Steps to: Student voice success

Steps to school climate success

Student voice is a concept that, when utilised to its full potential, can be a powerful tool in engaging students in their own learning and school community. Understanding "student voice" concept is essential for parents and teachers alike, as it can profoundly impact a child's educational journey. Student voice refers to the active engagement and participation of students in shaping their own learning experiences and environments. It recognizes that students are not just passive recipients of knowledge but active contributors to their educational process.

When we acknowledge and value the student voice, we empower children to take ownership of learning. This means encouraging them to express their thoughts, feelings, aspirations and actions regarding their education. By doing so, we foster a sense of agency and responsibility in students, which can lead to increased motivation and enthusiasm for learning. At its core, it is about the opportunity to open up dialogue, discuss issues or ideas brought forward, and most importantly include students in their school experiences.

What does “student voice” look like in a school environment?
Student voice is about providing each student with the platform and tools to be listened to and understood, rather than perpetuating an environment where only the loudest of opinions are heard across a sea of voices. By enabling student voice, schools allow students to feel there is space for genuine reciprocal communication, where they can actively participate and are involved in the decision-making around their school life and mental wellbeing.

What student voice looks like may vary from school to school depending on:
The developmental and emotional maturity of the students and what they need within their educational environment. On a primary-school level, this may be students’ ability to communicate with faculty their concerns or opinions on their experiences. When looking at student voice from a middle or secondary school level students may be viewed as collaborators in addressing and amending processes and mental health problems in their school.

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Regardless of age and stage of students, when we incorporate student voice into teaching practices this not only helps tailor instruction to individual needs but also demonstrates that opinions are valued and respected.

We may see this in the classroom through:

- Choice in academic subjects, curriculum and/or projects
- Opportunities for student feedback on classroom dynamics
- Opportunities for student involvement in school decision making processes
- Student representation in board and/or senior leadership discussions
- Leadership opportunities through student councils with the role to gather the "voice" of the student population and a process to escalate communication through this channel



Adapted from Toshalis & Nakkula's "The spectrum of student voice oriented activity" and Mitra & Gross "Pyramid of student voice". Retrieved from Toshalis & Nakkula's "Motivation, engagement, and student voice; Toolkit (2013).

By recognizing that students possess valuable insights, perspectives, and needs, schools can benefit greatly from shifting up the spectrum of student engagement. To achieve this shift, schools must transition from superficial tokenism and decoration to more substantial levels of participation and partnership. This involves actively seeking and valuing student input, involving them in decision-making processes, and allowing them to co-create their educational experiences.

Schools can provide platforms for open dialogue, establish student councils or advisory groups, and ensure that students are represented in committees and policy discussions. By embracing these practices, schools not only empower students to take ownership of their education but also promote a sense of belonging and collaboration within the school community, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive educational systems.

Student voice spectrum

Recognition and validation — **Collaboration with staff** — **Leadership**



Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Students offer perspectives/ opinions; contributions are then acknowledged by staff, who decide on next steps	Students are invited to share feedback & opinions; often in a focus group setting, or via survey	Students participate in meetings with decision-makers	Students are given clear & institutionalised roles in decision-making	Students are able to identify problems & create their solutions; they are advocates for change	Students lead co-planning, co-executing. Students have equal responsibilities for changes & outcomes

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How can family help?
In the pursuit of promoting student voice, a collaborative effort between parents, caregivers and schools is an invaluable asset. To make this a reality, we encourage parents to actively engage in fostering student voice alongside school initiatives. In a collaborative effort between parents and schools, we can create an educational ecosystem where student voice is not only encouraged but also celebrated. By working together, we can empower our students to become active, engaged, and confident participants in their own education.

We may see this at home through:
Open communication:
Create a safe and open space for your child to share their thoughts, questions, and feelings. Encourage them to talk about their experiences at school and beyond.

Respecting their perspective:
Even if you don't agree with your child's viewpoint, respect their right to express it. Avoid being judgmental or dismissive of their opinions.

Encouraging critical thinking:
Help your child develop critical thinking skills by asking them to explain the reasoning behind their opinions. Discuss various sides of an issue and encourage them to think critically about their beliefs.

Advocating for them:
Support your child's right to express their opinions at school. If they encounter challenges or feel unheard, advocate on their behalf when necessary, such as during parent-teacher conferences.

By implementing these strategies, parents can play a significant role in promoting student voice and helping their children develop the confidence and skills to express themselves effectively in various aspects of their lives.

What are the benefits of promoting Student Voice?
Increased engagement and academic outcomes:
When students feel heard and have a say in their education, they become more engaged in the learning process, leading to better academic outcomes.

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Ownership of learning:
Student voice empowers students to take ownership of their education, making them more responsible for their learning and personal growth. This evokes a growth mindset and internal motivation.

Improved self-esteem and wellbeing:
Students who see their ideas valued and implemented tend to have higher self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Providing a platform for students to express their feelings and concerns can contribute to improved wellbeing, reducing stress and anxiety.

Diverse perspectives and innovation:
Student input brings diverse and innovative perspectives into the educational process, enriching classroom and school wide discussions and promoting tolerance and understanding.

Positive school climate:
A culture of listening and respect for student voices can create a more positive and inclusive school environment. As a result we see happier students and teachers and stronger communication and connections.

Promoting student voice not only benefits students themselves but also enhances the overall educational experience, fosters a sense of empowerment, and prepares students for success in both their academic and personal lives.

