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**Contact:** Fred Lewis (OSSE) - (202) 412-2167; [fred.lewis@dc.gov](mailto:fred.lewis@dc.gov)  
Wendy Wilk (USSYP) - [USSYP@heartsfdn.org](mailto:USSYP@heartsfdn.org)

## **District of Columbia Students Selected for United States Senate Youth Program**

*High School Seniors to Represent DC in Washington Week Program and Receive \$10,000 Scholarships*

**(Washington, DC)** — Today, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) announced that high school students Nyla Dinkins and Marie-Celeste Pessey will represent the District of Columbia during the 64th annual USSYP Washington Week. The program runs from March 7-14, 2026.

Selected from among the District's top student leaders, Nyla and Marie-Celeste join a delegation of 104 students - two from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity. The group will engage in an intensive week-long study of the federal government, meetings with senators, the president, a Supreme Court justice, and other senior officials. Each delegate receives a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship with encouragement to continue coursework in government, history and public affairs.

"I am proud to congratulate Nyla Dinkins and Marie-Celeste Pessey on their selection to the United States Senate Youth Program. Their achievement reflects not only exceptional academic talent, but a deep commitment to leadership, service, and civic engagement," said State Superintendent Dr. Antoinette S. Mitchell. "When we empower young people to understand and participate in our democracy, we strengthen the future of our city and our nation. Marie-Celeste and Nyla represent the very best of DC, and I know they will make our community proud as they bring their voices to this prestigious national program."

### **About the 2026 USSYP Delegates:**

**Nyla Dinkins**, a senior at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, serves as the student representative to the District of Columbia State Board of Education. In this role, she advocates on behalf of nearly 100,000 students and co-leads the Board's Student Advisory Committee. She previously served as a national conference panelist on education policy, serving as the voice of DC youth and their educational experiences. Nyla is vice president of the National Honor Society, a member of the National Spanish Honor Society, an AP scholar with honors and a recipient of the Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

She demonstrates leadership and communication skills as a senior teen chapter president with Jack and Jill of America, Inc., a policy debater with the Washington Urban Debate League, and a two-time national finalist in the National Endowment of the Arts' Poetry Out Loud competition. She is also a

mentee in the Aspen Institute's *Our Future Is Science* program, where she explores the intersection of STEM, policy, and equity.

Nyla has also completed more than 300 hours of community service and plans to pursue degrees in international relations and law to create meaningful change through policy.

**Marie-Celeste Pessey**, a senior at School Without Walls High School, serves as a student council representative. She actively leverages her location in the nation's capital to engage with diverse perspectives, often discussing policy and current events with visitors to the city. Committed to public service, she spearheaded a debate program for incarcerated youth.

Marie-Celeste is eager to diversify her surroundings and meet students and adults who are open to debate and learning from one another. Outside of classroom hours she exemplifies leadership as the captain of the girls' cross country and track and field teams. She plans to major in international relations with a minor in East Asian Studies, aiming for a career in the Foreign Service or international organization.

**Alternates:** Jaala Brown of Benjamin Banneker Academic High School and Sitara Mazumdar of BASIS DC Public Charter School were selected as alternates for the 2026 program.

**Selection Process:** State departments of education, including the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activities, select delegates and alternates after nomination by teachers and principals. The chief state school officer for each jurisdiction confirms the final selection. State Superintendent Dr. Antoinette S. Mitchell designated this year's District of Columbia delegates and alternates.

### **About the United States Senate Youth Program**

*The 2026 United States Senate Youth Program co-chairs are Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama and Sen. Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts. The full USSYP Senate Advisory Committee consists of the vice president of the United States and the senate majority and minority leaders who annually serve as the program's honorary co-chairs; two senators, one from each party, serving as acting co-chairs who each have keynote speaking roles, and an eight-member bipartisan senate panel, four senators from each party, who lend their names in support. Serving on the advisory committee for the upcoming program are Sen. John Barrasso, M.D. of Wyoming, Sen. Steve Daines of Montana, Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, Sen. Andy Kim of New Jersey, Sen. Angus S. King, Jr. of Maine and Sen. Elissa Slotkin of Michigan.*

*The USSYP is a competitive, merit-based program created by Senate Resolution 324 in 1962 by the sons of William Randolph Hearst and the senate leadership of the day – Sens. Kuchel, Mansfield, Dirksen, and Humphrey. The USSYP is designed to encourage America's most talented young people to consider public service as an important, life-long, and noble pursuit. Senate Resolution 324 passed unanimously.*

*The Hearst Foundations have fully funded the program since inception, as stipulated in SR 324, no government funds are utilized.*

*USSYP Alumni now number more than 6,300 and many go on to build legacies of public service. The distinguished alumni include Sen. Susan Collins, the first USSYP delegate to be elected US senator; former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, the first to be appointed as a cabinet secretary; Rep. Sarah McBride, the second to be elected to the US House of Representatives; former Sen. Cory Gardner, the second alumnus to be*

*elected US senator and the first to be elected to the US House of Representatives, and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, the first to be elected governor.*

*For more information on USSYP, visit [ussenateyouth.org](http://ussenateyouth.org)*

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