

## **DSA Staff Statement Opposing Self-Governance**

From The Desks of:

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**December, 2012**

On April 9, while Detroit Public Schools was not in session due to Easter Break, it was announced by way of news publication that Detroit School of Arts (DSA) would become a self-governing school beginning in the fall of 2012. The DSA staff was not informed of this decision prior to the public announcement on April 9. We did not know why we were chosen. We do not fit the criteria of a self-governing school. Unlike the other nine schools that were listed as becoming self-governing, DSA is not a small school, is not a school within a school and is not a failing school.

Upon returning to work after the Easter Break, the DSA staff was very confused and upset because we had no idea what being self-governing meant. Several staff members left the Detroit School of Arts because of the uncertainty. Approximately a month later, we were presented with a Governing Council whom we had no hand in choosing, and who has further added to the frustration and confusion among the DSA staff. In order to remain at the DSA, we had to write an essay to this Governing Council, who knows nothing about our school, stating our desire to remain at the Detroit School of Arts as well as our vision for the school. If we chose not to write the letter, it was assumed we did not wish to return.

What we do know is the following: Before we were self-governing, the DSA:

- Made annual yearly progress (AYP) every year, with the exception of the 2010-2011 school year when administration changed from Dr. Denise Davis-Cotton to Ms. Rita Davis.
- Had a graduation rate of 99 percent or higher every year
- Had graduation classes ranging in size between 100-180 students earning multi-millions of dollars in scholarships
- Had multiple Bill Gates Scholarship Recipients in every graduating class, with the exception of the 2011-12 school year when her administration continued from Dr. Cotton to Ms. Davis
- Was always in the top 5 percent in the district for attendance
- Has traveled the nation and the world performing in such places as Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, London, Toronto, etc.

- Has won multiple awards through art-based competitions, contests, and festivals, usually placing first or second
- Was a world-renowned performing arts high school
- Has always had its own advisory council which was already in place for the betterment of DSA

We were informed by Roy Roberts that Detroit School of Arts was good, but by becoming a self-governing school, we could become great. We were already great. In fact, we were exceptional and excellent and still are. However, since becoming self-governing, not only have we not been made “great,” we have been made to endure the following:

- It is the 12th week of school, yet we still have no budget to operate our school on a day-to-day basis. We had an operating budget as of July 1 that met all of the financial needs of the school. However, Doug Ross and his staff have since taken over our budget and reconfigured it, putting monies in Charter school lines which we are unable to access.

Currently we have “no” monies to buy supplies needed for classroom production. We have been told Doug Ross and his staff control our budget, which is why we currently do not have one. When we ask about the budget, the governing council points the finger at Doug Ross while Doug Ross points the finger at the governing council. In the meantime, nothing is accomplished and we still have no operating budget. There has been no collaboration between our Interim Principal Ahna Felix-Brown, Doug Ross, his staff or the governing council about the financial needs of the building.

- It is the 12th week of school, yet there are still 45 classes that are oversized to the capacity of anywhere between 39 students to 54 students. We have been told we can't hire more teachers because it is not in the budget, the one that we still do not have.
- It is the 12th week of school, and we still have no idea what “self-governing” means for the Detroit School of Arts, nor does the Governing Council.
- The Governing Council has not made one attempt to support any of the current programs we have at DSA, be it arts, academics or otherwise. They have not had one discussion with staff to collaborate on what we already do and what we need. They only discuss their plans of what they would like to do with DSA and who or what they would like to bring into the school, regardless of whether it contradicts the current atmosphere. We have no voice in these matters. By the words they speak, their intention is to replace who we are and all that we have done during the approximate 20 years of DSA's existence.
- We are DPS when it is convenient, meaning that if we are winning awards or bringing positive recognition to ourselves, we are claimed as “DPS” by Detroit Public Schools. However, when we need services, such as accompanist for our music and dance classes,

or utilities for the building, or food service to feed the students, or custodians to clean the building, or security to protect students and staff, or mail services to handle our incoming and outgoing mail, we are told “you are self-governing” and therefore must pay DPS to utilize DPS services. Why is this if we are still DPS?

- Doug Ross’ office, the Office of Innovation and Charter Schools, receives 3 percent of our operating budget, the one we still don’t have. Whenever this office is called for assistance they can never assist; they always have to get back to you. However, when they get a complaint they are quick to call or e-mail and make snap decisions without explanation. Why, if we are still DPS?

- Our principal, Ms. Ahna Felix-Brown, is still in “interim” status and has not been named or appointed as our official principal. Why?

- On Oct. 23, DPS received a grant from the Knight Foundation in the amount of \$2.25 million. At the banquet where this award was announced, neither Ms. Brown nor Ms. DeLois Cooke-Spryszak, our assistant principal, were allowed to accept the award. Instead, the chairman and vice chairman of the governing council, Stuart Frankel and Elizabeth Moje, accepted the award. In addition, the money from the grant is in an account at the University of Michigan. DSA has no access to it, nor do we know the process to access it.

- The Governing Council has allowed the University of Michigan to invade our school. They are in our classrooms, uninvited. They are in our staff meetings, uninvited. They have even facilitated some of our staff meetings and our professional developments. They are illegally evaluating us as well as filling our building with interns, student teachers and teaching fellows. They have even gone so far as to deny student teachers to come to our building who are not from the University of Michigan. And when we questioned what our rights were in all of these situations, we were told that there was nothing we could do about it because we were self-governing.

- The minutes from the Governing Council meetings dating back as far as July have not been made public on the DSA Web site. According to Open Meetings Act 15.269, proposed minutes should be made public within eight days and approved minutes five days after approval at a public meeting.

- As we all were waiting the outcome of Proposal 1 in the recent November election, we were “informed” by Doug Ross the following:

- It would be in our “best interest” to remain self-governing.

- We should consider the “consequences of our actions” when asked whether to remain self-governing or to return to DPS.

- Extra funding was found for the school that we would lose if we decided to return to DPS.

- Ms. Davis ... would be reinstated as principal of that Detroit School of Arts if we decided to return to DPS.

What we, the staff of DSA, would like to know is:

- Why is the Governing Council still in existence? They were appointed under Public Act 4, which was voted down. The Governing Council should have been dismantled as well.

- What happens to that Detroit School of Arts now? Will we remain self-governing or will we receive our Full DPS Status back? The Detroit School of Arts staff is excited to return to full DPS Status.

- The Detroit School of Arts staff would like to keep Ahna Felix-Brown as our principal and DeLois Cooke-Spryszak as our assistant principal.

*Respectfully,  
The staff of the Detroit School of Arts*