent concerns are taken more seriously will help
- Adjectives used to characterize good communications from administration:
 - Respectful, mutually respectful
 - Open, honest, transparent,
 - Accountable; clarity and directness (*in relation to clarifying how decisions are really made and who makes them*)

School Climate

- Adjectives used to characterize a good climate:
 - respectful, tolerant
 - inviting, welcoming
- Shift the new emphasis on “safety” to a greater emphasis on student responsibility
- Find ways to reduce the ‘isolation’ of majors from each other; promote more cohesion/interaction

Impacts of the New Schedule

- Need to revisit and recover some of the block-schedule benefits that were lost to the new schedule

Creative Expression

- Ensure that students have the ability to explore creative expression and perform

Re: Effective Recruiting/“Courting” of Prospective Students and Parents

QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

What’s Working

- The new brochure is a good foundation
- The link within the web page’s main menu is a good move
- The on-line audition information for most majors is fairly detailed and helpful

What Needs Work

- Current approach to tours and recruiting is hurting our prospecting:
 - Current limits on the # of families that can tour are counter-productive
 - We risk giving people a bad impression when there are not enough staff or volunteers to stay on top of the tour scheduling, inquiries, etc
- Current approach to “shadowing” is hit-or-miss:
 - the “host” students are not prepared or trained to support a positive experience for the prospective student

Updated: 11/14/2008

DSA Parent Issues List

Questions, Comments and Suggestions

Recorded Nov. 3, 2008 – Present

- setting up a whole day schedule is too much
- the available times are too limited (need more days during the “rush” and need to provide more opportunities later in the year, so families can plan ahead)
- Still need to change the culture of DSA being an “elitist” school

SUGGESTIONS

- “Shop” other MS and HS competitors
- Rethink the whole approach to working with prospective families, treat it more like a business:
 - Target **both** students and parents
 - Train parent volunteers to:
 - follow up with families on the wait list, answer general questions, etc
 - coordinate more general info open houses
 - Train DSA students who will “host” prospective students
 - Take a more “open door” approach
 - Host informational open houses throughout year (use volunteer parents)
 - More access for visitation; expand the tour schedule (even a little)
 - More proactive communication about the application process
 - Simplify the audition process, make it more consistent from major to major
- Increase community outreach, e.g.:
 - free tickets to neighborhood schools, dance & theatre schools, etc
 - visiting performances at neighborhood schools, nursing homes, etc
 - increased visibility in community media, parent magazines, etc

See related content at the end of Question #3

Some of the questions, comments and suggestions that were submitted in response to this question (Question #4) focused on many of the same academic and arts education themes that were touched on under the previous question, Question #3.

To support a more cohesive summary, these items have been moved to a special section at the end of the Question #3 responses.

Updated: 11/14/2008