

The Student Voice Revolution

Shifting Power, Shaping Learning

A year-long, multi-state, youth-driven YPAR project

The Student Voice Revolution is a transformative research project running from September 2024 to June 2025, dedicated to understanding and enhancing student engagement through student-centered learning and meaningful youth participation in school decision-making.

This project seeks to address the crucial question of how engagement shifts when students are empowered to have a genuine voice in their education, alongside exploring the dynamics of power between youth and adults in educational settings.

By involving youth co-researchers from Connecticut, Vermont, and Iowa at every stage—from writing this summary to conducting focus groups to sharing our findings—we ensure that the perspectives and experiences of young people are authentically represented and integrated.

In collaboration with UP for Learning, an educational non-profit committed to empowering students and educators, and Rick Battistoni a professor and researcher at Providence College, this research utilizes Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Youth-Adult Partnership to critically reimagine traditional educational structures.

The project aims not only to produce insights but also to generate actionable outcomes, including this document of strategies and recommendations for students, educators, and administrators. We hope these resources will support educators in transforming their practices to prioritize student voice and expand opportunities for student-centered learning, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and responsive educational system.



Research Questions & Focus:

1. How does engagement change when youth have the opportunity to experience student-centered learning?
2. How does engagement change when youth feel like they have a voice in decision-making in schools?
3. What are things that we (youth and adults) can do to create that greater sense of balance (in power) between youth and adults?
4. What can we (youth and adults) do to support increasing opportunities for student-centered learning?



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Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Our recommendations to promote meaningful and equitable student voice

For students:

- You do not need to be asked or be given permission to have a voice!
- Collaborate with others: Work together with students to advocate for greater voice in your own learning and in school decision making.
- Enlist adults as partners: Adults bring practical insights and logistical know-how that will help you achieve your goals.
- Recognize that there are many different roles in advocating for what you care about. You do not need to be in a leadership role to advocate for yourself.
- Join or start clubs that allow you to make your voice heard on school policies and practices.
- Ask “Whose voices are not being heard?”
 - Work to lift up the voices of all young people.

For administrators:

- Examine student voice from an equity perspective. Ask: Are there disparities in which students have a voice or choice in what or how they learn?
- Establish formal structures where students can contribute to discussions of school policy and practice.
- Create school-wide opportunities for students to develop and lead clubs and co-curricular learning.
- Conduct a youth and adult climate survey and then engage students and teachers in the data analysis.
- Support teachers in developing new courses and content that aligns with their own passions and interests.

For educators:

- Ask all your students what they care about and are interested in.
- Take time to build strong relationships and find common ground with all students in your classes, regardless of subject matter.
- Recognize that different students will need different avenues, encouragement, and support to help them speak out.
- Design lessons and assignments to provide opportunities for choice and creativity while providing clear guidelines and standards.
- Examine your biases about youth, and how they impact your interactions with students.
- Follow through on students’ suggestions and feedback when students speak up.
- Regularly collect and act upon student input through surveys, class discussions, or informal check-ins to demonstrate that their voices are valued.

Want to learn more?

Scan this QR code to access a virtual version of these recommendations, including more detailed ideas and hyperlinked resources!

