

DRAFT CIVIC ACTION PLAN

School Name

I Have a Dream HS

School Issues Report:

Based on the input and priorities expressed by all students during Summit 1, our student body has decided to address the following issues:

1. Impersonal school/student feeling of being just a number (*School Issue*)
2. Bathrooms are unsanitary and need work (*School Issue*)
3. Local water and river quality are poor (*Local/Neighborhood/Community Issue*)
4. Improving the lives of those affected by war in Iraq and Afghanistan (*National/Global Issue*)

(A complete list of Issues that came up during the Student Summits is available on our school's student council web site.)

ISSUE 1: Impersonal school/student feeling of being just a number. (*School Issue*)

- **Action Recommendations:** Many excellent recommendations were made to help students feel more at home and get them involved in our school; however, we had to narrow the list to just a few that were manageable. Below are three recommendations. A complete list of the recommendations has been shared with the principal, faculty, and school board (and can also be found on our school's student council web site.) We hope to revisit some of those recommendations once we have completed items outlined below.
 - **Recommendation 1:** Track involvement in the activities/service projects and study the best way to make the activity and service programs engage every student and support learning while increasing the quantity and quality of activities and service projects and tailoring activities and service to allow the student to demonstrate to teachers what they are passionate about.
 - **Rationale:** Do we really know what students get out of certain service projects—has the school ever tracked it or tied the projects to demonstrating skills better learned *doing* than reading about in a book? We have a very limited number of service projects and school activities and clubs. This in turn limits the ability of many students to be able to engage in activities of their choice or to learn valuable lessons in a service project of their choice. In addition, many students are not allowed to demonstrate to teachers how skillful and engaged they are when they undertake an activity of their choice. Finally, many students simply decide not to become involved in an activity or a project—and consequently deprive themselves of being involved in a small group activity in which they can interact and be more comfortable being one of ten rather than one of a thousand.
 - **Research:** In recent conversations with the principal we have discovered that there has never been an organized effort to look at our activities and service opportunities to see how they support learning and student engagement—and how they might be improved to make that tie more explicit. Instead, these programs have been pieced together over the years—more a compilation over time than a result of an overall strategy to support learning. The National Association of Student Councils and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have compiled research on the benefits of activities to student engagement and to overall academic success (benefits such as improved attendance, decreased dropout rates, a higher level of engagement in school, etc. Visit www.nasc.us or www.principals.org.
 - **Response to Resistance:** Initial conversations with the principal have been positive. Several parents have also volunteered to work with the teachers to develop dozens of service projects from which the school or students can choose

that will supplement classroom lesson plans. The primary areas of concern that we will need to address are getting enough parents and teachers to sponsor activities; money to pay teachers for the extra time to sponsor activities; getting those students who don't now participate in activities or service to tell us which activities they would like to see started.

- **Action Steps:**
 - Survey other local schools to see what service programs and activities they have and how they engage all students
 - Review and analyze level of student involvement in activities/service.
 - Survey students to see what new activities they would like to see.
 - Research key components of programs that engage students and support learning and set up a system to make sure all activities/service include the components and are monitored regularly.
 - Recommend a system that will allow more teachers to see students in these environments—not just at sporting events.
- **Recommendation 2:** Organize regular social activities and opportunities for teachers and students to interact and teachers to show “their other sides”
 - **Rationale:** Students rarely get to see the majority of teachers as “human.” Teachers always have to play the role of disciplinarian or tough grader or the oppressive homework ogre. For students to be able to see teachers—and for teachers to be able to see students—in other roles would allow the two groups to see each other as human (and all that entails: making mistakes, enjoying something other than the square root of 8 billion).
 - **Research:** Informal conversations have shown that the principal and the faculty would be interested in pursuing some ideas. Other schools are doing...(TBD)
 - **Response to Resistance:** The one reservation that we did hear from the faculty was that it was still important to ensure that proper respect and climate be maintained. The activities proposed need to be designed to ensure that.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Survey the faculty to see the types of activities they would like to see
 - Survey the students to see the types of activities they would like to see
 - Survey local schools to see what social activities they have
 - Ask local businesses to support the social activities
 - Ask the parent organization to organize and host activities and to get parents to be the chaperones so that teachers don't have to.
- **Recommendation 3:** Institute advisory period
 - **Rationale:** Too many students are falling through the cracks. They get lost once they enter the school and no one is looking out for them which is causing all kinds of problems—kids dropping out, violence in the hallways, and some kids just stay to themselves totally which is scaring other students. Rather than throwing kids into a school of a thousand where they know no one, why not make the chances better for them to meet people by putting them into a small group of 15 where they have a better chance of not falling through the cracks and the adviser can be a mentor or help them to find a suitable mentor. This may be the only opportunity for some students to interact with others.
 - **Research:** Several other schools in the area have advisory periods and we can get a lot of information including how they run them and the topics from them. Typically the school administration and faculty develop the topics which makes some sense, but we think it also makes sense for students to be able to propose ideas and topics. The principal is hesitant but is open to discussing because he is a member of the National Association of Secondary School Principals

(www.principals.org) and he is familiar with some of the work they have done endorsing advisories as one way to “personalize” schools for students—fancy word for making schools a place where students want to learn and want to be.

- **Response to Resistance:** The principal and faculty hesitate to fully endorse the idea for a number of reasons: the entire schedule would have to be re-worked; it would be additional work for the faculty and staff; they don’t want it to become a glorified homeroom period. Good and engaging topics, with some design input from students, and a defined calendar with some measurable goals should help to address the latter challenge. As to the former challenges, all we can say is that we will work to overcome the logistical challenges. No one wants logistical challenges to be the reason that students continually fall through the cracks.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Get curriculum/calendar from other schools who have advisories
 - Obtain daily schedules from a dozen schools that have advisories to see how they fit them into the schedule
 - Survey the students from other schools who have advisories to see what they like/don’t like and how they could be better
 - Develop detailed fact sheet and talking points on why advisories benefit students
 - Get testimonial from a student in a neighboring school whose school life benefited from advisories
 - Conduct preliminary research into the topic and ask the principal and faculty to do the same with their professional organizations; share results
 - Survey students on the topics they would like to see covered in an advisory
 - Survey faculty on the topics they would like to see covered in an advisory

ISSUE 2: Bathrooms are unsanitary and need work. (*School Issue*)

- **Recommendation 1:** Develop education/awareness program addressing health consequences of unsanitary conditions and how poor decisions (e.g., trashing the bathroom) affect others (janitors and students)
 - **Rationale:** While most students are respectful and don’t trash the bathrooms on purpose, others do. Perhaps if they knew—or got a taste of—what the janitors have to do to clean up after them then they would appreciate that it is much more respectful to clean up after yourself. In addition, if the students understood the history of the spread of disease through unsanitary conditions, and how their actions are causing conditions to be like they are in undeveloped nations, then perhaps they would hesitate before trashing the bathroom the next time.
 - **Research:** The principal says there is a long history of trying to address the problem but appreciates any help. Ultimately, she says, there are things that can be done but students must take responsibility for their own actions and other students have to be willing to help them make the right decisions.
 - **Response to Resistance:** No resistance from the faculty... though they appreciated the idea—especially since it was one of the top issues for all students school-wide—one teacher said, “good luck, it’s an admirable undertaking...but we’ve tried it all.” The difference this time is that students are the ones who are applying the pressure—after all, we don’t want security cameras in the bathrooms.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Ask the science and history faculty to develop a series on the science and history of germs—and how they devastate families and societies.
 - Canvas other schools of approximately the same size to see if they have similar problems.

- Begin awareness campaign about how demoralizing it is for the janitors. Help students to see that their actions affect real people—the janitor. (Campaign might include offenders being paired w/janitors for lunch.)
 - Ask the parents of offenders if they would be willing to be the janitor for the day—to make sure their son/daughter knows how difficult he/she makes life for someone.
- **Recommendation 2:** Put doors on the bathroom stalls to protect student privacy
- **Rationale:** At home and in virtually every public restroom in the area there are doors on the bathroom stalls. Are the faculty bathrooms like that? No more should need to be said.
 - **Research:** The history: apparently things were happening that shouldn't happen so they took the doors off the stalls. (In much earlier times and in different places, it was also not completely uncommon to not have doors.) It remains unclear whether we don't have doors due to a lack of money or lack of interest in the issue.
 - **Response to Resistance:** Times have changed...it's time for doors. All of us shouldn't have to suffer for others' actions.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Survey the entire student body to see whether they find the lack of doors humiliating or whether it makes them uncomfortable
 - Research the expense involved in getting new doors installed
 - Survey board members, administrators, and faculty members to see if they would feel comfortable having a similar door-less set-up for themselves and needing to use the restroom with dozens of parents during back-to-school night, parent conferences, board meetings, or at a dinner party/social engagement
 - Meet with the principal to provide survey results and make a formal request to install doors
 - Meet with the school board to provide survey results and make a formal request to install doors
- **Recommendation 3:** Develop system to monitor how bad the bathrooms get and which ones are the biggest problems and then track after enforcement and modifications are put in place. The enforcement should focus on students taking responsibility for actions (and recommending consequences)
- **Rationale:** We need to find out how bad the situation is, why and where before recommending ways to police.
 - **Research:** The principal has some information but welcomes our effort to “methodically” track the problems and get students involved in self-policing.
 - **Response to Resistance:** No resistance to date...though the principal was interested in hearing more about what we meant by “students recommending consequences.”
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Discretely monitor the bathrooms for one week period to see trouble spots.
 - Ask students to offer suggestions for punishment for offenders
 - Ask faculty where they think the most problems are and any solutions they might offer

ISSUE 3: Local water and river quality are poor. (Local/Neighborhood/Community Issue)

- **Recommendation 1:** Test the water and conduct awareness campaign about the types of pollutants in the river, its consequences for the human body, where the pollutants come from and how they can be stopped.
 - **Rationale:** If people know the consequences for themselves or their children, or the baby next door, they are more likely to think about it much more carefully. We are bombarded by so much bad news in the media that it becomes numbing. For students to personally deliver their research and results to their parents and grandparents and neighbors provides a more personal connection.
 - **Research:** Several local organizations have done some preliminary research and would welcome students helping them with the research either as part of the science curriculum or as a series of research projects. The science department has also indicated its support for the idea. There has been more research done about the sources of the pollution than there has been an awareness campaign about the extent of the pollution or its potential effects. The drinking water supply is constantly monitored and has deteriorated; however, very little monitoring has been done of individual wells supplying water to single houses.
 - **Response to Resistance:** The only real resistance we have encountered is from several researchers that warned us that we should be careful to make sure that the information we share publicly is fact-checked by a scientist (or a panel of scientists/others) and that we be careful to present a balanced picture. Our testing methods will be established in cooperation with our science teachers and respected scientists. We will also attempt in any information that we provide to fairly represent “both” sides of the story.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Work with the science department and the local college to recommend a testing schedule, regimen and methods
 - Discover who in the area is on well water and contact them to see if we can do periodic testing of their water
 - Detail the sources and amounts of the pollutants
 - Research available technologies that can minimize the pollutants
 - Research alternatives to the pollutants (methods that eliminate use of pollutants)
 - Develop multimedia presentation on the sources of the pollutants and how to minimize
 - Work with the newspaper staff to develop schedule for regular reporting
 - Work with the district public relations officer and parents involved in public relations to develop a timeline for an awareness campaign as well as techniques to spread the word
 - Establish committee to work with the alleged polluters to better understand their side of the story and their issues with current research
 - Establish a review panel that will impartially review materials
 - Develop materials to distribute to parents based on the student research, the sources, and ways that families can help prevent the pollution in their daily lives.

- **Recommendation 2:** Organize a river clean up day.
 - **Rationale:** It’s dirty, let’s get it clean so some day it will be useable again!
 - **Research:** Several local organizations (and the parent-teacher organization) have already indicated they will support the initiative and will help us get materials and the dump trucks needed to haul the junk found.
 - **Response to Resistance:** We anticipate that some of the major polluters will resist the efforts—not the physical cleaning of the river—rather the unseen pollutants that we won’t be able to clean up in a day. All that we can do is

provide the best methods we can to collect water samples, provide the available scientific review based on what scientists know today, and then let people decide for themselves the level of the danger. We just want to be able to swim in that river again some day—like our great-grandparents did.

- **Action Steps:**
 - Work with local businesses to supply materials and food
 - Work with the county to get relevant permits
 - Work with local bands to set up a post-clean-up concert
 - Food committee
 - PR/media committee
 - Develop marketing campaign that will allow us to get 1,000+ volunteers signed up for the event and do it in conjunction with a celebration, party, games or concert—so it’s not just a day of “dredgery.”
- **Recommendation 3:** Meet with legislators to discuss need for potential regulations.
 - **Rationale:** If polluters can’t be convinced to do what the science seems to say is the right thing, then perhaps new rules are necessary; however, we are not close to that step yet.
 - **Research:** Still to be done. We do not have the necessary information to pursue any regulations or to know whether any new regulations are necessary.
 - **Response to Resistance:** We would anticipate stiff resistance on this from those entities that may be polluting. We will wait to see the results of our own testing and analysis before proposing any regulations. The initial focus must be on fact-finding.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Work with the civics department to research existing laws and regulations
 - Research how regulations are passed in the county council and in the state legislature.
 - Meet with legislators to see whether they believe existing regulations are sufficient and why.
 - Review alternatives to legislation.

ISSUE 4: Improving the lives of those affected by war in Iraq and Afghanistan. (National/Global Issue)

- **Recommendation 1:** Research the financial and physical needs of wounded and other military members and their families and help address unmet needs
 - **Rationale:** Regardless of your feelings about the wars or war in general, so many students want to do something to help those who have sacrificed life, limb, and their family life—and being around their families—to serve their country. We just have very few ideas as to what we can do to help.
 - **Research:** See below
 - **Response to Resistance:** TBD
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Research what is already being done by other organizations
 - Publicize the efforts of other organizations
 - Organize a meeting of school parents who have served in the military and try to discover what they think these families and the military members might need most.
 - Organize a meeting for students in our school and other local schools who have parents that are serving or who have served to discuss what they most need or miss.

- Meet with local veterans groups to ascertain unmet needs.
 - Meet with the state/national guard to ascertain unmet needs
 - Plan a fundraiser to meet the needs
- **Recommendation 2:** Research history and economies of Iraq and Afghanistan and establish link with village or families in each
- **Rationale:** We will be doing our part in the effort to help Iraqis and Afghans to bring peace and financial stability to their nations. We will also help to meet unmet needs that they might have. Furthermore, we would like to provide a “local market” for an Afghani village’s goods/local wares so that the investment might support the village and provide income alternatives to poppy production. Establishing personal links may help others to better understand us and to help us better understand them.
 - **Research:** The principal and parent organizations think this is a great idea—but they want to make sure that safeguards are established to ensure the safety of students.
 - **Response to Resistance:** TBD
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Contact the U.S. Department of State to see what recommendations they have for this type of contact as well as to get from them contact information for “approved” villages that can be monitored (by U.S. personnel or non-profits)
 - Establish a school-to-school letter writing campaign to students studying English
 - Establish contact with a translator willing to offer his/her services
 - Work with social studies/history department to develop a mini-series on Afghan and Iraq history and economies for the entire school
 - Begin a Saturday sidewalk market for Afghani goods
- **Recommendation 3:** Establish regular letter-writing campaign to soldiers
- **Rationale:** Self-explanatory
 - **Research:** None needed. Principal, faculty, parent organization supports.
 - **Response to Resistance:** None
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Contact local elementary schools to get them to share artwork with soldiers so that each student send one drawing per month to a soldier
 - Contact local middle school to get them to share artwork and letters with soldiers—one letter or artwork per student per month
 - Develop marketing campaign that will encourage every student in our school to write a letter or send artwork or something of interest to a member of the military stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan each month.
 - Contact the Department of Defense and the Governor’s office/national guard