



Strategic Plan 2017-2020

Our Process:

- *In January 2017, MSW intern conducted extensive research and wrote an environmental scan that looked into data and research on topics such as suspensions / expulsions, cradle to prison pipeline, 3rd grade reading bill, absenteeism, mental health, legal issues and much more. Deeper dives into specific geographic areas (such as Flint) was conducted as well.*
- *In the Winter of 2017, MSW interns conducted interviews with 22 people (13 internal personnel, 9 external personnel), using phone, in-person or email (based on the interviewee's preference and schedule). The interviews covered strengths and weaknesses of SAC's programs that they are involved in, and opportunities and threats to SAC in general.*
- *Interviews were used to create SWOT analyses for SAC in general and for each program.*
- *In March of 2017, the Board of Directors met to review the scan and SWOTs. An outside facilitator, Denise Tanguay, from the EMU School of Business, facilitated an Environmental Scan Pair-Up and Report Out (significant take-aways and questions), Overall Agency SWOT Activity and Program SWOT Gallery Walk.*
- *In April of 2017, the Governance Committee reviewed findings from the board meeting and drafted 4 strategic initiatives. Staff was given an opportunity to respond and provide feedback on target population and ongoing activities.*
- *In May of 2017, the Board affirmed the 4 strategic initiatives, target population and ongoing activities.*
- *In June and July of 2017, staff worked with D. Tanguay, three communications / marketing experts and the Governance Committee to develop action steps for each strategic initiative. Staff also worked internally to tweak the mission statement.*
- *In July of 2017, staff revised the mission statement.*
- *In late summer, the board and staff made minor edits to the strategic plan.*
- *In September 2017, the board approved the strategic plan.*

Mission:

The Student Advocacy Center of Michigan works collaboratively with underserved students, and their families, to stay in school, realize their rights to a quality public education, grow and experience success.

Vision:

Every student in school, supported and engaged.

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.

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- Using what we learn from each case, we work together with families and students to affect system-level changes.

Other Principles of Practice

1. Accessibility

SAC is committed to accessible services and being intentional about asking students and their families the best *way* to communicate with them, the best *time* to meet and the best *place* to meet. We are committed to ongoing reflection of our service model to make services as accessible as possible.

In alignment with SAC's mission, services offered are primarily for low-income families. In efforts to be inclusive and recognize other contributors to school disengagement, SAC offers affordable, fee-based services to those with middle and high incomes.

2. Diversity, Cultural Humility and Non-Discrimination

SAC celebrates diversity, has a deep commitment to cultural humility, and expressly prohibits discrimination in regard to race, color, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disAbility, religion, veteran status, height, weight, associational preference, or genetic information.

We believe in and commit to ongoing learning about other cultures, reducing power imbalances and working in partnership with those whose voices too often go unheard. SAC is committed to working, individually and as a team, on our own privilege, and identifying and addressing the ways racism, homophobia, ableism and other systemically oppressive behaviors show up within ourselves, our organization, and the systems that serve youth. It is imperative that we name that privilege as we work to dismantle the oppression we fight against.

SAC is committed to providing welcoming services and safe spaces. We continuously seek ways to communicate this commitment, particularly to people of color, gender non-conforming youth, youth with different abilities, returning citizens, undocumented citizens, and others who experience hate and rejection in our world.

- Staff: Student Advocacy Center of Michigan strives for diversity and cultural humility in its hiring, orientation, training, ongoing supervision, internal dialogue, and everyday practices.
- Students and Families: We are committed to fostering a reflective and evaluative environment in which all cultures and individuals are valued, respected and continuously learned from.

3. Commitment to Restorative Practices

SAC is committed to promoting and using restorative practices in its work with students, parents, school staff, community members, and fellow staff members. This includes using both

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informal and formal processes to proactively build relationships and a sense of community, to prevent conflict and wrongdoing, to problem-solve, and to repair harm when wrongdoing has occurred.

4. Commitment to Trauma-Informed Practices

SAC always strives to be trauma-informed in its work with its staff, board, volunteers and families.

Our core trauma – informed beliefs include:

- We believe everyone has the responsibility to help and no one has the right to hurt another, physically or verbally.
- We believe in recognizing and developing the strengths of all students.
- We believe that relational responses are more productive in minimizing challenging behaviors, and improving learning, than are behavioral responses.
- We believe problems are solvable opportunities that facilitate learning.
- We sustain hope and believe healing is possible.

Our commitment to trauma-informed practice manifest in many ways:

- Being intentional and focused on self-care.
- Encouraging colleagues to stay committed to self-care, supporting colleagues in processing emotions, and respecting boundaries developed to promote self-care.
- Taking time to understand the needs being communicated by behavior.
- Being sensitive to possible triggers, such as loud voices, physical touch, transitions.
- Supporting youth and colleagues in creating their own safety and wellness plans.
- Learning, modeling and teaching new coping strategies.

5. Culture of Philanthropy

- We view fundraising as a shared responsibility and opportunity to match the passions and interests of people in the community to the needs we see each day in our work.
- We act as ambassadors for Student Advocacy Center, sharing our story, impact and need, while maintaining client confidentiality.
- We promote philanthropy and seek out opportunities to support SAC's mission.

Target Population:

We prioritize low-income students and families experiencing homelessness, foster care, abuse/neglect, trauma, mental illness and other disabilities, harsh school discipline and/or criminal justice involvement. We are particularly committed to populations who are underserved and whose voices too often go unheard.

Ongoing Activities

- Education Advocacy and Support (including volunteer tutors for out of school youth)
- Student Rights Project (collaboration with University of Michigan students from Law School, School of Social Work and School of Education to provide volunteer school discipline advocacy)
- Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan (SAC volunteers, including lawyers, community members and Michigan State University students, who provide school discipline advocacy)

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- Student Rights Helpline (statewide)
- Check and Connect (evidence-based mentoring)
- Youth Action Michigan (youth organizing and leadership)
- Bridges to School (in-home support for families with elementary students who are chronically absent)
- Collaborative participation in bodies such as School Justice Partnership teams
- Outreach
- Support for systems changes in schools and communities, including trainings for schools, community partners, parents and students
- High-quality professional development

Strategic Initiatives and Action Steps

Capacity Building Initiatives

1. Develop and improve SAC's brand / marketing / message, building awareness of new laws and our unique mission and strengths.

History:

Despite SAC's long history, we remain largely unknown and misunderstood. While we have no problem reaching clients, we struggle to get our message to new donors. Board members sometimes struggle with how to describe the work we do. Feedback we've received is that our "brand" or "look" is historic / dated and doesn't accurately reflect the power and seriousness of the work we do. Our tagline talks about all students, but our work is really about those who fall through the cracks.

Action Steps

- Revamp rack card to include stats (infographic) and successes (versus mission).
- Create story cards that highlight Most Significant Change Stories.
- Develop a marketing plan.
 - Engage outside expertise to better understand target donors (Who are they? What do they care about? What are their perception of SAC, what problem do we solve for them, what inspires them to donate, how do they want to learn about us?), what messages resonant with donors, what is the best way to describe our work, new ways to reach new donors (media, external signature events). Focus groups / surveys.
 - Engage outside expertise to analyze and develop a brand strategy, including recommendations for new logo, tagline and "look" (Web site).
 - Revise existing materials and develop new marketing tools.
- Develop an ongoing video strategy (including budget and ways to support).
- Secure additional real photos for Web site
 - Engage clients for feedback first.

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- Increase media engagement.
 - Engage Fund Development Committee in ongoing media strategy development and include updates in ED report to board.
- Explore possibility of physical signage.

2. Increase the resources and time spent on more relationship- and data-driven fundraising in order to better meet the needs of our clients and sustain an effective and well-managed organization.

**Metric: increased time spent fundraising and increased dollars raised
annual fund development report with metrics**

History:

SAC has historically spent very little on fundraising. In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, we spent only 1% of our budget on fundraising. Yet, we continue to be overwhelmed with requests for help. Our statewide helpline, our student needs fund in particular completely rely on private dollars, but all of our programs need a mix of funding to be sustainable and successful.

- Reorganize duties and responsibilities to provide added time for fundraising for Peri and Danielle.
- Support board members to cultivate first-time and existing donors.
- Add an annual storytelling event in Detroit (with sponsors) and smaller, “friendraising” events.
- Increase engagement of fund development committee (more meetings, increased membership).
- Create a donor analysis tool, and collect and report donor data (i.e. number of overall donors, major donors, lapsed donors) to the board.
- Increase contacts with donors.

Programmatic Strategic Initiatives

3. Develop an effective administrative, staffing and budget plan to meet current needs and develop a sustainable growth business plan.

History:

SAC has grown quickly over the last 5 years from only 4 full-time staff and some interns in two offices in 2012 to nearly 9 FTE and a team of volunteer advocates working in three offices in 2017 with more growth expected. This growth strained the administrative structure of the agency. An administrative and outreach associate was hired in July of 2015, but staff still struggle to keep up with the demands of grant writing, evaluation, fundraising, program supervision (and clients). We have been asked to expand to new areas, but how do we do that in sustainable ways that do not burn out existing staff?



- Have key staff complete task log with time spent on different activity categories (fundraising, program support, evaluation, billing, supervision) and list of ongoing activities they need more time and resources to complete with estimated hours needed.
 - Metric: Task log
- Facilitate a series of one-on-one meetings with key staff to review findings. Develop a consensus on priorities and potential time reallocations.
 - Metric: time reallocations
- Facilitate a meeting with key staff and board members to review findings and determine high-need areas to develop an administrative and staffing plan for the next 3 years.
 - Metric: administrative and staffing plan due January 2018
- Work with accountant to develop a projected 3-year budget that supports strategic initiatives and priorities.
 - Metric: 3-year budget plan
- Executive Director will meet with at least 3 statewide or regional organizations about their structure and growth strategy (historical and ongoing structure, how and why did they expand, what administrative and funding support was needed, internal communication strategy, how was this sustained) (Unified, ARC, Legal Aid, Childcare Network, Orchard's)
 - Metric: ED report on lessons learned
- Facilitate a discussion with Executive Committee and key staff on findings relative to potential expansion (carry over to next strategic planning session for 2020).
 - Statewide association of education advocates (volunteer or other 501(c)3s)
 - Independent franchise model
 - Opening SAC offices in other locations

4. Develop an integrated model and expanded capacity for working with students in early grades (ages 3-3rd grade), addressing issues such as new funding sources, staff professional development, collaborative work, new partners, and new advocacy and supportive services techniques.

Metric: Integrated Model due date not to exceed 24 months

Periodic Metric Progress: number of administrators and professionals met; number of meetings with Success by Six; staff development activities, partners identified

History:

Increasingly more researchers and leaders are recognizing the problem of suspension and expulsion in general, particularly in the early grades. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education have issued a statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings, calling on states to "prevent, severely reduce, and ultimately eliminate expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings." Many of our partners through the Dignity In Schools Campaign have led successful campaigns to ban early childhood suspensions, efforts that are typically led by parent organizers. SAC has been seeing more and more referrals for younger students. At the same time, a new



state law, often referred to as the “Third Grade Reading Law,” requires mandated retention of third grade students based on a single assessment (beginning with the kindergarten class starting the 2017-2018 school year). SAC has worked with this population for many years, but is still not known for that work and hasn’t spent time articulating how our work may look different with this age group.

- Identify administrators and professionals in this target group (public preschools, special education staff, nonprofits) to build relationships with.
- Meet with Success by Six staff and other identified key partners to identify needs, gaps in services, and ways SAC can uniquely contribute.
- Identify 2-3 professionals to work with developing an integrated model (addressing issues such as parent engagement, staff expertise)
- Identify and apply to potential funding sources to focus on this age group.
- Identify partners who can assist in professional development on topics such as research-based reading interventions, childhood development, parent engagement, early intervention (special education), etc.
- Review advocacy tools and adapt for younger students as needed.
- Assess staffing needs and allocation of time.