STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

Integrating student voice in the governing bodies of Kentucky schools

STUDENT VOICE TEAM

PRICHARD COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

SUMMER
2016

"I am excited to support The Student Voice Team's recommendations. Classrooms, schools, and schools districts will flourish when we foster a culture of respect and allow students representation in the decision-making process."

– Kentucky House Education Chairman Derrick Graham

"The Kentucky Association of School Councils is committed to developing and encouraging significant ways to include student voice in our public schools. This report reminds us that students who feel some level of ownership in their education are more likely to succeed academically."

– Kentucky Association of School Councils

"The importance of student opinions, ideas, feedback, experiences, and concerns are a vital in the pursuit of an exceptional educational experience for every student. In support of the Prichard Committee, I am truly pleased to see the work in elevating the student voice statewide."

– Dr. Randy Poe, Superintendent, Boone County Public Schools, Kentucky

"This is a must-read report for educational leaders and policy makers, with must-implement recommendations. It is a call to action, driven by the Student Voice Team's ability and willingness to listen to and learn from all members of the school community, and the acknowledgement that students should always be a central part of school improvement efforts."

– Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, Founder, Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations & author of the best-selling book Student Voice: The Instrument of Change

"The go-to resource for understanding the state of student voice and participation in Kentucky. While the report documents a lack of student voice in most schools, it shows increased willingness for greater student voice in the future. The report ends with helpful insights on how to foster meaningful voice rather than token participation."

– Dr. Dana L. Mitra, Professor of Education, Pennsylvania State University

This is "a document that not only raised expectations about the importance and value of student voice but also provides excellent concrete recommendations for serious inclusion of youth voice in policy and practice."

– Michele Cahill, Distinguished Fellow in Education and Youth Development, National Center for Civic Innovation

"We know from our work with students that when they have agency and ownership, the sky is the limit. I hope the recommendations will be implemented and appreciate the excellent work that you and the SVT have done to establish this foundation."

– Jane Shropshire, Shropshire Educational Consulting

C O N T E N T S

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When it comes to education, students' perspectives are largely unrepresented in the discussions and decisions that so profoundly shape their lives and futures. Many schools lack a utilized institutional mechanism for soliciting student feedback, allowing students to slip through the school system as passive consumers rather than engaging them as active partners in governance and learning. This represents a missed opportunity to strengthen our schools.

Students experience school in a manner different from teachers, administrators, and parents. Because they are on the receiving end of the education system, they notice problems and identify solutions that would not occur to adults. Listening to students' perspectives generates important feedback and creates a sense of agency and ownership that can lead to higher student performance.

THE RATIONALE

Leveraging student voice within our school system will:

- Further democratize Kentucky schools,

- Allow students to apply what they learn in the classroom,

- Encourage students to own their learning experience,

- Increase self-efficacy,

- Engage stakeholders, an approach with a record of success in the business community, and

- Bring students' fresh perspective and comprehensive understanding of the school system to the decision-making table.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- Teachers and students are natural allies.

- Many schools currently engage students at the surface level through councils centered around social planning. We advocate for schools to also engage students in policymaking.

- Students successfully serve on school governance bodies throughout the country.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

The results from the 89 school districts and 189 schools in Kentucky who responded to our survey indicate:

- Compared to leaders like California and Maryland, Kentucky schools are behind the curve when it comes to elevating student voice as a tool for school improvement.
  - 6% of school councils have advisory student members and only 2% have voting student members.
  - 9% of school boards have student members, all of which are advisory.
  - 43% of schools offer their students a meaningful platform from which to voice their opinions.
- Kentucky is ready for change.
  - 53% of school councils would be willing to add a student member.
  - 46% of school boards would be willing to add a student member.
- Several schools and districts in Kentucky, such as Eminence Independent, actively employ student voice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a culture of respect.
2. Support students to serve on school governance bodies.
3. Create a formal platform where students can share their perspectives with educators.
4. Enlist students to design and disseminate student voice surveys and/or hold roundtables to inform policy changes that directly affect them.

DEMOCRATIZING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The concept of broad-based stakeholder engagement is central to Kentucky's school governance. Including students as partners is a natural extension of this history.

Kentucky's public school system began in 1838 at the prompting of advocates who worried Kentucky was falling behind. To govern this new system, lawmakers authorized appointed trustees to oversee daily operations.[10] In 1920, after it became apparent that the trustees were corrupt and the system ineffective, lawmakers reformed the district governing system to create the five-person elected school board still in use today.[11] This model democratized the school system, taking the power out of the hands of corrupt administrators and putting it back into the hands of the people.

Seventy years later, amid complaints of a closed and poorly performing system, lawmakers came together once again. They passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), which opened and decentralized decision-making through the creation of the School-Based Decision Making Council (SBDM).[4] This widened the circle of high-level discussion and decisions to include teachers, parents, and principals.

However, because Kentucky law limits school board membership to citizens over the age of 24 and SBDM membership to parents, teachers, and administrators,[21] the education system's most populous stakeholders remain largely unrepresented. This undermines some of the democratic principles schools aim to uphold and transmit.

Student voice: student contributions to school decisions or education policy discussions and the serious consideration of this feedback and perspective.

School-Based Decision-Making Council (SBDM): a council responsible for most of the decisions involved with running a school in Kentucky.[21]

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence hosts a town hall on education reform in 1984.

The absence of students on school governance bodies is a missed opportunity to expand the classroom. The goal of the education system is to prepare students to be productive members of society. Integrating students in school governance helps to realize this goal by engaging students in democratic processes from a young age and teaching students the importance of civic engagement.[29] Students, as a collective, will learn how to constructively convey their frustrations and offer solutions rather than just complaints.

Supporting students to serve on school governance bodies also prompts students to synthesize and apply what they learn in the classroom. Synthesis and application are two of the highest cognitive levels in Bloom's Taxonomy, which was created by a psychologist as a classification system for student performance.[9]

Supporting students to serve as members on school governance bodies continues the process of democratization while furthering the goals of the education system.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

This proposition is particularly relevant given the school system's never-ending struggle to engage students at risk of dropping out. According to Dr. Dana Mitra, Penn State Associate Professor of Educational Theory and Policy, many students feel disengaged and alienated at school. Student voice, however, allows them to think of themselves as valuable members of their education communities.[23]

In the words of Rosalinda, a 12th grader who participated in student forums facilitated by Mitra at a low-performing California school:

> *Now I'm very confident in myself. I know that I can make changes. Sometimes I used to think that our lives were kind of pointless. And now, it's like, you can make real changes. Now it's the school, and maybe in my career and my adult life I could actually do something, with a lot of determination and will.*
>
> **Rosalinda,**
> *12th grader*[23]

Psychologists call the positive shift in Rosalinda's evaluation of her own importance within the school system "buy-in" and "ownership." According to the Education Alliance, buy-in leads to deeper student engagement, thus decreasing dropout rates and increasing student performance.[34] This hypothesis is reinforced by the 2013 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, which compared students from 65 cities around the world and found that in the highest-performing schools, students feel a real sense of ownership over their education.[13] PISA manager Andreas Schleicher explains that students will not try in school if they do not understand its

value and relevancy and do not feel "that they personally can make a difference in their own outcomes."[13]

SELF-EFFICACY

According to renowned psychologists Alfred Bandura and Mary Gist, buy-in is closely tied to self-efficacy, which again leads to higher performance.[14] In the case of education, self-efficacy would refer to a student's belief in his/her importance within the school system. Gist says self-efficacy correlates with several factors, including:

> **High expectations:** People tend to either rise or fall to expectations, a phenomenon known as the Pygmalion effect. If schools treat students like intelligent beings capable of making meaningful contributions to school decision making, they will perform accordingly.[14]

> **Internal locus of control:** When people feel like they have a certain degree of control over their role within a larger group, they feel partially responsible for the group's success or failure. This fosters an increased sense of urgency and a willingness to take on the group goal as their own. Supporting students to formally participate in school governance grants them some autonomy over their own education. This is instrumental in raising performance levels.[14]

For example, in Maryland, students serve on each board of education. Alexya Brown, Student Member of the Board in Calvert County, Maryland, observed an "increase [in] the overall efficacy of the students." Students "host multiple town hall forums [and] have created over a dozen student advocacy units within the school system."[3] By giving these students a larger say in what happens to them while they are at school, school officials have prompted students to take a larger interest in their education and to tackle issues with maturity and professionalism.

Students participate in a roundtable, discussing academic standards.

CONSUMER-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MODEL

These psychological principles have been more widely tested by businesses seeking to engage consumers. Censeo Consulting Group explains that companies should prioritize stakeholders based on "the degree of influence they have on program outcomes" and "their attitudes toward the program."[30]

In the business world, engaging stakeholders makes them feel valued, educates them on the product or service, and allows the company to gather valuable data and feedback. Conversely, failing to engage stakeholders can result in negative consequences for the business.[30] Although students are more than consumers of education, the consumer stakeholder engagement model closely parallels the student voice model in the following ways:

1. Students, like consumers, are the recipients of a service.

2. The success of both schools and businesses depends on an engaged student body/consumer base.

The principles of the consumer engagement model apply to student voice; therefore schools should prioritize student feedback. Engaging students is not only a democratic practice, it is integral for school improvement.

Members of the Student Voice Team ask the Fayette County Board of Education to add a student member.

DEEPER STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Students offer a rich reserve for classroom and institutional feedback, yet all too often, schools only scratch the surface of their potential. In many cases, students serve more as symbols of student participation than as active, effective partners in decision-making. Authentic, meaningful student involvement requires a "sustainable structure of support."[12] It requires "involvement and investment."[32] And it requires mutual respect.

Understandably, it may be difficult for adults to take the feedback of students seriously. They have seen too many requests for longer recess, heard too many complaints about bad grades on tests, and otherwise seen seemingly petty grievances confronted with an outsized response. But teachers Mark and Christine Boynton assert that "students will never trust us [teachers] or open themselves up to hear what we have to say unless they sense that we value and respect them." Students are more likely to take teachers and administrators seriously when they do the same in turn.[4] Mutual respect is the foundation that makes meaningful student voice possible. Consider these contrasting examples of how this dynamic plays out in a real-world context.

TEACHERS AS ALLIES

Students and teachers are natural allies. Both spend at least 35 hours a week in the classroom, and both are on the frontline of schools, albeit under different circumstances. They are the gears of the education system, constantly turning and connecting in order to ensure that everything functions properly. They support each other, providing feedback and encouraging higher performances. And collaboration outside of the classroom is the logical, aspirational extension of the collaboration within it.

Lafayette High School social studies teacher Brison Harvey explained his motivation for supporting student agency in the classroom: "I desperately want to include students in the decision-making process [in order to] know how I can best help students... succeed."[18]

Harvey elaborated that because students know best which tools they need to succeed, their perspective is vital when it comes to allocating resources. If a teacher can gather feedback on what resources students need most, he can better prepare them for success.

John G. Carlisle Elementary School teacher Tiffany Gruen explained on the value of supporting students to be a part of their own learning: "The relationship between student voice and teacher voice is the defining ingredient of a positive classroom community. We [students and teachers] support each other when someone is struggling and uplift each other in our successes."[15]

Gruen regularly employs student voice in her third grade classroom by asking students about potential problems and solutions within their community. She says she is often surprised by how intelligent and thoughtful her students' responses are, as they are able to pinpoint potential fixes that would never have occurred to adults.[15]

A VOTING STUDENT BOARD MEMBER IN MARYLAND

Junior Eric Guerci was elected to serve as a voting member of the Montgomery County School Board for the 2015-2016 year. The election process was intensive, consisting of speeches and visits to all of Montgomery County's schools, a primary election, formal question and answer sessions, a live debate, and a popular vote election. Although he does not have a vote on matters of budget, collective bargaining, boundaries, or negative personnel, he is part of all debate and discussion and is otherwise treated as a full board member. He serves on several committees, participates in work sessions on the budget, and meets with unions and student groups. He feels that there is a climate of mutual respect and refers to the other board members as his "colleagues."[16]

Eric said that the other board members frequently thank him for his contributions and turn to him for advice when voting because they recognize the value of his input. He has even brought attention to matters that the school board otherwise would not have considered. For example, Eric played a significant role in the county's switch from two-hour final exams to a quarterly assessment structure. Furthermore, in a neighboring county, the Student Member of the Board introduced a budget plan that saved the district thousands of dollars.[16]

A SUPERINTENDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL IN KENTUCKY

Erin Christopher, a senior at Tates Creek High School, served on the Fayette County superintendent advisory council. She became frustrated when she realized "we weren't really allowed to call into question the issues going on across the county;" it was not the opportunity to let students "have a voice in how we're being educated" for which she had hoped.[8]

Although surface-level engagement is an improvement from little or no engagement at all, it can create frustration and cynicism for students who aspire to have a more meaningful impact. Christopher thought she had an opportunity to share the informed ideas she had about school improvement, but she ended up feeling like she was being used for a photo-op.[8]

Similarly, when the Student Voice Team conducted its Student Voice Audit, surveying the student body about pressing school climate issues, one junior high school student wrote: "Is anyone even going to read these?" on the back of his survey.[33] He expected that the solicitation of his feedback about school was just one more exercise in futility.

Left: Eric Guerci (2nd from right), with other members of the Board of Education of Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools.

Below: Students on the Fayette County superintendent advisory committee.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Students' perspectives are clearly valuable: information gleaned from student feedback is vital to predicting teacher performance, according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's *Measures of Effective Teaching* study.[6] But how are student opinions qualitatively different from those of teachers, parents, and administrators?

Students' ideas for the future are less influenced by what has always been done in the past. When they approach a situation, they are not as inclined to interpret the situation through stigmas and paradigms hardened by past experiences. This contextual knowledge is necessary to an extent, but it is also helpful to have someone in the room whose primary focus is the present and future. Additionally, students are less hindered by personal agendas; they are primarily concerned with improving their own education experience. According to Eminence Independent Superintendent Buddy Berry, who successfully advocated for a voting student member to his school's SBDM, "The kids have nothing [political] to gain from their position," he said. "The adults can."[1]

Some problems that go unnoticed by adults are readily identified by tapping into student experience. For example, when we performed a Student Voice Audit at a Kentucky junior high school, we observed large gaps in student and teacher responses. Although not a single adult commented on bullying in his/her survey responses or interviews, two-thirds of the students complained of an ineffective discipline policy, resulting in a major bullying problem.[33] Taking into account the opinions and requests of students, the Student Voice Team was able to make several suggestions for school improvement efforts.

Similarly, in Calvert County, Maryland, student member of the board Alexya Brown could see what her fellow board members could not: the unequal distribution of students and resources among the district's four high schools was negatively affecting the performance of programs in the under-capacity schools. When she brought this to the Board's attention, the members realized the problem was far greater than they initially thought and began to look into redistricting.[3]

Students have a discussion with school administrators.

SUCCESS STORIES

Student feedback is vital to a thriving education system. But what happens when schools institutionalize student voice by including students as members on school governance bodies? Several case studies from Kentucky and from around the country suggest such practice leads to significant benefits to learning:

FEDERAL HOCKING LOCAL SCHOOLS

Location: Stewart, Ohio[25]
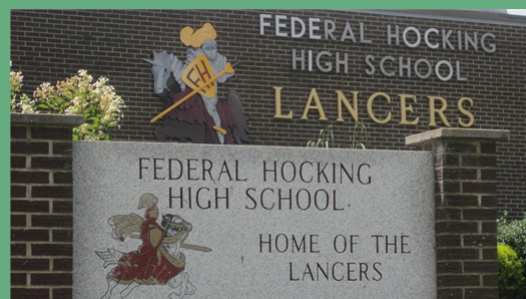Population: 966

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

Location: Annapolis, Maryland[24]
Population: 78,489

In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, students have served as voting members on the school board for more than 37 years.[12]

In 2015, there were district-wide teacher protests over pay. Teachers refused to write recommendation letters, teach class, or answer students' questions. Student Member of the Board Jacob Horstkamp felt pressure from his teachers and friends to take the teachers' side, but, aware of the importance of his role, carefully considered both sides of the issue. Like a mature professional, he did not allow outside pressure to sway his decision.[19]

Federal Hocking is one of the lowest-income school districts in Ohio. An astonishing 85% of Federal Hocking High School's students are "economically disadvantaged" and of the economically disadvantaged students, 82% qualify for free lunch.[36]

Yet 91% of its students are proficient in reading, 90% of its students are proficient in math, 56% of students scored either accelerated or advanced on reading assessments, and 60% of students scored accelerated or advanced on math assessments.[35] Additionally, 95% of students graduate, 70% go to college, and former students earn a B+ average in college classes.[36]

Superintendent George Wood credits student voice, asserting "change has to begin with the perceived needs of those to whom the change is going to happen."[36]

Students run all student activities and serve as full members on all school governance bodies, even participating in personnel decisions.[36]

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Location: Minneapolis, Minnesota[26]
Population: 36,817

PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Location: Pasadena, California[27]
Population: 19,102

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) Board of Education added a nonvoting student member in 2015. Students must go through an application process, and students must show initiative.[22]
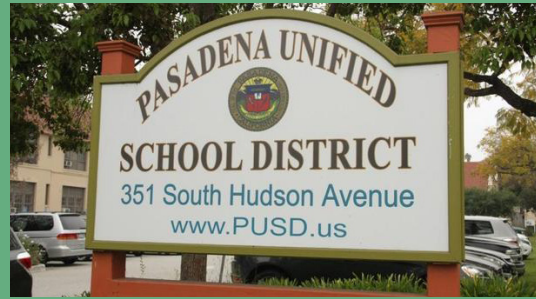
The district also has an Office of Student, Family, and Community Engagement. Its vision statement is: "MPS will welcome every family and every student, actively engaging them as partners in student learning and school improvement."[28]

In the Pasadena Unified School District, a student serves as an advisory member on the Board of Education. He is allowed a preferential vote, meaning he voices his opinion prior to the full vote, and the secretary must record his vote.[32]

The student member of the board can make motions, question witnesses, and discuss issues. However, he cannot participate in closed sessions.[32]

Students have served on California district boards since 1972. Over half of the boards in the state have student members.[31]

The California State Board of Education has a voting student member, whom the governor appoints after an extensive application process.[31]

I've seen more students willing to open up and share their voices. At my school, I've seen students more willing to share their opinions in newspaper outlets, or write a letter to the alderman, or just feel empowered to talk about their feelings or the way things are running at their school, which I don't think was happening as much before.

Coral Ortiz
Student Member of the Board of Education of New Haven Independent, Connecticut[7]

> *We represent students. Everything we do is for students. To do this work and not have the voice of students in the room would be disingenuous to what we say our mission is all about. So to have students who are committed, who are ambitious and are intelligent, who understand what it is the students need and want and what their challenges are—that keeps us honest.*

Segun Eubanks
Chairman of the Board of Education of Prince George County, Maryland[20]

> *In my role as a non-voting member I would add input on how the budget was created, the various policies that were being considered, and provided input on the various programs that were run across the county/district. I felt that in my position, I was respected at the table and all participants listened to my input. In the past, previous student board members were not as vocal, but the shock of having a student provide adequate feedback was quickly dissipated by having an informed view.*
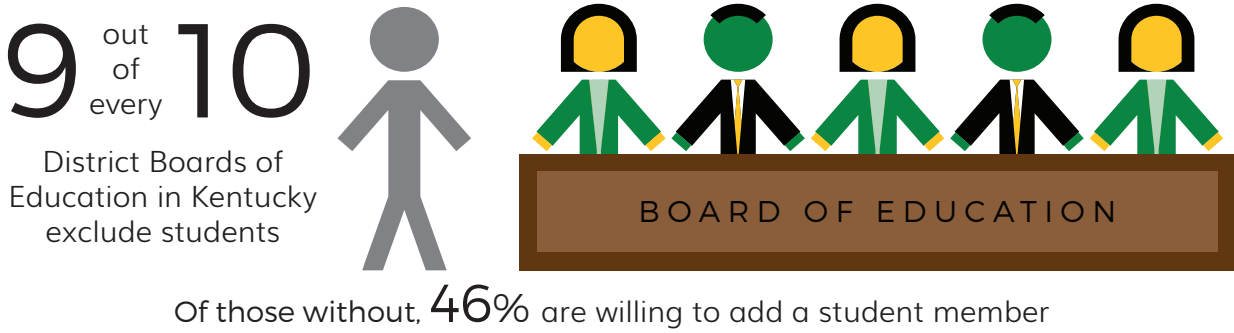
Brison Harvey
Lexington high school social studies teacher and former Student Member of a Board of Education in Maryland[18]
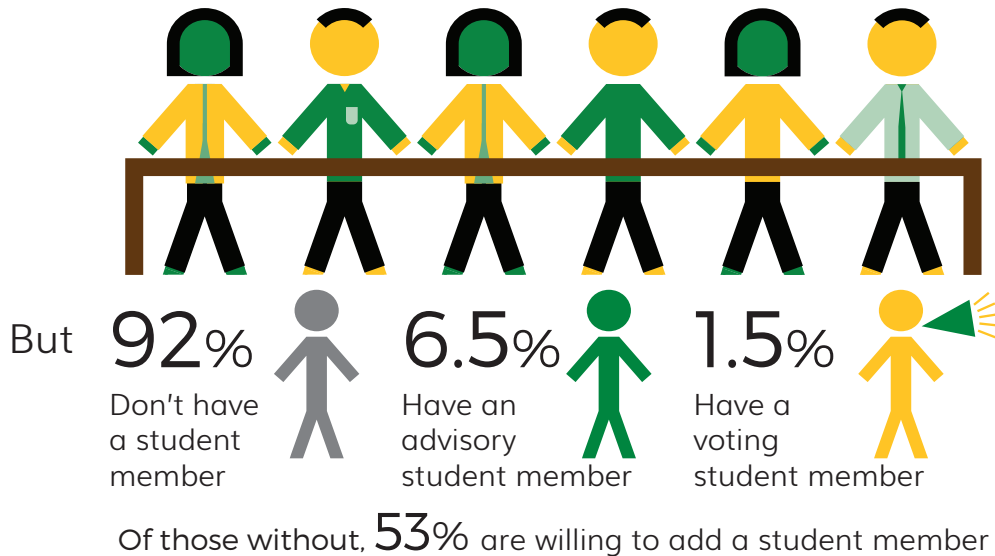

Students discuss the state of their school building in a roundtable.

FINDINGS

We surveyed 89 school districts and 189 schools in Kentucky about student voice and school governance. We found the following:

9 out of every **10** District Boards of Education in Kentucky exclude students

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Of those without, **46%** are willing to add a student member

---

Most SBDMs in Kentucky have three teachers, two parents, and one administrator

But **92%** Don't have a student member

6.5% Have an advisory student member

1.5% Have a voting student member

Of those without, **53%** are willing to add a student member
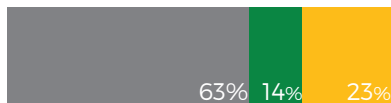

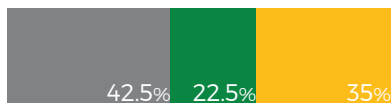Finally, **74%** of high schools in Kentucky have a student council,

but only **1** in **3** were described as having meaningful duties by principals

Additionally, there are student voice opportunities avaiable in many schools and districts.

Districts

63% 14% 23%

Schools

42.5% 22.5% 35%

■ No
■ Yes, but non-meaningful
■ Yes, meaningful

Meaningful student council & student voice program: any survey response that demonstrated that the school actively solicited and considered the feedback of students. For example, consulting students before making a policy change or asking for monthly recommendations.

Non-meaningful student council/student voice programs: any survey response that failed to demonstrate that the school seriously sought out and considered the feedback of students, such as student councils that focus only on dances and fundraisers or a superintendent lunch group.

SBDM Coordinator: serve as the representative of an area's SBDM to the Kentucky Association of School Councils.

Every decision being made is impacting students. It makes sense for them to have representation at the table.

Tara Howard
Mercer County High School Principal

I think having buy-in from the student population is an integral part of culture building.

Julie York
Clinton County SBDM Coordinator

I think with student voice there is an opportunity provide a unique insight and perspective on reaching goals for the district.

Houston Barber
Franklin Independent Schools Superintendent

I am not sure how much they would understand at first, but I am willing to educate them just as we do new parents and teachers.

Brad Phips
Caverna High School Principal, Barren County

It would give us a better understanding of what the students are experiencing and where we can improve from their perspective without compromising our objectives.

John Ritchie
Gallatian County Middle School Principal

KENTUCKY SUCCESS: EMINENCE INDEPENDENT

As a District of Innovation that has a waiver from certain state laws, Eminence Independent District in Kentucky involves students in school governance. Every SBDM in the district, elementary through high school, has a voting student member. However, the elementary school member must be a fifth grader and cannot participate in discussions involving teacher impropriety. Candidates for the position self-nominate and give a three to five minute speech. According to Supterintendent Buddy Berry, "the kids that show their passion and have the best talk usually win."[1]

Superintendent Berry believes that when it comes to electing someone to formally represent them on a school governance body, students know better than to simply pick the most popular candidate. "I honestly believe kids are better than adults at separating popularity from position," he said.[1]

When purchasing a new textbook or software, the council will consult the student member to verify that the particular item either would facilitate future learning or had been helpful in the past. When asked if there had ever been a problem or argument when the adults and students disagree, Supterintendent Berry said, "No. Usually they work out the kinks and make a compromise before it gets to voting. The feedback loop really works."[1]

Students walk the halls of their school, discussing the school culture.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The Student Voice Team finds the data encouraging. As evidenced by our survey results, student voice has a foundation of support in Kentucky. Over half of school councils and nearly half of school boards would be willing to add a student member.

Still, there is much room for growth. Less than one-tenth of school councils and school boards have student members, and a majority could do far more to offer students more meaningful platforms to voice their opinions and be heard. Although school boards have no legal path to add voting student members and SBDMs must work through a challenging application process to do so, there does exist the possibility for students to serve as substantive advisory members on either body.

The good news is that Kentucky is ready for change. Around half of both superintendents and principals are willing to work towards student representation on school governance bodies.

That being said, schools can engage students in ways other than representation on governance bodies. They can work to see students as co-creators, empower students to gather feedback from their peers, and provide students with a formal platform from which to voice their opinions.

The surveys we distributed and the raw data can be found in the back of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As evidenced by our research, schools stand to benefit from formal integration of student feedback in decision-making processes. Here are four recommendations outlining what students, teachers, and other school leaders can do to ensure that happens.

1. **Foster a culture of respect.** Of the four recommendations, this is the most important. It cannot be accomplished through a policy change or task force. It will require a paradigm shift on the part of teachers, administrators, and students, and it will take time.

   a. Students: Students should respect teachers, staff, and administrators and demostrate responsibility to encourage reciprocation of respect.

   b. Teachers: Teachers should consider students as partners in learning. They should regularly seek student feedback on lesson plans and support students to guide their own learning.

   c. Schools & Districts: Both schools and districts should acknowledge that students can offer valid feedback and commit to treating students as partners rather than passive consumers of education. Students should know that if they come to an administrator with a problem, their concerns will not be dismissed without further discussion.

2. **Support students to serve on school governance bodies.** This allows students formal representation in the decision making process, ensures their informed opinions will be taken as seriously as that of any other informed stakeholder, and models the democratic values to which our public schools aspire.

   a. <u>Students & Teachers:</u> Students and teachers should advocate for policy changes by creating petitions; contacting community leaders; writing letters to the editor; and voicing support on social media. They can also demonstrate interest by urging their school or district to follow the procedures outlined below to add an advisory student member to its governing body.

   b. <u>School-Based Decision-Making Councils:</u> SBDMs can easily add an advisory student memer. No state law or regulation prohibits this. However, to add a voting student member SBDMs must ask their district to apply to be a District of Innovation and specifically request exemption from the SBDM membership statute.

CAN AN ADVISORY MEMBER BE MEANINGFUL?

While a voting position is preferable to an advisory position, advisory members can still participate in debate and decisions in a meaningful way. We recommend that school boards and school councils allow advisory student members to make a 3-5 minute presentation at the start of the meeting and to comment on issues before they come to a vote.

---

   c. <u>District Boards of Education:</u> Boards can adopt a policy and process to allow for an advisory student member. No state law or regulation prohibits this.

   d. <u>Lawmakers & Policymakers:</u> Lawmakers and Policymakers can consider policy changes that will engage students in the school decision-making process and explore additional strategies to incorporate student voice in the education policymaking processes.

3. **Create a formal platform** where students can share their perspectives with educators.

   a. <u>Students:</u> Students can express interest by formally asking their SBDM or school board to meaningfully involve students in decision-making, starting a petition, holding a rally, proposing a structure, or requesting a meeting with their principal or superintendent. Students should demonstrate that they would utilize and take seriously a meaningful student voice platform.

   b. <u>Teachers</u>: Teachers can support and assist student advocacy.

   c. <u>Schools:</u> This platform will look different for each school, but might include a student council that does more than plan bake sales and dances or a forum or committee through which students and teachers can work together to address pressing education or school climate issues. Schools should gather student, parent, and teacher feedback in determining which road to take.

d. <u>Districts:</u> An excellent example of a meaningful advisory body can be found in Boone County, where students run a three-hour monthly meeting attended by the superintendent and principals. In this context, they discuss relevant issues and propose and implement solutions. The head of this advisory body (a student) serves as an advisory member on the school board. Districts can strive to create similar models to integrate student voice.

4. **Enlist students** to design and disseminate student voice surveys and conduct roundtables to gather information and input before making policy changes that directly affect students.

   a. <u>Students:</u> Students can ask their SBDM or school board to conduct school-wide student surveys. They can offer to help in writing the questions and administering the surveys and put focused effort into their responses. Students can also conduct roundtable discussions before or after school using a prepared set of questions. They can then present the results to their SBDM or school board.

   b. <u>Teachers:</u> Teachers can ask their SBDM or school board to conduct school-wide student surveys. They can also use surveys within the classroom to inform decisions related to teaching methods, curriculum, and suggested changes.

   c. <u>Schools & Districts:</u> Schools and districts can design and disseminate district or school-wide student surveys and use this data to make informed decisions. Involving students in this work will lead to more meaningful results.

   d. <u>Policymakers:</u> Policymakers can include students in the development of a new school accountability model under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Implementing these changes will bring valuable perspectives into the decision-making process, create schools where students feel their opinion is heard, encourage students to engage in the community and the classroom, raise performance levels, and ensure the leaders of tomorrow—and today—can thrive.

ABOUT US

The Prichard Committee Student Voice Team is a part of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, an independent, non-partisan, statewide nonprofit that has been mobilizing citizens to improve Kentucky schools since 1983. The Student Voice Team, consisting of over 100 self-selected youth from across the Commonwealth, works to amplify, elevate, and integrate students as full partners in that effort.

In 2014, we helped restore K-12 funding in Kentucky to pre-recession levels. During the 2015 legislative session, we advocated for the inclusion of students on superintendent screening committees. Later that year, we released *Uncovering the Tripwires to Postsecondary Success*, an examination of college transtions, and completed our first Student Voice Audit. In 2016, we led the Powerball Promise campaign, successfully advocating for the restoration of scholarships for over 8,000 low-income students.

THE STUDENTS AS PARTNERS TEAM

Eliza Jane Schaeffer
Project Lead
Henry Clay High School

Hiatt Allen
Graphic Design
American University

Gabriel Chesney
North Laurel High School

Logan Ziegler
Lexington Christian Academy

Justin Huffman
West Jessamine High School

Zachariah Sippy
Henry Clay High School

Gentry Fitch
University of North Carolina

Andrew Brennen
University of North Carolina
SVT Student Director

Rachel Belin
Student Voice Team Director
Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Students as Partners* report is the result of a collaborative effort for which we have many people to thank.

We are grateful for Prichard Committee staff including Executive Director, **Brigitte Blom Ramsey**; Associate Director, **Cory Curl**; and Senior Policy Director, **Perry Papka** for advising us throughout the research and policy-report writing process.

We thank **Susan Perkins Weston** for her on-call education law expertise and her abiding belief in this work.

We thank Penn State researcher, **Dana Mitra**; SoundOut Director, **Adam Fletcher**; and former Murray State professor, **Dr. George Patmor** for their support and expertise and for their academic and practical contributions to the burgeoning field of student voice.

We thank all the school administrators throughout the commonwealth who so readily responded to our requests for data. And we especially thank Eminence Independent Superintendent **Buddy Berry** and Boone County Superintendent **Randy Poe** for sharing their inspiring examples of what happens when student voice is unleashed to improve the learning environment.

Finally, we thank all of the young people in Kentucky and across the country who have pioneered what is possible when students are enlisted as full partners in making our education system better.

SURVEY METHOD

We surveyed every school and school district in Kentucky asking them whether students serve on school governance bodies in their school or district; if they would support the addition of a student member to those bodies; and what student voice opportunities are available to students in their school or district. Each target group received the survey three times. In total, 89 superintendents participated in the district-level survey and 189 SBDM coordinators, middle school principals, and high school principals participated in the school-level survey.

Though our results suggest that the student voice movement in Kentucky is still in its nascent stages, we did find several locations with strong student voice initiatives that could serve as best practice models for the rest of the state. We also found many superintendents and principals who are open to developing more opportunities for their students and who echo the Student Voice Team's core contention that as people who spend thirty-five hours or more in the classroom every week, students valuable perspectives on whether and how schools are working.

SAMPLE SURVEY

DISTRICT SURVEY
We sent the following survey to all 174 public school districts in Kentucky.

1. Name

2. District

3. Email

4. Is there a student serving on the school board?

5. If not, would you support the addition of a student member to the school board?

6. If so, to what extent do they influence debate/decisions?

7. Describe any district-wide student voice programs.

SCHOOL SURVEY
We sent the following survey to all 528 schools in Kentucky serving any of grades 6 through 12.

1. Name

2. District

3. Email

4. Is there a student serving on your school's SBDM?

5. If yes, to what extent does he or she influene debate/decisions?

6. If no, would you be open to adding a student member? Why or why not?

7. Does your school have a student council?

8. If yes, describe some of its projects/responsibilities.

9. Are there any other organizations in your school that have students working as partners with adults to improve it? If so, please describe them.

SURVEY DATA

SCHOOLS

Is there a student serving on your school's SBDM?		
Yes, voting	3	1.6%
Yes, advisory	12	6.3%
No	174	92.1%
Total	189	

If no, would you be open to adding a student member?		
Yes	82	47.1%
Yes, advisory only	11	6.3%
No	36	20.7%
Maybe	13	7.5%
No response	32	18.4%
Total	174	

Does your school have a student council?		
Yes*	23	12.2%
Yes, meaningful*	47	24.9%
Yes, not meaningful*	70	37.0%
No	45	23.8%
No response	4	2.1%
Total	189	

Are there any other organizations in your school that have students working as partners with adults to improve it?		
Yes*	1	0.5%
Yes, meaningful*	44	23.3%
Yes, not meaningful*	26	13.8%
No	116	61.4%
No response	2	1.1%
Total	189	

DISTRICTS

Is there a student serving on the school board?		
Yes	8	9.0%
No	81	91.0%
Total	89	

If no, would you be open to adding a student member?		
Yes	27	30.3%
Yes, advisory only	10	11.2%
No	29	32.6%
Maybe	3	3.4%
No response	12	13.5%
Total	89	

Are there any district-wide student voice programs?		
Yes, meaningful*	31	34.8%
Yes, not meaningful*	20	22.5%
No	35	39.3%
No response	3	3.4%
Total	89	

Some respondees chose to elaborate on their responses. Some did not. For those that did, the Student Voice Team used the given details to determine whether the student council provided students with an opportunity for meaningful student involvement. A "not meaningful" student council might just focus on social event planning.

ENDNOTES

1. Berry, Buddy. Personal communication, November 19, 2016.

2. Boynton, M., & Boynton, C. (2005). *The Educator's Guide to Preventing and Solving Discipline Problems*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

3. Brown, Alexya. Personal communication, January 1, 2016.

4. Brown, Kevin. Personal communication, November 23, 2015.

5. Bowman, P. J. Personal communication, November 14, 2015.

6. Cantrell, S., & Kane, T. J. (2013). *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching*. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

7. Chanen, E. (2016, April 8). The Electoral High School. *The Yale Herald*. Website.

8. Christopher, Erin. Personal communication, November 1, 2015.

9. Coffey, H. (2008). Bloom's Taxonomy. *Learn NC*. Website.

10. Ellis, W. E. (2011). *A History of Education in Kentucky* (p. 23). Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

11. Ellis, W. E. (2011). (p. 195).

12. Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful Student Involvement*. Olympia, WA: CommonAction.

13. Friedman, T. L. (2013, December 7). Can't We do Better? *The New York Times*. Website.

14. Gist, M. E. (1987). *Self-Efficacy: Implications for Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management*. Academy of Management Review, 12(3), 472-485.

15. Gruen, Tiffany. Personal communication, December 21, 2015.

16. Guerci, Eric. Personal communication, December 21, 2015.

17. Gunther, Rachel. Personal communication, February, 2015.

18. Harvey, Brison. Personal communication, November 25, 2015, & December 10, 2015.

19. Huang, C. (2015, November 16). Student School Board Member Balances Two Worlds Amid Protests. *Capital Gazette*. Website.

20. Keyes, C. R. (2015, August 13). PGCPS Board of Education Swears in New Student Member. *The Sentinel Newspapers*. Website.

21. Ky. Rev. Stat. § 160.345.

22. Linares, E. (2015, February 10). Teen Sworn In As Mpls. School Board Member. *CBS Minnesota*. Website.

23. Mitra, D. L. (2008). *Student Voice in School Reform: Building Youth-Adult Partnerships That Strengthen Schools and Empower Youth*. (pp. 81-94). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

24. National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Anne Arundel County Public Schools. *District Directory Information*. Website.

25. National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Federal Hocking. *District Directory Information*. Website.

26. National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Minneapolis Public School District. *District Directory Information*. Website.

27. National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Pasadena Unified School District. *District Directory Information*. Website.

28. Office of Student, Family, and Community Engagement. (2016). *Minneapolis Public Schools*. Website.

29. Patmor, F. N. (1998). *Student and School Council Member Views of Student Involvement in Decision Making in Kentucky High Schools* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

30. Sharma, R. (2008). *The 6 Principles of Stakeholder Engagement*. Washington, DC: Censeo Consulting Group.

31. Soundout. (2015, April 4). Students on School Boards in California. *Soundout*. Website.

32. Student Board Members, GAMUT. (2011). *Education Code 35012*.

33. Student Voice Team. (2015). *Student Voice Audit*. Lexington, KY: Author.

34. The Education Alliance. (2004). *A Summary of Research on Using Student Voice in School Improvement Planning*. Charleston, WV: Author.

35. US News & World Report. (2013). Federal Hocking High School Overview. *US News & World Report High School Rankings*. Website.

36. Wood, G. (2010). The Lessons of a Rural Principal. *Teaching Tollerane: A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center*. Website.

IMAGE CREDITS

Covers: Ross Boggess/Student Voice Team

p. 3: Prichard Committee

p. 5: Andrew Brennen/Student Voice

p. 6: Hiatt Allen/Student Voice Team

p. 8: (Left) Twitter/@mocoboe/Montgomery County Board of Education

(Right) Tammy L. Lane/Fayette County Public Schools

p. 9: Andrew Brennen/Student Voice

p. 10: (Left) Anne Arundel County Schools

(Right) Federal Hocking Local Schools

p. 11: (Left) KSTP-TV Minneapolis

(Right) AltadenaPoint

p. 12: Hiatt Allen/Student Voice

p. 15: Andrew Brennen/Student Voice