

1.

There is a false and harmful notion that student voice comes from students alone. As a result, it is sometimes assumed that when students do not take on leadership roles in schools, they must lack interest or will. The responsibility to “step up” rests squarely on their shoulders. The reality is, however, that many students have a life history that involves adults expecting youth compliance. This pattern is hard to unlearn. As a result, many high school students do not even imagine the possibility of participating in real planning and decision making and would not know where to begin, if given the chance, because they have never had the experience. It is therefore crucial that principals send a clear and consistent message to the whole school community that student voice is vital. Principals must summon students and teachers to lead the charge and provide examples and opportunities for making student voice a part of all aspects of school culture.

Sussman, A. (n.d.). The Student Voice Collaborative: An Effort to Systematize Student Participation in School and District Improvement. *National Society for the Study of Education*, 114(1), 119–134

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3.

Since the advent of formal education in the United States, both the educational system and that system’s every reform have been premised on adults’ notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced. There is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing Students’ Perspectives: Toward Trust, Dialogue, and Change in Education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3–14. doi: 10.3102/0013189x031004003

2.

Student action research projects can galvanize, at-risk, disenfranchised youth and engage them in meaningful-rich activities that connect them to their own learning and the educational process. Unlike efforts that focus on “remediating” youth, student action research projects ask students to cover new ground by investigating issues of critical importance to them, and in the process, they develop high-level thinking skills, for instance, with support from adults on the project. In so doing, students can develop broader analysis of the forces affecting their lives and their education, they get to voice their concerns and opinions about issues they select, and they learn how to think proactively about possible solutions.

Student Action Research: Reaping the Benefits for Students and School Leaders Rubin, Beth C; Jones, Makeba National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin; Dec 2007; 91, 4; ProQuest pg. 36

4.

Bringing stakeholders together who have diverse backgrounds, experiences, and opinions strengthens the change process. If voices of students are left out, particularly the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, then the change process is weakened. Adults must begin to learn to trust students to take a central role in the educational change and design process.

Joseph, R. (2006). The Excluded Stakeholder: of Student Voice Change Process. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~syschang/decatour/documents/joseph_student-voice.pdf

5.

While some might claim that student government at the high school level is a perfect example of this sort of leadership, Mitra (2009) points out that most associated student bodies “exercise little power, focus primarily on social activities, and do not represent a cross-section of the school. In fact, a nationwide study of communities found no instances where student governments engaged in formal problem solving related to either the “school’s academic program or social-emotional climate,” areas of concern that are far more important in terms of achievement and social-emotional well-being than a well-planned prom.

(n.d.). Retrieved from <https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/resource/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice/>

6.

Student voice, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students’ “power” and “authority”. Aspects of student voice do raise concerns for some adults, who feel there needs to be more of a distance between themselves and their students. Cook-Sather (2006:366) explores the influence of “powershift” between adults and students: “the shifts in power dynamics between adults and young people and in roles for students are both prerequisites and results of the key premises and practices of student voice work”. This “power shift” can be perceived as threatening to both institution and individual teachers.

Robertson, G. (2015). Student voice at the "heart of learning". *Research in Teacher Education*, 5(1), 27–32.

7.

Fullan (1991: 170) reminds us that there are wider implications at stake in not listening to “student voice”. He quotes Bowles & Gintis (1976) and reflects upon the question, “Why in a democratic society should an individuals’ first real contact with a formal institution be so profoundly anti-democratic?” Fullan, writing about institutional change, reminds us that, change, above all is a people-related phenomenon for each and every individual.” Fullan poses the question, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in the introduction and implementation of reform in schools?”

Robertson, G. (2015). Student voice at the "heart of learning". *Research in Teacher Education*, 5(1), 27–32.

8.

The need for including student voice in inclusive education reform efforts is a critical step toward developing equitable schools. Though youth are at the center of all school reform efforts, they are seldom treated as partners in these efforts. Without youth, school reform efforts are limited to adults’ understandings of what counts as equity, which can continue to perpetuate some of the most marginalized youth. This tool draws on student voice as a robust tool in school reform, with the understanding that youth contributions and partnerships can deeply impact the equity and inclusive visions of educational systems.

Gonzalez, T., McCabe, K. M., & Castro, C. L. D. (2017). An Equity Toolkit For Inclusive Schools: Centering Youth Voice In School Change. Retrieved from <https://greatlakesequity.org/resource/equity-toolkit-inclusive-schools-centering-youth-voice-school-change>.