

# Kanye West helps fight drop out issue across country

by Dolly Malik

Kanye West has entertained the world for years with songs like “Heartless” and “Stronger,” but today he is helping under-served students entertain the world through the Kanye West Foundation.

The Kanye West Foundation was started in 2005 by Dr. Donda West, Kanye’s late mother. As a former college professor, Dr. West understood the importance of education. She started the Kanye West Foundation with the goal of helping to address the growing drop out rate of students across the country. The foundation achieves this goal by partnering with schools and community organizations to provide them with music equipment and education.

Director of programs, Aumijo S. Gomes said, “I think the Kanye West Foundation is a great organization that really makes a meaningful positive impact on the young people we work with. I believe that it often just takes a small spark for a young person to realize their talents and start to make positive plans for their future.” He told the Trumpet that he thinks music education can provide that spark because it engages young people in something they like and can also be used to teach important skills.

The Kanye West Foundation’s primary program is called Loop Dreams. The program uses hip-hop music to introduce different life skills to the students such as time management, responsibility and

commitment. Most teenagers have an interest in music so the foundation’s goal to get them re-interested in school through a “non-school” approach is effective. Although the program has its basis around music, it also provides academic support and requires the GPA of a “C” to participate. Keeping students engaged in music while still in an educational environment, Loop Dreams encourages furthering education and discourages dropping out. Program participants have the opportunity to experiment with their creativity, which can really motivate them and help them boost their interest in academics. Overall, Loop Dreams helps keep students on track so that they will be able to pursue higher education or success in the music industry.

**Senior Orlando Vasquez said, “I think the foundation is great, and it is a good opportunity to let young adults do something positive.”**

Among the Kanye West Foundation staff is Chief Executive Officer Joseph Collins, with degrees in education and youth development, Director of Program Operations Aumijo S. Gomes, also with degrees and experience in the field of youth development, Secretary Beverly J. Williams, a retired educator; Teaching Artist Haskel Jackson, Jr., CEO of Genesoul Productions, and Executive

Assistant, Dionne Harmon, a recent addition to the team. Together, the staff, experienced in both the educational and musical fields have come together with Kanye West to continue Dr. West’s dream and help battle the dropout problem across the United States.

“She [Dr. Donda West] started the organization as a way to help Kanye give back and as a way to turn his words into reality. Kanye once said that when he was in high school there were classes and programs to learn music and instruments but never anything to teach kids how to make the music that they hear on the radio. Dr. West realized that the foundation could have a unique platform to teach young people how to make this music while also using their participation in the program as a motivator to keep them in school. Now that we are in our fourth year of existence, our mission is to keep the vision of Dr. West alive by providing these of opportunities to kids who really need them,” said Gomes.

According to the Foundation’s board of directors, “The vision of the Foundation is broad and not easy to attain but we are committed to the ongoing development of this program across the country and envision a day when the high school dropout rate in cities across the nation will be virtually non-existent.” With the help of this foundation and other organizations, perhaps dropping out will be a thing of the past in the near future.

Gomes said, “I see the impact of our



photo by Dolly Malik

*Kanye West has created the Kanye West Foundation to encourage furthering education.*

work on kids everyday and I believe that the programs of the Foundation can be an even bigger positive motivator to even more kids around the country as we expand our partnerships.”

To learn more about the Kanye West Foundation, to make a donation, or to see other ways to help, visit their website at [www.KanyeWestFoundation.org](http://www.KanyeWestFoundation.org). Donations can be made online or can be sent to 8560 West Sunset Blvd., Suite #210 West Hollywood, CA 90069. More information about the foundation can be found on Facebook, MySpace, Leap Anywhere, Vimeo, and Flickr. Like Kanye’s song, this foundation will help the kids “Touch the Sky.”

## Students seek definition of student government

by Aaron Spikol

**Council:** A group elected or appointed as an advisory or legislative body

**Officer :** One who holds an office of trust, authority or command

**Senate:** An assembly or council usually possessing high deliberative and legislative functions

*Definitions courtesy of Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

In Parkland, there is a lack of clarity as to what constitutes student government. In the school, there are at least three main organizations whose names connote a government role: student council, class officers and student senate. None of these organizations, however, match their dictionary definitions.

The first and easiest myth to dispel is that student council is in some way related to student government. It is not. Rather, it is a school club focused on community outreach and organizing many major school events. The school events that they are responsible for include Homecoming, the semi-formal dance and the Mr. Parkland competition. They also run many of the fundraisers that students contribute to throughout the year.

“There’s definitely confusion,” said Senior student council co-president Courtney Sniscak. “I’ve had people ask me if they needed to be elected to join the club.” Just like all regular school clubs, any student is encouraged to join throughout the year.

It is class officer positions that are voted on in school wide elections. There are five positions for each grade: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and a technology secretary. The technology secretary does not appear on the ballot but applies for the position by creating a website. To be on the ballot, students cannot have any infractions on their student record and must submit a petition for which they gather the signatures of two staff members and one

parent. Elections take place during the first marking period of every year, with students campaigning the week before by putting up posters and signs. The elected officers then have one main responsibility: raising money for their class’ senior prom. They raise the money through class dues and selling prom tickets, entertainment books and class t-shirts, whose design and logo they are responsible. “One

Monday before school in the library classroom with the principal, Mr. Lessel, to discuss issues that are important to students. The senate was formed by Mr. Lessel seven years ago when he was an assistant principal. “I felt like we needed communication between the students and the administration, and it was a good way for me to get involved. It’s nice for the students to have a direct link,” said

“They say we don’t think of [LCTI], but we might have to eliminate the two positions reserved for them,” said Mr. Lessel. Excluding pending decisions on freshman applications, there are currently thirteen filled positions in student senate.

Save for the vice presidents, once a student is accepted to student senate, they maintain their position for the entirety of their school career. Mr. Lessel explained this as a way to guarantee consistency from year to year, ensuring there are always students with experience in the senate. A student can only be removed from student senate if they consistently fail to attend meetings. To be accepted into the student senate, a student must complete an application, which can be acquired from Mr. Lessel’s office, and then submit it for review by the students of the senate. The students do not see the names or grade levels of applicants and grade the applications according to a rubric created by Mr. Lessel. Criteria that are considered include the extracurricular activities a student is involved in, as well as the strength of several short answer essays.

Student senate’s list of accomplishments includes many things that students take for granted. Improvements that they have previously implemented include putting microwaves in the cafeteria, erecting the student memorial outside of the school, making midterm days early dismissals, getting patio picnic tables for seniors and, most recently, lifting the ban on electronic device use before and after the school day. Improvements that the student senate has failed to implement include convincing PennDot to build a second entrance to the school parking lot and implementing a staggered dismissal schedule based on grade level, both of which were intended to relieve congestion problems in the school parking lot.

Describing student senate’s role, Mr. Lessel said, “They’re the bridge between students and the administration.”

This is as clear a definition of student government as one would hope to find.



photo by Aaron Spikol

*Student representatives have a discussion with Mr. Lessel.*

hundred percent of the money goes to prom,” said freshman class advisor Mrs. Goldstein, who has been a class advisor for five years. “It’s entirely student funded and usually costs around \$50,000.”

Money is not pooled between classes, but members of each class volunteer their time to assist with both the prom and the Prom Fashion Show. All class officers from each grade make a float for Homecoming. The only class officer with different responsibilities is the vice president, who is automatically made a member of the student senate.

The student senate, which is arguably the least visible of the three organizations, acts as Parkland’s student government. They meet every

Mr. Lessel. He explained that he takes the issues the students bring to him and then presents them to the related school board or committee. He then relays the response to the students. He also advises the students on what they can realistically expect from each proposal and helps them discuss the issues.

The student senate has positions for 19 students that represent specific areas of the school such as the arts and the athletic departments. Other positions include the four reserved for the class vice presidents and a position for the student representative to the school board. It is rare that all the positions are completely filled. In particular, the two slots for LCTI representation consistently remain empty.