

Capital Prep Senior Promotes Self-Advocacy to Eighth Graders

My name is Savannah Pollard and I attend Capital Preparatory Magnet School in Hartford, CT, where I am a senior. As a part of the senior capstone project, Capital Prep has adopted the requirement of a Social Justice Project. The SSJP is a performance-based task where seniors demonstrate their ability to question, research, lead, act, present, and reflect in order to confront a social injustice in their community. Furthermore, the project should be designed to make a positive change in the community.

The project I chose addresses how a lack of self-advocacy in middle school students affects their academics. I chose this project because it demonstrates what I went through as a middle schooler transitioning into high school. I was the type of person who would not ask anyone, especially teachers, for help when I needed it the most because I felt shy and didn't want students judging me if I didn't understand something. But as I became a high school student, I realized that as the work got harder and I began to become more motivated to improve my grades, I needed to change. My experience in high school helped me realize I wanted to do this project as I wanted to make a positive impact on 8th grade students as a whole.

I began with a lesson on what self-advocacy means and how to be one's own advocate. I created a six-session seminar with six students who are in eighth grade and taught them lessons on topics such as:

- Self-advocacy : (Introduced what self-advocacy was; helped students identify their self-advocacy road to success; and viewed a YouTube video to help explain these concepts)
- Goal Setting – (Worked in small and large groups with students identifying their long term, mid-term and short term goals; talked about their experiences working in small or large groups and identified what techniques were successful when working in these groups)
- Study habits and asking teachers for help: (Talked about quiet spaces and managing one's study habits)
- Problem Solving: (Gave students a stressful situation and asked them to identify how they would resolve that situation; brought discussion back to self-advocacy and how it makes one an advocate)
- Participation and Learning styles: (Students identified their primary learning styles and, based on their responses, developed strategies to learn best)
- Time Management: (Asked students to log their schedule and then analyze it to see what they can change)

As a result of the project, I learned that most middle school students have the same problem I had when I was in middle school. The project showed me, and them, that it's better to learn different self-advocacy skills before becoming a high schooler. My hope is that, through my efforts, other middle school students will develop these skills while in middle school. Feedback from Capital Prep eighth graders includes: "After this seminar, I learned I shouldn't worry about what other students have to say when I am asking questions in class;" and, "I now know what being an advocate is and how it can help me in the future." I am convinced that all middle school students could benefit from learning self-advocacy skills.