

Student-Centered Learning Fact Sheet

Students take ownership over their own learning by becoming actively engaged in their own success, incorporating their interests and skills into the learning process, and having a voice in decision-making about issues that affect their learning at the classroom, school, district, and state levels.

Examples:

- Opportunities for students to reflect on their own work, development, and learning styles
- Student-led parent-teacher conferences and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings
- Student voice in school-level decision making, including school improvement efforts
- Community-based programs that support student advocacy at the school, district, and state levels and prepare students to lead.^{1,2,3}

Benefits of Student Ownership Over Their Own Learning

- Increases student engagement in their own learning
- Helps students develop a stronger sense of themselves as learners and make decisions about what to learn and how to learn it
- Promotes essential skills, including goal setting, planning, perseverance, self-efficacy, and responsibility
- Helps students build the skills and community connections they need for success in college and careers
- Supports school improvement efforts
- Provides school, district, and state decision-makers with knowledge and perspectives about what happens in schools that they could not obtain any other way.^{4,5}

Students Take Ownership Over Their Own Learning

Student-Led Conferences

- Student-led conferences (SLCs) are different from traditional parent-teacher conferences because in this model, students take charge of the discussion with the guidance and support of their teachers. Students prepare for these conferences by reflecting on their strengths, weaknesses, and goals and then use portfolios they have prepared with samples of their work to present evidence of their learning and growth to their parents.^{6,7}
- SLCs can help foster student ownership over their own learning and increase student engagement. When students plan and run their own parent-teacher conferences, it allows them to connect their own interests to what they are learning in school and helps foster important 21st century skills, including organization, planning, self-reflection, public speaking, and collaboration.^{8,9,10}
- The SLC format can also increase parent participation in parent-teacher conferences and help accommodate parents who do not speak English.^{11,12}
- While SLCs are not a new idea, this approach is gaining traction as more schools and districts discover the benefits.¹³

Student Involvement in School Design, Governance, and Improvement

- Schools can involve students more deeply by encouraging student participation on school improvement teams, requiring that students make up a certain percentage of voting members on key committees, or involving students in the design or redesign of their schools.^{14,15,16}
- Since 2010, Young Voices, a Rhode Island nonprofit organization, has supported students to have an authentic voice in the redesign of their high schools. In schools, such as Alvarez High School and Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex in Providence, Central Falls High School, and Tolman High School in Pawtucket, youth have conducted surveys and focus groups to obtain youth input on how to improve their schools and then collaborated with school leaders to implement proposed policy changes.¹⁷
- In 2014, the Carnegie Corporation of New York awarded a \$3 million grant to Providence Public Schools to create two new high schools designed by teams comprised of students, educators, and community partners. These two schools, 360 High School and Evolutions, opened in September 2015 and continue to evolve based on the input of students, parents, and teachers. These school models will be replicated elsewhere in Providence if they prove to be successful in terms of increasing high school graduation rates and college and career readiness.^{18,19}

Student Voice in District Reform

- In 2014, Nellie Mae Education Foundation awarded a grant to launch the Providence Youth Caucus (PYC), a coalition of youth from across Providence. This coalition is comprised of six youth organizations: the Providence Student Union, Young Voices, New Urban Arts, H2O, the Rhode Island Urban Debate League, and Youth in Action. The PYC provides a forum for youth to work with leaders from the City and state to improve Rhode Island's biggest school district.^{20,21}
- During the 2014 mayoral election, the Providence Youth Caucus held a mayoral forum and presented its student-developed education platform to mayoral candidates for their review and signature.²²
- Currently, the Providence Youth Caucus focuses on two key areas: (1) improving school culture and disciplinary practices and (2) expanding personalized learning and student ownership.²³

Student Involvement in State Governance and Advocacy

- In 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that established a Student Advisory Council to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, consisting of one elected representative from every public high school in the state. The Student Advisory Council's purpose is to provide advice from the general student body to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Student Advisory Council members also elect a chairperson to serve as a non-voting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.²⁴
- Rhode Island has several youth organizations that provide training and support to youth interested in state-level advocacy. Organizations have supported youth in developing and delivering testimony to the General Assembly and Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on high school graduation requirements, the use of suspensions, and the state's education funding formula.²⁵
- Students also advocate for state-level change through public actions, media releases, and speeches at high-profile events.²⁶

Recommendations

- Consider student-led parent-teacher conferences as an alternative to traditional parent-teacher conferences.
- Allow students to provide input and participate in decision-making that affects their individual learning as well as their larger school community.
- Actively seek student input when making school-, district-, and state-level decisions that directly impact students and their schools.
- Provide funding and other support to help community-based agencies support authentic student voice in school, district, and state decision-making.

References

- ¹ The Nellie Mae Education Foundation. (2016). *Learning is student-driven*. Retrieved November 10, 2016, from www.nmefoundation.org
- ^{2,4,8,14} Reif, G., Shultz, G., & Ellis, S. (2016). *A qualitative study of student-centered learning practices in New England high schools*. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.
- ^{3,5,15} Toshalis, E. & Nakkula, M. J. (2012). *Motivation, engagement, and student voice*. Retrieved November 10, 2016, from www.studentsatthecenter.org
- ⁶ Cronin, A. (2016). *Student-led conferences: Resources for educators*. Retrieved December 20, 2016, from www.edutopia.org
- ^{7,9,12} Kinney, P. (2005, October). Letting students take the lead. *Principal Leadership Magazine*, 33-36.
- ^{10,11,13} Richmond, E. (2016, April 6). When kids lead their parent-teacher conferences. *The Atlantic*.
- ¹⁶ SoundOut. (2015). *Student voice toolbox: Why student voice? A research summary*. Retrieved December 20, 2016, from <https://soundout.org>
- ¹⁷ Young Voices. (2016). *Change at the school level*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from www.youngvoicesri.org
- ¹⁸ Borg, L. (2016, January 19). Students design their own day at 2 Providence schools. *Providence Journal*, A1, A7.
- ¹⁹ Providence Public Schools. (n.d.). *360 High School and Evolutions High School*. Retrieved December 21, 2016, from www.providenceschools.org
- ²⁰ Young Voices. (2016). *District-level change*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from www.youngvoicesri.org
- ^{21,22,23} Providence Youth Caucus. (n.d.). *Providence Youth Caucus*. Retrieved December 21, 2016, from www.pvdyouthcaucus.org
- ²⁴ Rhode Island General Law 16-60-2. Enacted by the General Assembly as H-7133 SubA in 2014.
- ²⁵ Young Voices. (2016). *State-level change*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from www.youngvoicesri.org
- ²⁶ McKay, C., Regunberg, A., & Shea, T. (Winter 2014/2015). Zombies, flunkies, and the Providence Student Union. *Rethinking Schools*, 29, 2.



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Phone: 401-351-9400
rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org

