

# AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE: STRATEGIES FOR HELPING YOUTH HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD

Student voice—the process of educators, school leaders, and other supportive adults gathering young people’s values and unique perspectives and implementing policy and practice changes based on these shared ideas—provides an opportunity for young people to be active participants in improving their schools. Below we explain how student voice increases student engagement, enhances education systems, and improves student outcomes. We also share three strategies to support schools and community organizations with gathering student voice data.

## STUDENT VOICE ENHANCES EDUCATION:

**Builds Positive Relationships and Trust.** Working together towards a common goal builds trust and respect between young people and educators. Seeking student voice to provide feedback, share concerns, or be involved in decision-making processes that actively shape their educational experiences help young people develop positive relationships with educators and supportive adults.

**Increases Equity.** Young people from racialized or lower-income communities and those living with disabilities often face unique and complex barriers to education. Student voice enables school leaders and supportive adults to hear young people’s unique perspectives and discover specific deficiencies in their organization related to diversity, equity, inclusion.

**Promotes Student Engagement & Fosters a Collaborative Learning Environment.** Allowing young people to share their ideas motivates them to become invested in their learning experiences. According to Gretchen Brion-Meisels at [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#), an expert on student voice and engagement, student voice helps young people develop a sense of ownership and attachment to their school community. When they feel their opinions are valued and taken seriously, they become collaborative partners in their learning environment.

## THREE STRATEGIES FOR AMPLIFYING STUDENT VOICE ON ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT:

**1. Synthesized Findings from Peer-to-Peer Focus Groups.** A student focus group brings together a small group of students to answer questions in a moderated setting. Teachers can support young people by recruiting volunteers to be Focus Group Moderators and guiding them through a process of developing focus group questions to help identify new ways of understanding barriers to school attendance and engagement, as well as creative solutions to increase attendance and make school a place where everyone wants to be. Importantly, educators and supportive adults will need to create opportunities for young people to co-lead and participate in focus groups and assist them with synthesizing and recording the findings. ***To see an example of how this can be done, watch this short [video](#) from Connect with Alpine from the Alpine School District in Utah.***

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**2. Student Empathy Interviews.** Empathy interviews can help identify issues that need to be addressed by the system, unpack the root causes of a problem from a young person’s perspective, and gather information that inspires new, student-centered change ideas. Educators, school leaders, and supportive adults can design or help young people design an interview protocol to better understand the barriers preventing them from attending school and the ways schools can foster welcoming and supportive environments. **To see an example of how this can be done, check out this [video](#) from the High Tech High GSE Center for Research on Equity and Innovation and the LUMA Institute.**

**3. Create a Project-Based Learning Experience.** Project-based learning (PBL) involves young people designing, developing, and constructing hands-on solutions to a problem. A PBL approach to gathering student voice builds young people’s creative capacity to collaboratively identify barriers to school attendance and explore potential solutions. PBL processes can vary, however, typically, PBL takes young people through the following phases or steps:

- Identify a problem (i.e., barriers to school attendance; learning environment aspects hindering attendance).
- Agree on or devise a potential solution path to the problem (i.e., how to achieve a solution).
- Design and develop a prototype of the solution.
- Refine the solution based on feedback from peers. **View this example [resource](#) from Making Good Humans.**

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

Student voice is one of many ways to engage young people in improving their schools. For more on student voice and other youth-led strategies for improving schools and increasing student connection, check out these additional resources.

#### **Youth Toolkits & Resource Pages:**

- [Voices Toolkit](#), Afterschool Alliance
- [Youth Voice Toolkit](#), XQ Institute
- [The Student Voice Toolkit](#), Search Institute
- "Redesigning With Students: The Power of Student Voice and Student Action in Rethinking Education," Student Voice Playbook [DC Public Schools Student Voice Playbook](#).
- [Resources on Engaging Student Voices](#), Edutopia
- [Students at the Center Hub](#), Resources Focused on Student Voice and Agency

#### **Articles & Reports Related to Student Voice:**

- [Elevating Student Voice in Education, A Report from the Center for American Progress](#)
- [Establishing Structures for Student Voice, Prepared for Washington State Administrators](#)
- [How Students Can Help Build Better Education Policy](#)
- [Student-Powered Improvement](#), A Report from the Center for American Progress
- ["Ok, So We Are Listening to Student Voices. Now What? Inclusive Strategy for Educational Transformation,"](#) Next Gen Learning

#### **Empathy Interviews to Boost Student Engagement:**

- [Brambleton Middle School, Loudoun County Public Schools](#)
- [San Diego County Public Schools](#)

#### **An Expression of Student Voice (Example):**

- [Get Schooled](#) is a youth-led podcast series that amplifies stories and voices of students.

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