



Strategic Plan – 2014-2017

Adopted January 28, 2014

Methodology:

- The Board of Directors initiated process in January of 2013 with a visioning session to identify core activities of the organization and possible projects for the future.
- In January, the board completed its first self-assessment.
- In February and March of 2013, SAC MSW Intern Julia Cohen conducted interviews with four community members, two board members and a former staff person, using a script that probed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, current program quality, priorities and needs. (Interviewees included: retired Program Director Margaret Harner, Mark McWilliams (MPAS), Sherry Fernandez (WACA), Debbie Jackson (United Way), Jim Hawkins (board member and retired school administrator), Ruth Zweifler (board member and founder), and Pam Mish (WISD).
- In March of 2013, the board conducted a visioning session around the geographic scope of SAC services and policy work.
- In May of 2013, the board conducted a visioning session on prioritizing geographic expansion and the future of statewide technical assistance.
- In June, staff sent out a survey to about 80 school staff people who had worked with us on cases and to community agencies we had worked with. About 30 school staff members responded and 16 community agencies responded.
- In July of 2013, SAC E.D. conducted a board evaluation.
- By the spring of 2013, the staff finalized a draft mission statement and values statement to forward on to the board.
- By spring of 2013, the Policy Committee finalized a Work Plan.
- In September 2013, the board had an initial visioning session around parent support and engagement services.
- In November of 2013, the board participated in a retreat facilitated by Don Lopnow, professor at EMU SSW. The mission, values and goals were finalized at this meeting. Objectives and strategies were drafted.
- The Governance Committee finalized objectives and strategies to bring forward for final board approval.
- The Board adopted the strategic plan on Jan. 28, 2014.
- SAC is an active member of the Washtenaw Alliance for Children and Youth and participated in its shared outcome process.

Mission:

The Student Advocacy Center of Michigan works to assist our most vulnerable students stay in school, realize their rights to a quality public education and experience success.

Organizational Values:



- A robust public education is a human right and essential to a thriving democracy.
- The student's voice is essential in all endeavors.
- We work collaboratively with the student, family, school and community to best meet the needs of each student.
- We work to build the resources of the families we work with and empower them to make a difference for the student.

Core Services:

- Education advocacy (school discipline, special education, school enrollment, McKinney-Vento, civil rights, etc.)
- Education support (technical assistance, outreach, case management, tutoring, credit recovery, homebound education, transportation)
- Dropout prevention (Check and Connect model)
- Family support and engagement
- Policy advocacy

Populations Served:

- Our priority is low-income students at risk of dropping out of school. We are particularly concerned with populations who have historically struggled educationally, including those in foster care, those who are homeless, mentally ill, those with a disability and those facing school exclusion.
- Washtenaw, Jackson and Wayne counties.
- Families in counties around the state needing technical assistance by phone.

Organizational Strengths

- Passionate, committed, creative staff and interns willing to go the extra mile.
- Education advocacy is a known strength. We are the go-to agency to call for education advocacy and many partners reach out to us for support in this area.
- We are one of the only organizations providing general education advocacy in the state.
- SAC's work with court-involved youth (both delinquent and abuse/neglect) was recognized as cutting edge by the Ford Foundation, which provided five years of funding. The Department of Human Services has been so impressed with SAC's work with court-involved youth that they chose to decline education planners from the state and use local funds to contract with SAC since 2007. Staff have presented at national and state meetings, providing expertise to the Michigan Governor's Task Force on Permanency Planning for Youth Aging out of Foster Care. Moreover, the SAC model was one of the recommendations sent to the Michigan Legislature for implementation.
- SAC provides needed and meaningful support to parents.
- Have a "do-what-it-takes" attitude to engage and support students and parents.
- We are tackling systemic, important problems with lifelong consequences (for instance, high school dropout).



- Our credit recovery program for foster youth and other at-risk teens has garnered support from Speckherd-Knight and Kiwanis, and been praised by Department of Human Services.
- Ypsilanti Community Services has expressed gratitude for our partnerships, including Check and Connect and a contract to provide homebound education.
- History of meaningful and unique policy contributions that highlight student voice (such as Nowhere to Go).
- Executive Director is an active member in the Washtenaw Alliance for Children and Youth and actively cultivates and values community partnerships. Partnered with Washtenaw Area Council for Children to share accountant.

Organizational Weaknesses

- Staffing capacity (interns must field calls, no admin support, executive director wearing many hats).
- Grants do not cover expenses.
- Fundraising efforts have been historically inconsistent and there remains inadequate capacity for fundraising.
- No funding for statewide technical assistance.

Threats

- Concerns that other programs could take away from core work of education advocacy.
- Over-committing ourselves.
- Difficult to measure success of advocacy, both on the macro and micro level.
- Lack of understanding about what we do and how we do it.
- Unstable funding.
- Challenging to be a service provider in different domains (education and abuse and neglect).
- Staff turnover because funding often only allows for part-time status vs. full-time.

Opportunities:

- Wayne County should be a priority for geographic expansion, based on funding.
- Expanding fee-based advocacy?
- Restorative Practices are being increasingly recognized. SAC E.D. has been trained in RP, is advocating for its use in different forums, and is actively seeking partnerships to promote it further.
- Michigan School-Justice Summit follow-up work and responding to identified needs such as truancy, the education of youth involved in juvenile justice system, etc.
- Work with foster youth in Wayne County and partnering with Wayne State University.
- Dignity In Schools' national movement.
- YOUTH VOICE expansion into Ypsilanti.
- Statewide technical support for homeless families?



- Training of parents and partnering with agencies such as SOS Community Services.

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Goal 1: Provide education advocacy and support services for the highest needs students and families in order to improve educational success and high school graduation and decrease school dropout.

Objectives	Activities/Strategies	Outcome Measures	Resources Needed & Responsible Person(s)
<p>1. Target limited resources to strategic, priority populations and advocacy case types that promote high school graduation and address unmet community needs.</p>	<p>a) Survey stakeholders (including parents and youth). b) Participate in collaborative bodies. c) Review research on indicators for graduation and school dropout. d) Based on needs assessment, staff will recommend priority populations and case selection criteria annually for board approval. e) Modify intake tools annually. f) Build partnerships with community agencies serving priority populations (such as Community Mental Health, DHS, MRS).</p>	<p>i. Annual needs assessment presented to board. ii. Staff recommendation to board. iii. Revised intake tools.</p>	<p>Staff</p>
<p>2. Provide academic support for students to promote high school graduation.</p>	<p>a) Provide direct instructional support when funding can be secured (credit recovery). b) Continue to explore the feasibility of serving as a contractor of homebound services. c) Maintain up-to-date resource guide. d) Pursue community partnerships to support students (Family Learning Institute, Washtenaw Literacy, 826Michigan).</p>	<p>i. Grant reports ii. Resource guide.</p>	<p>Staff</p>

<p>3. Provide support for parents and guardians to encourage school success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Listen to parent and guardian concerns, maintain regular communication, and provide written and oral information needed to empower parents to advocate for and support their own child. b) Provide transportation to school meetings whenever possible. c) Provide parent/guardian trainings annually through partnerships with DHS, ACLU, SOS, etc. d) Update and expand information on SAC Web site. e) Maintain updated resource guide with parent/family supports and connect families with resources such as Michigan Alliance for Families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Follow-up program surveys. ii. Executive Director reports outlining presentations provided. iii. SAC Web site. iv. Resource guide. 	<p>Staff</p>
<p>4. Continue to explore and invest in evidence-based practices to help determine new and innovative ways to improve educational success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Participate in collaborative bodies such as WACY and Jackson Cradle to Career). b) Meet at least annually with higher education partners, such as U-M, EMU and Wayne State in identifying best practices in advocacy and improving educational outcomes for high-risk youth. c) Expand Check and Connect and explore similar models for truancy. d) Expand Student Voice and student leadership opportunities. e) Continue exploring a partnership with the Dispute Resolution Center to promote restorative practices in the schools. f) Explore parent involvement models to improve educational success and seek funding to implement. g) Continue to refine evaluation tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Executive Director reports outlining community collaborative meetings. ii. Grant reports. 	<p>Staff</p>

<p>5. Invest in ongoing staff professional development in education law and policy, youth development and community resources.</p>	<p>a) Provide high-quality orientation and ongoing training on-site (at least six times a year). b) Promote training opportunities (WACY, CWI).</p>	<p>i. Training Tracker</p>	<p>Staff</p>
<p>6. Enhance relationships with school personnel and community partners to enhance effective advocacy.</p>	<p>a) The Governance Committee will develop an outreach plan annually. b) Offer staff presentations to partners such as the Department of Human Services, Community Mental Health, Juvenile Court and the Youth Center, MRS, homeless providers, and the Education Project. c) Seek feedback annually from partners on needs and ways to improve collaboration.</p>	<p>i. Governance Outreach plan. ii. Executive Director’s report outlining presentations. iii. Needs assessment results shared with board annually.</p>	<p>Governance Committee Staff</p>

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Goal 2: Advocate for change in education policy, both locally and on the state level, by working with students, their families and partner agencies using coordinated and strategic approaches.

Objectives	Activities/Strategies	Outcome Measures	Resources Needed & Responsible Person(s)
<p>1. Challenge the systemic problem of pushout in our nation's schools and advocate for the right of every child to a quality education and to be treated with dignity.</p>	<p>a) The Policy Committee will update strategic vision and work plan each year. b) SAC staff will participate in the national Dignity In Schools Coalition, including monthly calls. c) SAC staff and Policy Committee will convene the All Kids In School Coalition to implement a statewide DIS action plan. d) Staff shall analyze cases annually to identify trends, concerns and policy priorities. e) SAC staff and Policy Committee will develop materials and resources to share with stakeholders (Grim Tales, white papers). f) SAC staff and Policy Committee will share information about alternatives and best practices with policy makers, educators and legislators.</p>	<p>i. Policy Committee Work Plan. ii. Grant reports. iii. Annual staff report to Policy Committee.</p>	<p>Policy Committee Staff</p>
<p>2. Educate and involve students, families and partners on policies and best practices.</p>	<p>a) Engage SAC youth to have a voice in policies that impact them locally and statewide through our YOUTH VOICE project and meetings with policy makers. b) SAC will maintain a Parent Advocacy contact list and encourage parents to share their experiences with policymakers.</p>	<p>i. Grant reports.</p>	<p>Staff</p>

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Goal 3: Expand capacity and increase resources to meet the needs of our clients and sustain an effective and well-managed organization.

Objectives	Activities/Strategies	Outcome Measures	Resources Needed & Responsible Person(s)
1. Seek and compete for funding resources to serve priority populations and advocacy case types that promote high school graduation and address unmet community needs.	a) Develop criteria to evaluate grant opportunities. b) Explore strategic partnerships for potential funding with agencies such as DHS, CMH, juvenile justice and school districts.	i. Board-approved plan.	Staff Governance Committee
2. Increase unrestricted funds to ensure overhead is covered.	a) Fund Development Committee will develop annual work plan to increase event revenue and gifts from individual donors. b) Explore fee-based opportunities (fee-based advocacy, homebound contract, tutoring). c) Continue to seek out new and renewable funding opportunities that cover some overhead.	i. Fund Development Work Plan. ii. Fee-based contracts and Profit and Loss statements.	Fund Development Committee Staff
3. Expand the use of high-quality volunteers to support the organization.	a) Assess SAC's volunteer needs and develop volunteer plan that outlines recruitment, training and ongoing support needs. b) Expand Student Representation Project with U-M Law School and SSW. c) Expand the use of masters-level interns and expand the use of interns from other disciplines, allowing multiple staff to supervise.	i. Volunteer Plan. ii. Executive Director's reports.	Governance Committee Staff
4. Document and publicize program effectiveness.	a) Collaborate with partners such as WACY and Wayne State to continually improve	i. Executive Director's	Staff

	<p>evaluation tools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">b) Publish an annual report.c) Develop and maintain updated promotional materials (brochure).d) Continually update Web site.e) Pursue evaluations and endorsements through independent evaluators (such as Better Business Bureaus).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ii. Report.iii. Annual Report.iv. Brochure.v. Web site.At least one independent evaluation.	
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Goal 4: Expand geographic scope in a planned way based on factors such as proximity, funding and need.

Objectives	Activities/Strategies	Outcome Measures	Resources Needed & Responsible Person(s)
1. Seek out strategic partners in priority counties. 2. Pursue funding that will support our work in that targeted locales. 3. Develop a sustainable, high-quality response to calls from around the state.	a) Participate in collaborative bodies. b) Identify professional contacts. c) Build relationships with local agencies who have sites in priority counties. a) Identify start-up and sustainable funding sources, including matching fund opportunities. a) Collaborate with U-M Law School and SSW on Student Representation Project. b) Pursue funding for statewide work. c) Collaborate with statewide partners such as ACLU.	i. Executive Director's reports. ii. Grant reports.	Staff Executive Committee