



# STUDENT AGENCY & ENGAGEMENT

**How do you empower  
young people to contribute  
to their own learning?**



**The  
Super School  
Project**

**Young people  
have valuable  
insights about  
their own learning  
journeys. We  
need to seek out  
and value their  
opinions.**

**They have the most to gain from their own learning experiences, and they deserve an active voice in the way tomorrow's schools look and feel.**

# **How will you define student roles, responsibilities, and participation in building your XQ School?**

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Imagine what a typical day might look like for students in your school.

How will you develop and deepen students' engagement with and responsibility for their own learning?

How will your school connect young people with peers, teachers, and other adults? How will they use technology to connect with the wider world around them?

# CO-CREATING EDUCATION WITH STUDENTS

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**FACT: Students  
deserve to choose  
how they learn.**



# Young people must be legitimate contributors to their own development.

Imagine if someone else were telling you what to do all day, every day. Historically, society has leaned toward telling adolescents what they need and how to get it, rather than giving them a chance to provide input and articulate their needs themselves. In an XQ School, young people must be co-creators of their own learning experiences.

To make young people feel truly involved in school design and operation, you need to consider the following.

- + How will you invite honest responses from students?
- + How will you respond to their input?
- + What does it mean to truly listen to young people?
- + How will you make sure that their contributions have a real influence on decisions and outcomes?
- + When is it appropriate to let them lead?

More and more, schools have been using feedback from student surveys to improve the way they respond to the students' needs. Timothy Daly, former president of The New Teacher Project, says that student feedback in teacher evaluations is "among the most significant developments for education reform in the last decade."

## THINK ABOUT

What roles do students play, right now, in defining and structuring their learning experiences? What have been the most successful student-led school initiatives?

"Young people feel that who they are and what they want to become doesn't matter to teachers and schools. While students are required to fit into a restrictive school structure, culture, and curriculum, schools do little to fit themselves to their students."

ELLIOT WASHOR AND CHARLES MOJKOWSKI  
Authors, *Student Disengagement: It's Deeper than You Think* by, Phi Delta Kappan

## LADDER OF PARTICIPATION FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Young people's input belongs not just in the design of your school, but in the daily operations and decision-making that impact their learning. Revisit Roger Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation to make sure you are truly engaging your students.

EXPLORE ►

## GIRL-CENTERED DESIGN IN ETHIOPIA

Check out how the Girl Effect used girl-centered research and design in Ethiopia to engage girls and build programs relevant to their lives.

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## WHY STUDENTS SHOULD GRADE THEIR TEACHERS

A decade ago, Ronald Ferguson's idea that students should grade their teachers was considered revolutionary. Check out the surprisingly consistent results that came in from many types of students and schools in this *Atlantic Magazine* article.

READ ►

## DIGITAL BADGES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Why are digital badges emerging as a new way for students to pursue their passions and earn recognition for their accomplishments? Hear from the movement's leading voices in this video from HASTAC.

WATCH ►

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**FACT: Students need  
an authentic voice in  
decision-making.**



# Students should be involved in the entire school experience.

We want students to be included in key conversations about their learning experience and school environment at varying levels of importance, from hallway decorations to disciplinary policies. Authentic engagement occurs only when young people are treated as valued contributors to the decision-making process. Young people still need to learn from adults, of course, but sometimes they know more than adults do about certain topics. Their voices should be considered legitimate and be taken seriously.

Like any good team, a youth–adult collaboration allows everyone at the table to have a voice.

## THINK ABOUT

How do you make a school environment conducive to open and honest feedback from students?



### We The Students

“When I became a professor at the University of Maine, I kept on hearing that the kids were the problem, and we needed to fix them. I just got tired of hearing it. I wasn’t a great student, but I wasn’t broken! I flipped the whole thing on its head, and started looking at students as potential and not the problem.”

RUSSELL QUAGLIA,  
The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations

Check out engaged student voices on social media. Search for the #StuVoice hashtag to see what students are saying.

## HOW TO SURVEY STUDENTS

Ready to start surveying your students? This report from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project discusses the use of student surveys for teacher evaluation and the challenges that practitioners and policy makers face when turning survey data into action.

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## STUDENT-DESIGNED SPACES

What would a school building designed by students look like? Take a look at student submissions for the Chicago Architecture Foundation’s Discover Design competition.

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## THE STUDENT VOICE RUBRIC

Student voice is especially important in certain aspects of school design. This actionable rubric from the Student Voice Collaborative in New York City lays out key areas where students can have a positive impact on their schools’ decision-making.

READ ►

## STUDENT PERSPECTIVES TOOLKIT

Student perspectives can be a powerful force for problem-solving, as well as for rethinking policies and practices. This toolkit from the Regional Educational Laboratory West at WestEd provides you with three tools that will help you to listen deeply to students and address challenges in your school.

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**FACT: Young people  
want to create  
meaningful change in  
their own communities.**



# Motivation in the classroom is interconnected with community engagement.

A student who is motivated in the classroom is more likely to be engaged in the community, and positive community experiences in turn improve engagement and performance in school. This is why we need to create opportunities for students to contribute to their communities outside of school.

*Service-learning*, used in the Montessori model, involves integrating classroom studies with meaningful community service. This goes beyond cleaning up local parks and handing out fliers to include managing projects, designing solutions, and leading teams. These adolescents are making a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

Data shows that student engagement in communities correlates with higher academic performance. A survey conducted by University of Maine professor Russell Quaglia found that 12th-grade students who felt a strong sense of purpose were 18 times more likely to be academically motivated than those who did not.

Knowing that their ideas, opinions, and attitudes have a direct influence on the communities they care about can be a powerful driving force in young people's learning experience.

## THINK ABOUT

What purposeful community activities are students you know involved in now? What are their thoughts and feelings about these experiences? How can you incorporate these experiences into classroom learning?



The Student Voice Collaborative of New York City is a successful youth-led initiative. The school district took an important first step by creating a department focused on youth empowerment. Youth leaders are elected in their schools and meet bi-weekly with youth leaders from across the City to discuss school problems and potential solutions. They've identified key factors in school climate and culture and created a rubric that young people can use to assess their schools objectively. This reinforces the power of student voice, giving young people a direct role in creating meaningful change.

## YOUTH VOICE IN ACTION

Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a clear definition of youth voice and some great examples of how this movement is making its mark on education.

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## SERVICE-LEARNING

This database of tools and resources provided by the NYC Department of Education will help you integrate service-learning into your curriculum.

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## KIDS DESIGNING SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS

This Edutopia video highlights students working with designers and educators to make a difference in a Minneapolis homeless shelter.

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## YOUNG PEOPLE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Multnomah Youth Commission elects a group of students from across the city to impact local policy in the mayor's office.

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# An XQ School engages students in the process of designing and continuously improving their school.

**When young people are active participants in building their learning experiences, they establish meaningful relationships with adults and everyone becomes a stakeholder in the school's success.**

The youth–educator collaboration requires you to think about the following ideas:

- + *How do you bring everyone to the table during the planning stages?*
- + *How do you sustain enthusiasm and engagement throughout the school year?*
- + *How do you weigh the validity of different opinions and reach consensus?*

# GET INSPIRED



## RECASTING AT-RISK STUDENTS AS LEADERS

This article from *Education Week* tells the inspiring story of transforming a struggling dropout program at a Florida high school into a thriving leadership movement.

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## HOLACRACY



**Flexible Organizational Structure**

With clear roles and accountabilities



**New Meeting Format**

Geared toward action and eliminating over-analysis



**More Autonomy to Teams and Individuals**

For individuals to solve issues themselves and cut through bureaucracy



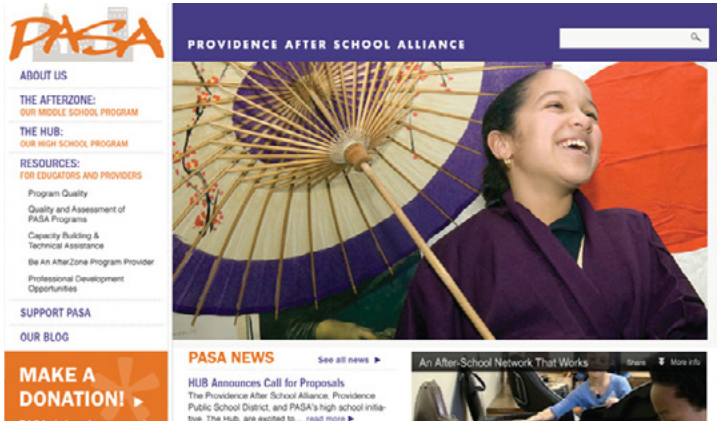
**Unique Decision-making Process**

To continuously evolve the organization's structure.

## INSPIRATION FROM ZAPPOS

Check out Holacracy, a method of self-organizing that the company Zappos is experimenting with.

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## MY PASA

Read about how the Providence After School Alliance created a digital badge system for earning high school credits.

READ ▶



## THE GAY—STRAIGHT ALLIANCE NETWORK

Since 1998, this youth-driven group has been making schools and communities safer for LGBTQ students. Their website contains extensive resources, from tips on how to build inclusive communities to movies that help raise awareness in the hallways.

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# GET CREATIVE



## DESIGNING A SUPER SCHOOL

with Keith Yamashita

**WATCH** ▶

KEITH YAMASHITA,  
Chairman and  
Founder, SYPartners

**INVOLVE  
STUDENTS  
IN REAL  
DECISIONS.**