

MAKING WAVES AT DCS



DHS Student Leadership Class - Advocating for Change

Students present their solutions to DHS issues in hopes of facilitating change.

The Student Leadership class at Dexter High School has been listed in the course catalog for a long time, but this past fall is the first time it has been taught in several years. As the high school prepared for the move to a block schedule, administration asked teachers to identify elective courses they might be interested in teaching. DHS teacher Murphy Hansen immediately jumped at the chance to teach Student Leadership, a 1-semester elective course in the social studies department.

Students spent the first half of the semester discussing what leadership means through discussion of readings and videos. Hansen stressed the importance of knowing yourself in order to be a better leader, and led students in several exercises exploring their own identities. In small and large group discussions, the class reflected on how people's identities and experiences influence how they "show up" in spaces: how people present themselves and how others perceive them.

This class includes students in grades 9 through 12. Because of this, Hansen incorporated additional "team-building" activities to ensure students felt comfortable exploring difficult concepts, ideas, and dilemmas – the core of what it means to be a leader.

For their final assignment, students spent several weeks brainstorming, researching, and collaborating on issues they care about and would like to improve within DCS. This "authentic assessment" culminated in presenting their ideas to administration, in hopes of working with decision-makers to alleviate these problems. Poster boards featured group research and potential solutions for issues such as mental health, modifying the Friends of DCS Facebook group, sports team funding, senior parking spots, sports recognition, and hallway passing time between classes.

One group presented research on the congestion in and around the DHS parking lot before and after school. They contacted Washtenaw County Sheriff and DCS Resource Officer Gerrod Visel to present their findings and get his professional feedback on their proposed solutions. Officer Visel offered his advice and provided the team with contacts for further exploration. The group proposed two solutions, each with pros and cons: installing traffic lights at the intersection of Shield and Parker Roads and possibly at the entrance/exit by the baseball fields, or creating a right-hand slip lane at Shield and Parker.

Another group looked at perceived sexism at Dexter Schools. The group worked hard to focus on DCS, noting individuals can only control what is currently within their power to control;

sexism in society is a much bigger issue. Presenting selected anonymous survey results and testimony from students and staff, this group proposed that the administration address the issue by increasing staff training/education, conducting periodic surveys, and other measures.

When asked how they felt about their presentation, one group shared they felt heard and appreciated the administration listening to their concerns and solutions.

“This class has gone above and beyond my expectations,” Hansen shared. “These students really want to work side-by-side with the administration.”

Due to the positive feedback from this semester’s class, Hansen successfully lobbied for the class to be a full-year course in 2022-2023. A full year class, Hansen shared, “will give students more time to build community with each other, allowing them to be vulnerable,” which is vital to effectively delve into deep topics in order to affect change.

“Inspired leadership requires vulnerability: Do we have the courage to show up, be seen, take risks, ask for help, own our mistakes, learn from failure, lean into joy, and can we support the people around us in doing the same?”

- Brené Brown



