YouthTruth

STUDENT SURVEY

A NATIONAL NONPROFIT

STUDENT VOICE IN ACTION:

Engaging Students in School Climate Data

The Case for Engaging Students in Climate Data

Too often in education, important decisions are made without engaging the people most affected: the students. By bringing students into transformation efforts, schools can catalyze improvements and train youth to lead alongside adults in defining and meeting district goals. As data and education experts, YouthTruth helps guide educators and students through the processes of gathering, interpreting, and acting upon student feedback. We believe this process is strongest and most powerful when students are involved at every stage. In this guidebook, you'll find protocols and strategies from YouthTruth and innovative educators who are elevating student voice to accelerate change.

ABOUT STUDENT VOICE

MYTHS	TRUTHS
Student voice is only relevant to youth.	High quality education requires that youth and adults work in partnership.[1]
It's only important to ask students what they think when a problem arises.	Youth voice keeps communities honest, connected, and effective.[2]
Students just complain.	Student perceptions are empirically linked to academic outcomes, so it's smart to listen and consider their perceptions legitimate.[3]
"Adults know best."	Students are the experts on their own experience.[4]

THE CASE FOR STUDENT FEEDBACK

Research shows that student perception is linked to both academic outcomes and teacher quality, and that student feedback should be a critical component of school improvement initiatives. Incorporating the unique perspectives of students into decision-making creates happier, healthier school systems with higher academic achievement.

REFERENCE

1. "Engaging Students in School Climate Improvement: A Student Voice Strategy." Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools, Edition: 2nd, Publisher: Routledge, Editors: Michael J. Furlong, Rich Gilman, E. Scott Huebner, pp. 329-346.
2. Robert W. Blum, "A Case for School Connectedness," Educational Leadership, ASCD, April 2005.
3. Elliot, Gable, and Marcy Church. "Perceptions of Classroom Environment, Achievement Goals, and Achievement Outcomes." Journal of Educational Psychology 93 (2001): 43-54.
4. Easton, and Elaine Allensworth, "What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools," UChicago Consortium on School Research, April 2007.

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This guidebook features strategies that work well in a range of school settings. Strategies are divided into school and district-level examples, but keep in mind that each approach can be modified to fit your context. These models for engagement and youth leadership involve students at every step of the feedback process — from surveying to reflection, and from prioritization to strategic planning.

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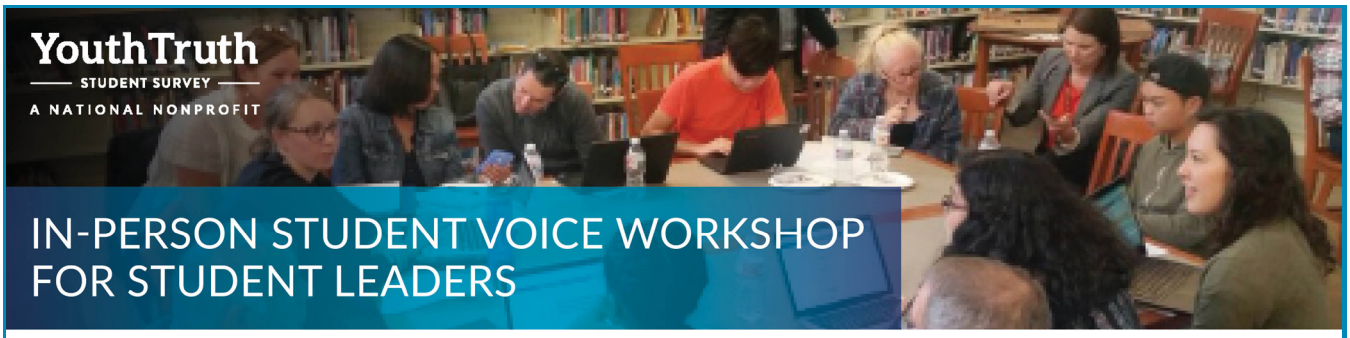

IN-PERSON STUDENT VOICE WORKSHOP FOR STUDENT LEADERS

OBJECTIVES

- Student will identify areas of school culture and instruction their peers rated most positively, as well as least positive. Next, they'll analyze the extent to which subgroups of students of have different experiences in school and partner with their classmates and adults in their school to improve the learning experience for all.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Each school identifies students representing a cross-section of the overall student population across identities, ages, and achievement.
- An adult chool adult (e.g. principal, teacher, counselor) joins student groups to help facilitate discussion.

Experienced, Trusted Advisors

Flexible Process & Actionable Results

YOUTHTRUTH'S TAILORED EXERCISES

- **Empathy Exercise:** A short conversation to build empathy and capacity for listening, even when feedback differs from students' own experiences.
- **School Data Dive:** YouthTruth helps students dig in and analyze school data.
- **Reflection:** Participants reflect, synthesize, and prioritize top areas for change.
- **Planning:** Students develop deliverables to share the results with their communities (e.g. the school board, their peers) and make change.

Request a **Quote**

Workshops are designed for 20-200 participants, typically takes 2 hours, and costs $3,000 (inlcudes travel).

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Before Surveying

FOR DISTRICTS

You've declared student voice a priority and decided to survey. Now what?
Here are some ways that students can help build buy-in and boost participation.

Students Share the Message Across the District

Activate a Superintendent's Student Senate
Seven times a year, a diverse group of student representatives across all secondary schools in San Luis Coastal Unified School District (SLCUSD) gather together as the Superintendent's Student Senate. In the fall of each year, SLCUSD administers the YouthTruth survey, and this group spreads the word about surveying through posters, student-made videos, and district-wide messaging.

Engage Your Youth Commission
Similarly, West Contra Costa Unified School District's (WCCUSD) Youth Commission leads communication efforts o both adults and students to prepare the district for their spring survey administration.

Both districts found that peer-to-peer messaging about their districts' desire to make change through student feedback to inspired and prepared peers to give honest and thoughtful feedback, and feel confident their voices would be heard. Following these efforts, SLCUSD achieved a 90% response rate.

If you don't have a Superintendent's Student Senate, a Youth Commission, or a similar group that's okay! With easy to use templates and video scripts provided by YouthTruth, students can easily tailor and launch their communications campaign. For examples of student-created collateral, click here.

"YouthTruth takes time, but it's worth it because it gives the teachers a bigger perspective of what is in the students' minds and what they're feeling or what they need to improve on."
–LORENA MOULTEN, 11TH GRADE STUDENT AT HIGH TECH CHULA VISTA

Before Surveying

FOR SCHOOLS

Students can rally their school's unique community of students, staff, and families to approach the survey process with authenticity. Here are some ways students can help prepare for survey launch.

Student-Led Communications Campaign

Videos: Student-made videos are a great way to get the word out about why the school is prioritizing student voice, what the survey will cover, and the timing of the survey window. *Click here to explore a few videos, or use http://bit.ly/2Rql3P3.*

Posters: Posters around campus can save precious class time and allow students to articulate your school's reasons for surveying to peers in their own words. *Download an example here, or use http://bit.ly/2SXcBEA.*

School Newspaper: Students at San Luis Obispo High School wrote articles in the school paper about their school's decision to survey to help gain the support and interest of peers. *Click here to explore an example, or use http://bit.ly/2W4eUHB.*

Morning Announcements: Across SLCUSD, students announced upcoming surveys on the morning news so that students could hear about the survey process and why it matters from their peers.

Student Proctors

At Morro Bay High School, student leaders facilitated the survey process by using the YouthTruth proctor script to introduce and explain the anonymous survey. This modeled student leadership and shared ownership of the process, demonstrating that student voices are important in each step. *To download a proctor script, click here, or follow this link: http://bit.ly/2szuXjt.*

Students Add Their Own Questions

Prior to learning about YouthTruth, WCCUSD's Youth Commission was drafting its own survey. But survey design requires time that the students did not have. With YouthTruth's research-backed surveys focused on the themes that matter most to creating strong climate and culture, the Commission only needed to create three custom questions that asked about district-specific topics.

With the support of YouthTruth's survey design experts, the items were refined and included in the YouthTruth survey — and students were both engaged in and learned from the survey design process.

"If the students think we don't care about them, that is a big problem. The data opened our eyes to our school in a new way, and as a result we have specifically had professional development on positive student interactions and adopted a social-emotional curriculum."

–SCHOOL LEADER

After Surveying

FOR DISTRICTS

District leadership teams receive student survey results within seven business days and can then dive into the results as a team before engaging students in the debrief process. Post-results conversations with students offer a valuable opportunity to continue to amplify and include student voice in decision-making. Too often, students take surveys and never find out what happens with their feedback. Including students in the data-debrief process sends a message that student input is taken seriously, builds culture, and generates fresh ideas.

Students Set SMART Goals

SLCUSD invited the Superintendent's Student Senate to create a set of recommendations to Central Office. In winter, this group spent a spent a half-day with the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, and other district leadership reflecting on their YouthTruth data. They identified bright spots and priorities for change, along with questions that were prompted through the findings. The following spring, students and district leadership gathered again to build on their reflections and set SMART goals.

Students Present to the Board of Trustees

After SLCUSD's Superintendent's Student Senate created an action plan, students presented recommendations to the district's board. This helped the district amplify the reach of student voice, add power to the ideas generated between students and district leadership, and showcase the district's commitment to making student feedback actionable.

> "The YouthTruth data informed a new, much more vital strategic planning process which in turn will enhance all of our school improvement plans."
>
> –SCHOOL LEADER

Student "Expert Panel"

As Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD) principals reflected on their YouthTruth data, they invited a diverse group of students to serve as an "expert panel" to inform their reflection.

How to:

- Set aside 30-45 minutes during the principals' meeting when survey data is discussed.
- Identify a facilitator, ideally the Superintendent. In this way, the Superintendent is modeling empathy for student experiences and commitment to student voice.
- Identify 3-5 data points from survey results for discussion and exploration. Look for data that…
  - Aligns to strategic priorities (e.g., if the district is prioritizing **strong academics**, look at how students responded to: "The work that I do for my classes really makes me think" under **Academic Rigor**)
  - Represents something to celebrate and keep doing and/or something that should be prioritized for modification
  - Shows meaningful differences in responses from student subgroups (i.e. grade-level, race/ethnicity, FRPL, etc.)
- Invite student representatives to participate as panelists. This is a great time to engage non-traditional student leaders. Share the data-points and question prompts in advance.
- Project the selected data and invite students to share their reflections, reactions, and recommendations.

After Surveying

FOR SCHOOLS

Inviting students to be a part of school improvement increases students' feelings of connectedness to their school's community. Research shows that when students are engaged in improving their learning environment, academic performance is higher.

Focus Groups

Focused group reflection is an effective and low-cost way to process and brainstorm ideas for school improvement. Focus groups of youth and adults can capture a wide range of perspectives and ideas, while grounding the conversation in the persectives of *all* students as reflected in the survey data. They help bring important themes to the surface and make it easy to identify what items are worth targeted improvement.

4-2-Q Protocol

High Tech Middle School director, Nikki Hinostro, facilitated a "4-2-Q" review of the charter network's data with students across campuses from the student advisory group. After each round of surveying, these students find **four things to celebrate**, articulate **two questions** based on the results of the survey, and identify **one area for growth**. Next, the students facilitate the same process with other students in their specific school to engage more students in the feedback.

Twitter Chat

Oxnard Union High School District (OUHSD) regularly hosts student survey data conversations on Twitter during which students can interact with each other and the YouthTruth results in real time. School personnel curate questions and snippets of feedback directly from their YouthTruth reports to spark discussion on key issues. *Check out their latest chat using #OUStuVoice.*

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA MAKES FOR STRONGER SCHOOLS

Keeping the feedback loop alive by involving students in your school or district's decision-making process is a critical component of student surveying. Students will know they've been heard, and will be invaluable team members in driving change to improve learning for themselves and their peers. Hearing from students directly brings valuable insights to light. If we aren't engaging students as experts, schools miss out on valuable opportunities to learn and benefit from the voices of those who matter most.

HIGH TECH HIGH

High Tech High is a public charter network located in San Diego that serves over 5,300 students in grades K-12 across 14 campuses. The organization also offers a Teacher Credentialing Program and the High Tech High Graduate School of Education. HTH is guided by equity, personalization, authentic work, and collaborative design.

MONTEREY PENINUSLA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

MPUSD envisions a school system that serves ALL students well, and engages each student in deep learning that prepares them to solve the challenges of the 21st century. While MPUSD's programs will evolve over time, their focus remains steadfast on increasing student achievement and eliminating performance gaps. MPUSD stretches from the city of Marina to the north to the city of Monterey to the south, and encompasses the communities of Del Rey Oaks, Marina, Monterey, Sand City and Seaside.

OXNARD UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Oxnard Union High School District serves more than 16,000 high school students across eleven schools located north of L.A. in Southern California. The district maintains a strong commitment to equity, high expectations, and powerful futures for every student.

SAN LUIS COASTAL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

San Luis Coastal Unified School District represents the communities of Avila, Edna Valley, Los Osos, Morro Bay, and San Luis Obispo in Southern California and has a current enrollment of approximately 7,500 students served across fifteen campuses. The district focuses on maintaining small neighborhood schools where students are educated from preschool through twelfth grade. SLCUSD also hosts an adult school program offering courses for community members.

WEST CONTRA COSTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

West Contra Costa School Unified School District serves over 30,000 students in Contra Costa County in Northern California, and includes 54 campuses. WCCUSD maintains a commitment to diversity and equity, championing the belief that all students can achieve at high levels of proficiency and that the effects of institutionalized racism can be mitigated in part through education.

YouthTruth extends a special thank you to its partners for their generous permissions to use photographs of real students and staff participating in YouthTruth workshops. *Credit by papge: HTH (circle feature, 3), MPUSD (banner, 5; banner, 6), OUHSD (banner, 3), SLCUSD (banner, 2) WCCUSD (banner, 4).*

ABOUT YOUTHTRUTH

YouthTruth is a national nonprofit that harnesses student and stakeholder feedback to help educators accelerate improvements. Through validated survey instruments and tailored advisory services, YouthTruth partners with schools, districts, CMOs, and education funders to enhance learning for all students. To learn more about the research that informs our work, please visit youthtruthsurvey.org/resources/#research.

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