



# Youth Voice In Community Schools Appendix

Institute for Educational Leadership

# Appendix: Methodology & Analysis

## Guiding Questions of the Project

The development of this guide was informed by four questions:

1. What forms of decision-making structures exist within Community Schools high schools?
2. How are student voices included in these decision-making structures?
3. What is the role of students, their voice and engagement, in these decision-making structures?
4. What school climate and school culture factors support student voice and participation in these decision-making structures?

The above questions offered context to our guide development. The guide was produced drawing on three sources: a) a literature review; b) a national network survey; and c) stories from youth in six Community School high schools. The project protocol was reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair under the rules of expedited review.

## Data Collection

We engaged students and Community Schools staff in two core activities between March and May 2022: at the national level, students and school staff responded to an anonymous survey regarding engaging youth in Community Schools; and students from six partnering high schools went through a series of virtual sessions designed to introduce, guide, and support them collectively as they developed stories describing youth voice in their schools.

**National Network Survey.** Between March and May 2022, a national network survey was conducted to capture ideas of promising practices of how Community Schools facilitate youth voice and leadership, develop a culture and climate that nurtures youth voice in decision-making. The national survey asked questions, such as definitions of youth voice, engagement, and leadership, strategies that used to engage youth, level of the youth engagement, and challenges for engaging youth in their schools and communities. For the survey administration, three lists were used for wide dissemination, a list generated by the field and stored in IEL's Community Schools directory of a 200-Community School high schools, a list of around 400 individuals who comprise the Coalition's Community Schools Coordinators Network (CSCN), and a list of about 60 Community School initiative leaders who comprise the Community School Leadership Network (CSLN).

**Virtual sessions.** Between March and May 2022, youth participants from six different Community School high schools participated in group learning exchange as a community of practice that virtually came together to learn with and from each other, problem-solve, and support each other as they engaged in the development and sharing of their stories. The sessions were facilitated by IEL staff. The sessions utilized the Learning Exchange protocols (see <https://iel.org/about-iel/protocols/>) to facilitate community dialogue and group sharing for the purpose of fostering deep learning. The core features of the Learning Exchange protocols applied in these sessions included:

- Opening and closing circles – a way to give each group member an opportunity to reflect and build relational trust in a community of practice
- Gracious space – an approach to meeting space that creates a set of norms and guidelines to help youth build trusting collaborations and problem-solve together in a community
- Journey lines – as a part of self-reflection as youth leaders, youth participants engaged in journey line exercise designed to reflect upon key moments in time when they have led in formal and informal ways during their school career and through sharing reflect on their own experiences with youth leadership and engagement
- Collaborative learning – young people had an opportunity to hear each other’s stories and examine common through lines and questions in a virtual world café setting
- Praxis – during the last session, we adapted the Commitments and Action Planning praxis step to support students’ actions in Community Schools.

Through the learning exchange protocols, youth participants were guided through the steps in the storytelling while creating a supportive environment for youth to work together, share, and problem-solve. With the consultation by IEL staff and their Community School high school coordinator, young people gathered information associated with the current decision-making structures of the school and community, opportunities for youth voice, organized their reflections, and finalized their stories to inform the guide.

The storytelling was comprised of two core activities: network mapping and story development. Network mapping is a tool designed to capture various relationships in an ecosystem to inform decision-making, problem-solving, and information flow processes.

Students engaged in a mapping exercise of ways in which youth voices are present in both formal and informal ways within their Community Schools, noting ways in which youth can share opinions, ideas, inform practices and policies at the school and if applicable, district levels. They brought the map into the national virtual group learning session and shared what they learned, observed, and made sense of the map to inform their own storytelling about the decision-making practices, mechanisms, as well as what role does school culture and/or climate play in these networks.

After they mapped the relationships, gathered artifacts about their schools' governance and decision-making structures, they developed a story that captured the processes, structures, opportunities, and areas of growth at their school. They shared their stories during the national virtual group learning exchange sessions and shared their stories with the Community Schools coordinator and the school principal in order to support ongoing school-level dialogue and engagement in the process. The stories are included in their entirety in this guide, and illustrative quotes have been pulled out to punctuate key considerations of youth voice.

## **Analysis of the Survey Responses**

The survey received 239 responses. Only completed survey responses are used in this analysis. Among 124 survey responses, 11 did not participate after reading the introduction, and 113 agreed to participate and completed the survey. Among 113 completed responses, 26 were from adults, including Community Schools coordinators, principals, administrators, and teachers, and 87 from high school students. Fifteen schools (including 12 high schools and three elementary schools) in eight states (Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Wisconsin) participated in the network survey. The responses were from people of diverse demographic backgrounds. The distribution of the race/ethnicity of all responses is consistent with the proportion of the race/ethnicity for the national population. The network survey was administered through an online survey tool (Alchemer.com) and all responses were exported from the survey tool and organized and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and Stata.

In the survey, both students and adults described how they define youth voice, youth engagement, and youth leadership. See Table A-1, A-2, and A-3 for details. Data was analyzed for themes consistent with our guiding questions and informed by key words and phrases that emerged through the literature review. The key words, key themes, and stand-out quotes are illustrated in the tables that follow and have been synthesized in the body of the guide.

**Table A-1 Youth Voice: How would you define youth voice?**

	Student	Adult
<b>Key Words</b>	Youth being heard	Opportunity
	Youth speaking up	Youth thoughts, views, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, and ideas
	Youth being informed	Seat at the table
	Equitable opportunities to speak up	
	Youth taking charge	
	Youth impacting decisions related to them	
	Youth making a difference	
<b>Key Themes</b>	Youth taking care of people or their community	
	Youth voice is that youth can speak up.	Youth voice is the opportunity that is extended to youth to express their thoughts, beliefs, and ideas freely.
	Youth voice is that youth can have a chance to be heard.	Youth voice benefits both the school and community.
	Youth voice is that youth can influence the decisions that are relevant to their schools and communities.	Youth can express their ideas to impact the decisions that are related to them.
	Youth need to have equitable opportunities to express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas.	

	Student	Adult
<b>Stand-out Quotes</b>	<p>“The youth somewhat have a say in things but there’s moments that it feels like we don’t have a say in things because people still view us as children.”</p> <p>“Students are not listened to in my opinion. Rather than treating everyone equally, the students who do athletics are given more opportunities to stand out. It’s not fair to students who are in the arts. I find the academic focus students aren’t even as recognized.”</p> <p>“The youth should have a voice when it comes to anything concerning them or that will affect them anyway in the future. We typically do not get a say in most things or if we do it doesn’t get listened to.”</p> <p>“I would define youth voice as letting students speak their minds on topics teens and young adults are normally told they shouldn’t speak on or be a part of. Youth voice is very important especially now in this point of time. We are the upcoming generations and we have the power and the potential to change the world for the better.”</p>	<p>“Youth voice is allowing students to share ideas and taking these ideas into action. Student voice also gives students the power to express their needs and create the change that will benefit the school.”</p> <p>“Youth voice to me would be what students have to say. The way they feel and perceive situations. Items and events that would be student oriented and created by them.”</p> <p>“Youth voice is young people, regardless of staff perception, providing input to various adult groups within a school that enlightens staff to scholarly needs and desires in areas ranging from the layout of daily assignments to school culture.”</p>

**Table A-2. Youth Engagement: How would you define youth engagement?**

	Student	Adult
Key Words	<p>Interested in doing something</p> <p>Equitable opportunity to engage</p> <p>Taking responsibility</p> <p>Young people to help the community</p>	<p>Youth active participation</p> <p>Youth involvement</p> <p>Youth to put their voice to work</p> <p>Youth feel ownership</p>
Key Themes	<p>Youth engagement is that youth have equitable opportunities to participate in activities that benefit their schools, communities, and themselves.</p> <p>Youth engagement is a sense of responsibility.</p> <p>Youth need to be equally treated.</p>	<p>Youth participate in planning and implementation along with other partners.</p> <p>Hard to get youth involved if they are not interested in participating.</p> <p>Youth being part of the processes and decision-making.</p> <p>Youth participate in activities both in and out of classes.</p>
Stand-out Quotes	<p>“Children and young adults are willing to help but they are still being pushed aside and treated as babies or not old enough to make decisions.”</p> <p>“Youth engagement is when young people are involved in taking responsibility in challenges in projects to create a positive impact around their community.”</p> <p>“Youth engagement is where people engage with their school, community, and just people around them. It is where the people are making a difference in their community.”</p> <p>“Youth engagement is when youth is very determined and have a drive to do what they plan to do.”</p>	<p>“Youth engagement is Youth Voice incorporated into school activities both in and out of classes. i.e., after school activities, spirit week, class challenges, schoolwork buy in...”</p> <p>“Students actively and responsibly involved in certain aspects of decision making within a community, especially when it directly affects them.”</p> <p>“Youth generally are engaged in events and social media that piques their interest. The more entertaining the engaged youth will be.”</p> <p>“Young people being an authentic part of processes and decision making as well as having opportunities to participate in academic and extracurricular school life.”</p>

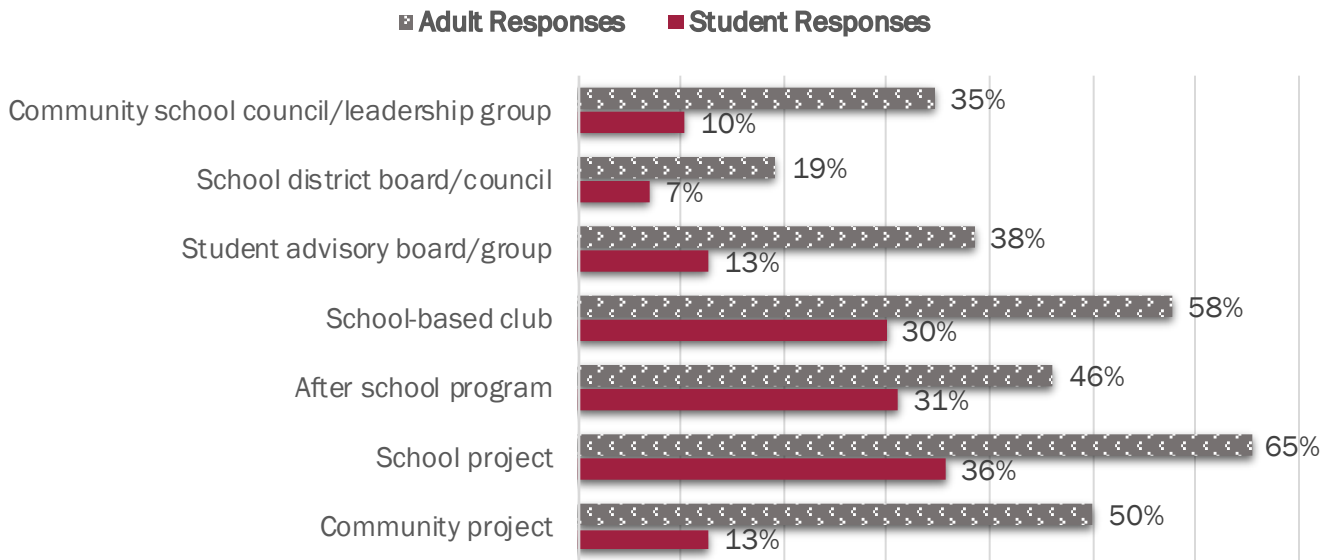
**Table A-3. Youth Leadership: How would you define youth leadership?**

	Student	Adult
Key Words	<p>Youth being strong</p> <p>Youth standing up for things</p> <p>Being heard and respected by people older than youth</p> <p>Youth to lead</p> <p>Lead to change</p> <p>Leadership skills and characteristics</p>	<p>Youth take charge</p> <p>Youth make decisions</p> <p>Youth take actions</p> <p>Youth being active</p> <p>Youth take ownership</p> <p>The willingness to step in</p>
Key Themes	<p>Youth have opportunities to be a part of decision-making.</p> <p>Youth with leadership skills and characteristics.</p> <p>Youth are being heard and respected by people who are older than them.</p> <p>Need to be more than just a title.</p> <p>Youth lead events and social groups.</p>	<p>Youth are given an opportunity to make decisions and lead the effort.</p> <p>Youth who have ideas that are expressed in a meaningful way to help solicit change.</p> <p>Youth use their skills and knowledge to address school and community needs.</p> <p>Youth need to have leadership skills, knowledge, and characteristics.</p>
Stand-out Quotes	<p>“I would define youth leadership as the way the younger generation to lead the future.”</p> <p>“There are a good portion of people that want to step up, but the people in Student Council don’t even really get to propose or “change” anything. At this point it’s just a title.”</p> <p>“Youth leadership to me is when a young person is listened to by a group of people younger and older than them. When that young person is actually respected and not dismissed because of their age.”</p> <p>“Youth leadership is when the youth of a community takes actions into their own hands. By encouraging others and taking the lead, these youths help better their community.”</p> <p>“Leadership is when you lead people into the right thing and to develop skills and knowledge from other people.”</p>	<p>“Student leadership is when students are a part of the active change they want to see in the school. Some students may be the ones who organize to create activities for the whole school; others may be running stations for students; some students are seen as mentors to the younger grades (middle school); or some students may not even see themselves as leaders but definitely have a big impact on how our school is making the necessary changes for all.”</p> <p>“Young people being a genuine part of decision-making processes, identifying and implementing projects of their choice, and having opportunities to gain experience &amp; grow skills, abilities and knowledge as it relates to improving their school community, education and civic engagement.”</p> <p>“Students who can lead and be good role models for others, positive people that can influence others and have charisma, who others are willing to listen to, follow Good communicators and people who are not afraid to step up.”</p>

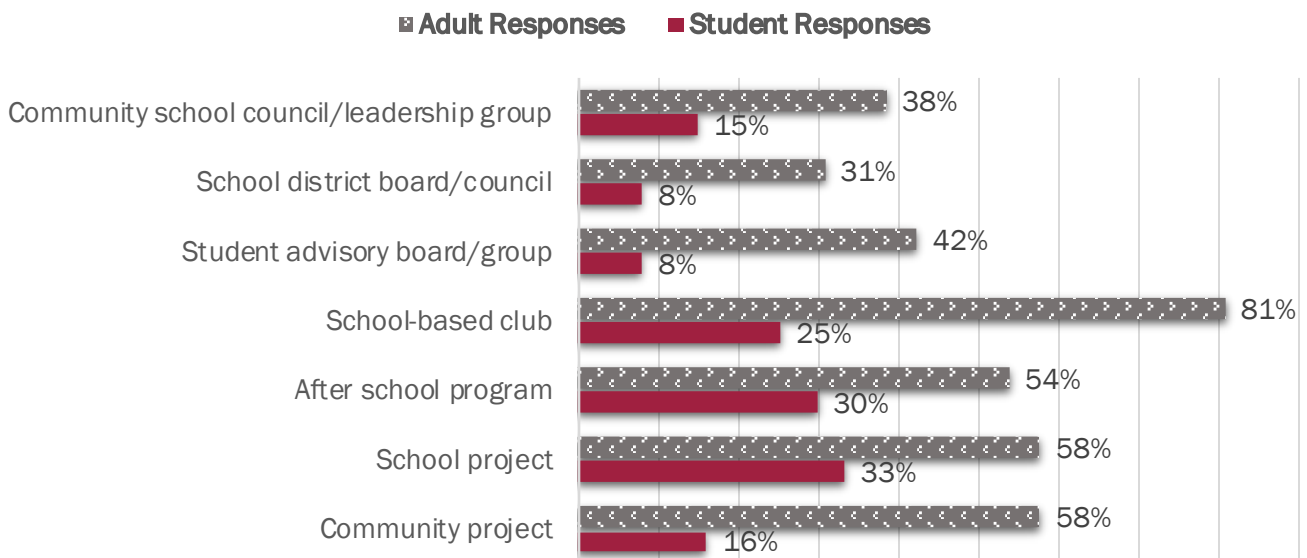


The network survey collected responses from both students and adults regarding their perspectives on youth engagement status in their schools and communities. We found that adults and students often had different perceptions on the level of youth engagement. See Figure A-1 and Figure A-2 for details.

**Figure A-1. The percent of community school often include students in the decision-making opportunities: by opportunity type**



**Figure A-2. The percent of community school include students in a meaningful way in the decision-making opportunities: by opportunity type**



We engaged in narrative analysis, coupling literature, youth stories, open-ended survey responses, with descriptive data, to inform the development of the Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools. We then worked with Coalition staff, drawing on field expertise, to co-design tips and strategies emerging from the Framework that could be informative to the Community Schools field.

## **Limitations and Opportunities**

There were limitations to the development of this guide associated with the site selection, sample size, duration, and data availability. From decades of practice, we identified nine sites from across the country that have at the school level a presence of a collaborative leadership structure, a site-based leadership team (SBLT), and/or a decision-making structure that allows for youth voice participation, whether directly through a formal role in the decision-making body or through an advisory group, whether standing or ad hoc, or another mechanism to regularly solicit youth opinions and ideas on school matters. However, only students from six sites completed the stories. For the storytelling activity, the perspectives shared were limited to the participants from the six participating high schools. Furthermore, due to the limitation of the data collection period, we received 113 completed national network survey responses, which was less than half of our ideal sample size (250). Noted limitations could impact the depth of analysis to a minimal extent.

There were however, many benefits to the school and student participation in storytelling, including: the school inclusion and visibility through the national network guide; an opportunity for participating students from six schools to work together at the school level; to meet counterparts from other high schools from across the country; to build new skillsets (collaborative practices, writing, reflective practices); to learn about youth voice and leadership; and to use this opportunity to advance their school's efforts in engaging youth voice and leadership in their school.

The final guide offers both an emerging framework and examples of practice of how youth voice can be included in Community Schools. Schools and districts reading the guide would be informed of ways to explore their own practices in engaging youth voice and leadership. The participating schools in this project had an opportunity to gain new insights into youth voice and leadership opportunities to further inform practice. We hope this guide advances conversation on how to meaningfully further engage youth in leadership opportunities and decision-making within Community Schools.

## Connect with us!

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