

# student rights PROJECT

## 2016 – 2017 Student Rights Project Annual Report

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## Introduction

Founded in 2013, The Student Rights Project (SRP) at the University of Michigan is an interdisciplinary student organization of Law, Social Work, and Education students advocating for K-12 students facing suspension and expulsion. In partnership with the Student Advocacy Center of Michigan, SRP trains University of Michigan graduate students to advocate for the rights of students across Southeast Michigan.

We provide a holistic model of representation that empowers youth and families throughout the disciplinary process, connects students with community support networks, and limits the use and negative consequences of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, SRP organizes and promotes activities designed to challenge institutional threats to educational opportunities for all Michigan children and raise awareness about the school-to-prison pipeline in our state.

This report provides an overview of the accomplishments of SRP in its fourth year (July 2016- June 2017), descriptions of organizational structure and operations, and recommendations to continue to improve practice.

## SRP 2016 – 2017 Highlights

This section provides a snapshot of SRP's year. For more details behind the numbers, see the sections below. During the 2016 – 2017 year, SRP had the following accomplishments:

- SRP added students from the University of Michigan's **School of Education** to our corps of advocates.
- SRP trained 52 advocates during the academic year.
- SRP took on **28 student advocacy cases** during the 2016 - 2017 year.
  - 19 (68%) of SRP cases had positive outcomes
  - 6 cases required MDR determinations (1 was successful).
  - 17 cases avoided long-term suspensions.
- SRP began a new advocate team structure:
  - Each team consisted of students from each of the Law, Social Work, and Education Schools.
  - An SRP Board member advised each team.
- The SRP Board revised and approved an updated **Memorandum of Understanding** with the Student Advocacy Center.
- SRP began, but did not complete, revisions to the SRP Constitution.
- SRP continued its efforts to increase member engagement by hosting advocate meetings, social events, and supplemental trainings, to name a few.
- SRP continued the **School Code Project** and worked with 31 school districts across Southeast Michigan.
  - 8 SRP advocates were trained to review school codes. 5 were trained to write reports.

- SRP established a partnership with the Wayne County School Justice Partnership and is now an active member.
- 31 district-specific reports were generated following the completion of the Wayne County code review processes.
- SRP expanded its social media presence, launching a **new blog**, updating our **Facebook presence**, and joining **Twitter**.

## **SRP Organizational Leadership**

### **SRP Executive Board**

During the 2016 – 2017 year, the SRP Board expanded to include representatives from the School of Education. In full, the board was comprised of 10 members: 5 members from the University of Michigan Law School, 3 members from the School of Social Work, and 2 from the School of Education.

As in previous years, each Board member participated on one of the following committees: (a) Hearing, Logistics, and Support or (b) Education and Organizing. In addition, three Board members served as “Executive Chairs” who oversaw committees, served as liaisons between the Board and Michigan constituents (e.g., the Law, Education, and Social Work Schools), or managed special projects.

Finally, several major organizational changes shaped the work of the SRP Board in 2016 - 2017. First, one active Board member simultaneously served as an intern with the Student Advocacy Center, acting as a liaison between SAC and SRP. Moreover, the SRP Board, in partnership with SAC drafted a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

## **SRP Budget**

### **Total Budget for 2016 – 2017: \$3,007.73**

- **Nannes Challenge:** \$658.34
- **LSSS:** \$500
- **Office of Student Affairs:** \$500
- **Law School Pro Bono:** \$250
- **School of Social Work:** \$100
- **Co-Sponsors:** \$0
- **Donations:** \$75.96
- **Funds Remaining from 2015 – 2016:** \$1,423.43

### **Expenses:**

- **Advocate Events:** \$537.35
- **Community Events:** \$642.75
- **Advocate Travel Reimbursements:** \$498.45
- **Trainings:** \$486.16

- **Co-Sponsorships:** \$175.00
- **Other:** \$205.93

**Current Available Funds: \$533.11**

**Student Advocacy Center SRP Budget**

- **Salaries:** \$2960.16
- **Volunteer Appreciation:** \$215.00
- **Insurance:** \$492.00
- **Total:** \$3667.16

**Collaborations and Relationships**

**Relationships with Community Members and Organizations**

SRP recognizes the critical role of partnerships that facilitate and enhance our work.

In 2016-2017, SRP renewed its relationship with the Student Advocacy Center in Ypsilanti, MI. Moreover, SRP continued its official partnership with the Michigan Advocacy Program (MAP). The MOU outlines the substances of these official relationships with both SAC and MAP.

Additionally, in early 2016, two SRP board members developed a partnership with Dr. Paul Salah, Associate Superintendent of the Wayne Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) after he took interest in the work of the School Code Project. By Fall 2016, SRP became involved in a four-day workshop series for Wayne County school districts to be hosted by the Wayne County School Justice Partnership (SJP) in February-May 2017. SRP presented their findings of the Wayne County School Code Review to over 100 Wayne County superintendents, school administrators, teachers, and staff and connected with several school districts to support their code of conduct revisions. SRP is now a formal member of the Wayne SJP and SRP board members regularly attend committee meetings.

As a part of the School Code Project, SRP also partnered with the Student Advocacy Center, Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan, ACLU of Michigan, 482 Forward, Michigan State Conference NAACP, Street Democracy, Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service to send a letter to schools around the state to offer “significant expertise in code of conduct revisions, tools to implement new laws, professional development, youth leadership, and individual case problem-solving and advocacy.”

Additionally, SRP broadened its engagement with the University of Michigan community. SRP now has an active presence as a recognized student organization in the School of Education, and has representatives on relevant student organization councils within the School of Education.

## **Advocate Training Overview**

During the 2016 - 2017 year, SRP held two advocate training sessions during the fall and winter semesters respectively. Following previous training sessions, advocates were trained on the SRP model, positive youth development, special education, working with stakeholders, preparing a case strategy, administering a hearing, and legislative issues.

- Fall 2016: 39
- Winter 2017: 13
- Currently SRP has 73 total advocates.

2016 - 2017 SRP training sessions also considered feedback from previous (2015 - 2016) training sessions. Changes included the inclusion of an activity on social identity awareness, the addition of a mock case for interdisciplinary teams to work through, and an overview of new and forthcoming laws governing disciplinary processes in Michigan public schools.

Finally, in addition to training advocates on administering cases, SRP trained advocates on reviewing school codes for the School Code Project. School Code Project trainings, held separately from the Fall and Winter trainings discussed above, were voluntary and open to all SRP advocates.

## **Educational Events Overview**

During the 2016 - 2017 year, SRP held several internal (i.e., advocates only), Michigan community, and external community educational events.

### ***Internal Educational Events***

Internal educational events were designed to aid SRP advocates in their student advocacy work, as well as work on other SRP projects (e.g., the School Code Project). These events included:

#### **Advocate Meeting - November 30, 2016**

This advocate meeting was an introduction to negotiation and its application to advocacy cases. Through a simulated negotiation session with the aim to reach an agreement, advocates considered how to both advocate for students while also drawing on restorative practices.

#### **Special Education Training - March 14, 2017**

Board member **Tina Woods** led advocates in a training about special education, including defining and clarifying special education terms, practices, and legislation. Tina also guided advocates through the implications of this area of specialized practice so that

advocates could better support children and families. Some concepts discussed were MDRs, IEPs, IDEA, FAPE, and LRE. Elizabeth Bowker from SAC also joined this meeting.

### ***Michigan Community Events***

Michigan community events were designed with several goals in mind. First, these events, often featuring professors, staff, and organizers from across the University of Michigan, facilitated the transfer of pertinent information related to SRPs core values, missions, and goals. Additionally, these events were a way for SRP to engage with other student, community, and professional organizations, building bridges to help in our work. These events included:

#### **Reforming School Discipline (School-to-Prison Pipeline) Panel - September 28, 2016**

Invited panelists Rodd Monts (ACLU), Peri Stone-Palmquist (SAC), and Cory McElmeel (Skyline High School) spoke about the school to prison pipeline and reforming school discipline policies. The event was well-attended with 79 people in attendance, and the panelists offered a broad range of perspectives, spanning law, social work, and education.

#### **Critical Consciousness in Schools - February 13, 2017**

During this panel, Dr. Matthew Diemer of the School of Education introduced Critical Consciousness, a theoretical framework for understanding how students come to know and experience the world around them. Amy McLaughlin, a counselor at Ann Arbor Skyline High School, provided practical experiences regarding her work with students as they develop critical consciousness. In addition, students who work with Amy also attended and shared their experiences with discipline policies at their school.

#### **Special Education and the Flint Water Crisis - March 20, 2017**

This event, held in honor of Human Rights Week, was co-sponsored with the Human Rights Advocates. Panelists Kristin Totten of the ACLU of Michigan and Professor Debra Chopp discussed their work in Flint, Michigan, as well as special education law and the rights of children in Flint.

### **Advocacy Overview**

The number of cases that SRP handles has steadily increased since its founding, from 6, 13, and 23 in years 1, 2, and 3 respectively, to 28 in the 2016 - 2017 year. SRP took on cases in Waterford, Lake Shore, Madison, Cedar Springs, Farmington, Clinton, Lamphere, Taylor, Chippewa Valley, Dearborn Heights, Heartland, Walled Lake Northern, Detroit Public Schools, Brighton, Lincoln, Redford, Van Buren, South Lyons, and Ypsilanti schools. Moreover, SRP handled cases in charter schools, including New

Standard Academy, Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences, Woodland Park Academy, Arbor Preparatory Academy, and Way Academy.

Given the fact that our, families', and students' goals are often different and fluid in each case, describing the number of successes is no easy task. We define positive outcomes as those that align with the stated and documented goals of each family (e.g., voluntary withdrawal, avoiding long-term suspension, avoiding expulsion). Of the 28 cases SRP handled, 19 cases (68%) had positive outcomes. This was consistent with the 2015 - 2016 success rate. Finally, two cases were either taken back by SAC for greater support or referred to legal counsel.

38 (approximately 52%) unique SRP advocates participated in at least one SRP case during the 2016 - 2017 year. This was consistent with participation rates from previous years.

<b>Date of Intake</b>	<b>Age of Student</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>School District or Charter</b>	<b>Positive Outcome?</b>
<b>3/21/17</b>	15	9	F	Black	Arbor Preparatory High School (Charter)	Y
<b>3/7/17</b>	13	8	M	White	Brighton	Y
<b>10/14/16</b>	17	11	M	White	Cedar Springs	Y
<b>11/21/16</b>	12	7	F	White	Chippewa Valley	N
<b>11/8/16</b>	17	12	M	Multi-racial	Clinton	N
<b>1/20/17</b>	15	9	M	Black	Dearborn	Y
<b>12/2/16</b>	17	12	M	Multi-racial	Dearborn Heights	Y
<b>2/10/17</b>	7	2	F	Black	Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences (Charter)	Y
<b>2/12/17</b>	15	10	F	Black	Detroit Public Schools	SRP removed
<b>3/7/17</b>	13	7	M	Black	Detroit Public Schools	Y
<b>11/8/16</b>	16	11	F	Black	Farmington	Y
<b>12/2/16</b>	16	11	M	White	Heartland	SRP removed
<b>7/8/16</b>	16	12	M	White	Lake Shore	Y/N
<b>11/11/16</b>	16	11	M	White	Lamphere	N

<b>3/15/17</b>	12	7	M	White	Lincoln Consolidated	Y
<b>8/1/16</b>	18	11	M	White	Madison	Y
<b>10/28/16</b>	8	1	M	Black	New Standard (Charter)	Y
<b>4/10/17</b>	11	6	M	Black	Redford Union	Y
<b>5/15/17</b>	13	7	F	Multi-Racial	South Lyon	Y
<b>11/18/16</b>	14	9	M	Black	Taylor	N
<b>2/8/17</b>	14	7	M	Black/Multi-racial	Taylor	N
<b>4/11/17</b>			M	Black	Van Buren	Y
<b>1/13/17</b>	15	9	M	White	Walled Lake Northern	N
<b>4/28/16</b>	16	10	M	Black	Waterford	Y
<b>9/15/16</b>	16	11	M	Multi-racial	Waterford	Y
<b>5/9/17</b>	17	11	M	Black	Way Academy (Charter)	Y
<b>3/31/17</b>	13	7	F	Black	Woodland Park Academy (Charter)	Y
<b>1/11/17</b>	13	7	F	White	Ypsilanti Community Schools	Y

## **Special Projects Overview**

### **School Code Review Project**

SRP's primary special project during the 2016 – 2017 year was the School Code Project, a continued effort from previous years. The School Code Review Project was established as an internal tool for SRP advocate case teams to have more information about the school district they are working in. As a standard part of the advocacy process, advocates reference the code of conduct for a better understanding of the individual district guidelines for disciplinary procedures.

Each district was provided with a “score” based on the individual analysis of a 26-question rubric. Moreover, recommendations for each school district are determined based on trends from the aggregate data, which are questions SRP prioritizes based on our advocacy lens, with an eye towards maintaining a balance between the types of changes recommended (Guidelines for Suspensions and Expulsions; Access to Education During Suspension and Expulsion; and Due Process Protection in Suspensions and Expulsions).

### **Supplemental Instruction Project**

While in its early stages, SRP advocates and Board members became concerned with the often-lengthy “lost educational time” associated with long-term suspension and expulsion. Moreover, SRP advocates and Board members recognized the challenge of re-entry after long absences from school. Thus, SRP has begun to establish a network of tutors, instructors, and supplemental educational facilitators who might work with families to help students become reoriented in school.

## **Reflections: Challenges and Recommendations**

We learned a lot from this year. For example, we reworked our training to be more learner-centered by including a simulated case study. This case study had advocate trainees work through the case process by reading the intake, using various resources to learn more about the school, Michigan's policies, and any legal issues, and creating plans of action and next steps. In addition, we also learned to lean on each other more, both as Board members, and as members of an interdisciplinary organization. We strive as a Board to share the workload of running a student organization, managing case teams, and working with SAC, and actively reflect, individually and collectively, how best to achieve this.

The following are some challenges we faced throughout the year, followed by recommendations for how we might address them.

1. We have a robust roster of advocates, but not all advocates have are active to the same degree. One of our challenges is to make sure that advocates who have been trained serve on at least one case in some capacity. One recommendation to create a sense of connection between SRP's activities and the general advocate population is to offer quick updates about cases (without violating confidentiality), especially those for which suspension and expulsions are avoided.
2. Sharing materials with the Student Advocacy Center in a timely matter became a challenge when the Board's schedules intensified. One means to have more sustained communication with SAC around SRP's general activities is by sharing notes of our weekly Board meetings with SAC. We will also consider times throughout the term when SRP and SAC might meet, for example during SRP's weekly board meetings.
3. The turnaround times for hearing memos have not been consistent. We plan to promote a hearing memo turnaround time that generally falls within 10 days of the hearing. Though there has to be flexibility for graduate student schedules and additional commitments, we can encourage our case teams to wrap up more quickly, citing 10 days as the norm and encouraging communication and status updates when that 10 days cannot be met.
4. Recognizing that the School of Education is a recent partner in SRP's work, we would like to continue efforts to increase the involvement of education students.
5. To continue our events and trainings, we will consider avenues of funding from the School of Social Work and the School of Education.
6. Our focus on both legal and ethical practice in our advocacy work continued during the 2016 - 2017 year. In particular, our concerns around confidentiality (for students), unauthorized practice of law, and supervision remain critical to our work. We will consider drawing up a framing document moving forward.