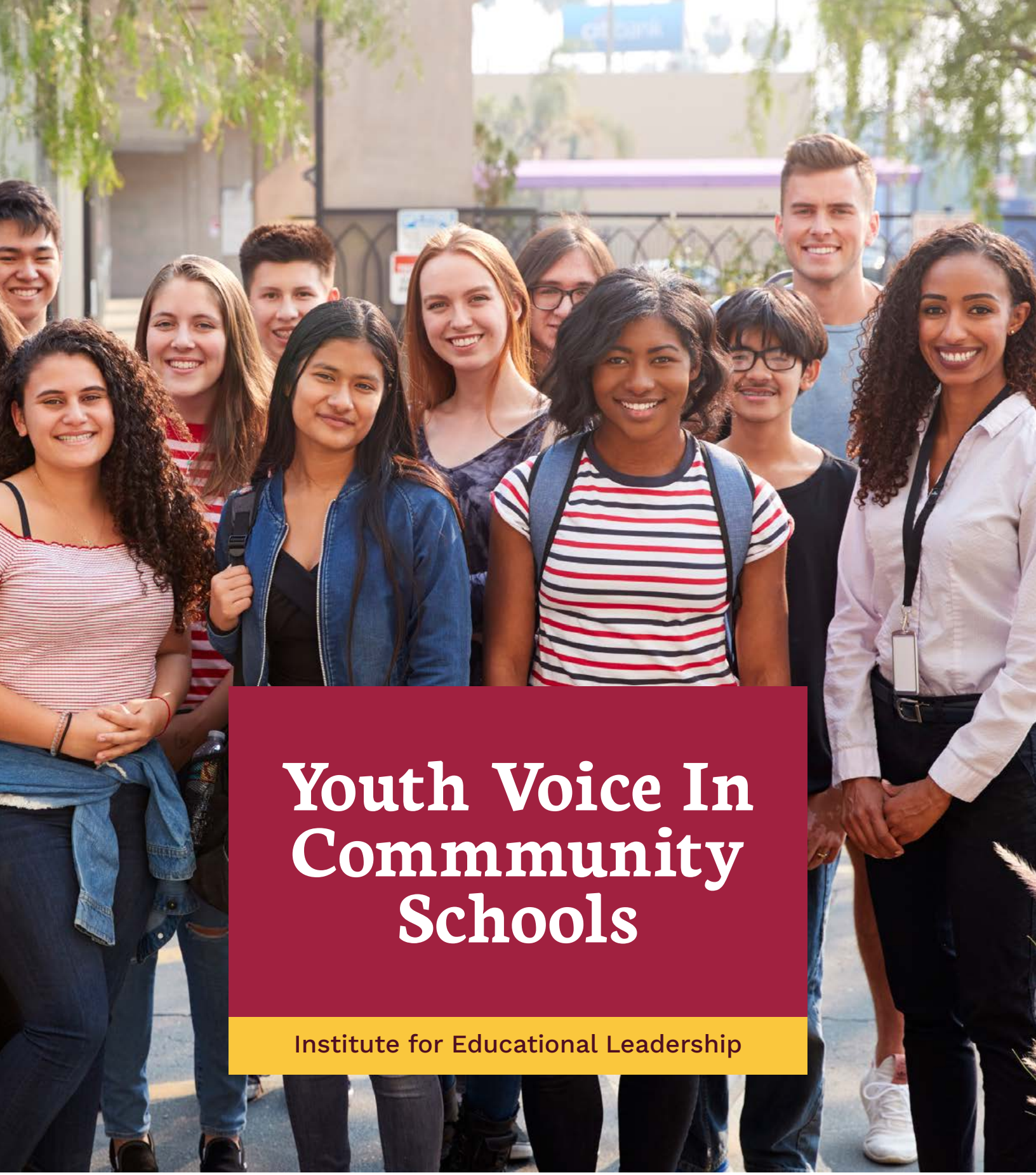

Youth Voice In Commmunity Schools

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COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Youth Voice in Community Schools

A Practical Guide to Advance Community School Strategies for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership

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Acknowledgments

This guide was produced by the Institute for Educational Leadership. (IEL) to examine the voice, engagement, and leadership of youth in Community Schools and to illuminate practices from the field. The guide serves to support practitioners to better understand and provide resources and equitable opportunities to youth in their schools and communities.

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Preface

About the Institute for Educational Leadership

Since 1964, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has equipped leaders to work together across boundaries to build effective systems that foster successful transitions from cradle to career, preparing children and youth for postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship. We envision a society that uses all its resources effectively to provide an equal opportunity for all children and youth to learn, develop, and become contributing citizens of our democracy. As a community driven, equity-focused organization dedicated to catalyzing and building capacity at the intersection of leadership, education, and workforce development, IEL partners with under-resourced communities through initiatives strategically situated at grassroots, regional, and national levels, cultivating and activating leadership across ages, stages, and context. IEL is the home to the Coalition for Community Schools.

About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools (the Coalition) is an alliance of leaders—inclusive of youth, families, institutions, service providers, grassroots organizations, and government agencies—who work together to grow excellent and sustainable Community Schools. Its mission is "to build on community strengths, invest in trusting relationships, and a commitment to continuous improvement" (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The Coalition prepares leaders in developing collaborative and adaptive leadership skills, supports leaders to work effectively across sectors to improve student outcomes, and mobilizes leaders to advocate for policies and practices that advance equitable opportunities for all children (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.).

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to illuminate best practices for meaningful engagement of youth in Community Schools and to recognize youth voice as a community asset that can help advance more equitable school systems. Youth voice plays an important role in redesigning how public education functions. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education and highlighted the need for more responsive systems that better serve the individualized needs of students. By engaging students as leaders in problem solving and decision making, Community Schools can build capacity of students to feel personal ownership for self, school, and community. Schools have operated in much the same manner for decades; it is now time to engage the next generation of leaders to design school systems, services, and programs that are responsive to their needs. This guide is designed for use by Community Schools practitioners who are working to advance their student engagement efforts. The strategies also offer considerations for youth-led work and youth-serving professionals working in communities and with schools. In this section we introduce key definitions, concepts, and principles that together create the foundation for this guide.

About Community Schools

A Community School is "a local engagement strategy that creates and coordinates opportunities with its public school to accelerate student success. It serves as a vehicle for hyper-local decision-making that responds to the unique needs of each community" (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). A Community School is primarily a public school that coordinates and integrates "educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before- and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer." (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018, p. 5).

The Community Schools strategy is an equity-centered strategy that takes a whole-child approach to the role of school in students' learning and development. Built on the foundation of positive youth development (Search Institute, n.d.), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and collaborative leadership (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018), Community Schools cultivate a set of conditions for learning in support of whole-child development:

- Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.
- The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning.
- The basic physical, social, emotional, and economic needs of young people and their families are met.
- There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents and school staff.
- The community is engaged in the school and promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful, and that connects students to a broader learning community (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.b, p. 5).

Attending to the conditions for learning facilitates whole-child development and student success in school and beyond. One of the conditions for learning is the inclusive culture and climate that intentionally connects families and community members to build partnerships that lift up families "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and community assets (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). This condition proposes the intentional connection of students to the school, home, community organizations, institutions, and systems that impact or influence students' learning experiences (see e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When adults align to create supportive environments, resources, and opportunities for students, they build safe, supportive, and respectful conditions for learning to take place (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.b).

The Community Schools strategy is supported by intentional partnerships between schools and community-based partners coordinated by a Community School coordinator. A Community School coordinator is a liaison between community-based organizations, afterschool programs, community services, and the school. They are at times school staff members and at times hired through another entity working in the school directly to coordinate relationships and resources. They are an essential functional role of any Community School.

The Community School Standards

To facilitate the conditions for learning, the Coalition for Community Schools has developed a set of Community School principles and standards that guide quality of Community Schools. The Community School standards (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018) provide a framework comprised of seven principles:

- Pursue equity
- Invest in a whole-child approach to education
- Build on community strengths to ensure conditions for learning
- Use data and community wisdom to guide partnerships, programs, and progress
- Commit to interdependence and shared accountability
- Invest in building trusting relationships
- Foster a learning organization.

The standards fall into two parts: 1) structures and functions; and 2) core program elements (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). Each part addresses the standard, core elements, and indicators of performance (ibid.). The community standards are as follows:

Part 1: Community Schools structures and functions

1. Collaborative leadership: Nurtures shared ownership and shared accountability
2. Planning: Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan
3. Coordinating infrastructure: Facilitates coordination of school and community resources
4. Student-centered data: Guides opportunities and support to individual students
5. Continuous improvement: Deepens the impact of the Community School
6. Sustainability: Ensures ongoing operations of the Community School

Part 2: Common opportunities in Community Schools

7. Powerful learning: Engages students as independent learners
8. Integrated health and social supports: Addressing barriers to learning
9. Authentic family engagement: Embraces families and mobilizes family assets
10. Authentic community engagement: Gathers and galvanizes community and neighborhood resources

Collaborative leadership, the first standard of Community Schools, posits that cross-sector of community partners "share responsibility and accountability for student and school success" (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018, p. 5), that partners are active in school, have specific agreements that guide their roles and responsibilities, and have buy-in and relational trust. Furthermore, this standard notes the presence of a 'site-based leadership team' (SBLT) as a governing and representative structure that guides the planning, implementation, and accountability of a Community School. SBLT is comprised of "families, students, community partners, unions, neighborhood community residents, the principal, Community School coordinator, teachers, and other school personnel and community partners" (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018, p. 6). SBLT meets regularly as a mechanism for input, discussion, decision-making, and leverages collective strengths, assets, and data to inform school-level decisions, including school improvement plans and policies.

The Community Schools Research Agenda

The Community Schools' standards offer a framework to align policies, practices, and research to advance the collective quality of students' experiences, supports, and opportunities to thrive and succeed. The standards are also aligned with the Community Schools research agenda, co-designed, validated, and codified in partnership with the Netter Center for Community Partnerships and with a hundred scholars and practitioners from across the Coalition's networks, who have identified key areas for further research inquiry and knowledge building. The next section offers an overview of the Community Schools Research Agenda.

Developed in 2020, the Community Schools Research Agenda (Coalition for Community Schools, 2020) is designed to advance the field by understanding how do Community Schools support learning and thriving students, families, and communities. The agenda is comprised of eleven areas of inquiry:

1. Measuring outcomes
2. Elevating voices into research
3. Translating research into practice
4. Defining and adapting the Community School model
5. Collaborative leadership and relational trust
6. Defining and supporting roles
7. Racial equity and social justice
8. Organizing
9. Sustainability
10. Teaching and learning
11. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collaborative leadership and relational trust, research agenda item #5, addresses the importance of sharing power inside and outside Community Schools, including engaging student voices in decision-making within Community Schools, and building inclusive leadership structures for student participation (Coalition for Community Schools, 2020). This agenda item calls for authentic engagement of students as an intentional partner that can contribute ideas, opinions, and inform practice.

How Conditions for Learning, Community School Standards, and the Community Schools Research Agenda Come Together in This Guide

The overlapping thread across the Conditions for Learning, Community School Standards, and the Community School Research Agenda are shared leadership and supportive structures that intentionally include youth voice within Community Schools. The development of this guide serves as an exploratory opportunity to identify different expressions of youth voice within Community Schools and to illustrate examples of youth engagement, voice, and leadership in school and community policies and practices. In particular, the guide highlights stories from six Community School high schools, given the diversity of youth voice structures present at the secondary level of education. The guide serves to offer ideas on ways Community Schools can further strengthen and engage youth into the fabric of their school community.

Executive Summary

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) Coalition for Community Schools (the Coalition) defines Community Schools as "a local engagement strategy that creates and coordinates opportunities with its public school to accelerate student success. It serves as a vehicle for hyper-local decision-making that responds to the unique needs of each community" (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The Community Schools strategy is an equity-centered strategy that takes a whole-child approach to the role of school in students' learning and development.

The purpose of this guide is to offer strategies for elevating youth voice in Community Schools and to recognize youth voice as a community asset that can help advance more equitable school systems. This guide is designed for use by Community Schools practitioners who are working to advance student voice, engagement, and leadership efforts. The strategies and implications highlighted in this guide are transferable to youth-related work across school levels and within communities.

To inform this guide, in Spring 2022, the Coalition conducted a literature scan, administered a national network survey, and worked with youth within six Community School high schools. The literature scan focused on two strands: a) understanding concepts of positive youth development, engagement, and empowerment; and b) the role organizational readiness, school environment, and culture play in engaging youth voice in the school community. The network survey was designed to capture field's definitions of key concepts and to understand the frequency of various decision-making structures within Community Schools. The survey was administered across three Coalition networks with 113 respondents, 26 adults and 87 high school-age students in Community Schools. To better understand the existing strategies and practices of advancing youth voice, the Coalition worked with 12 students from six Community School high schools to share stories of youth voice practices within their schools.

Based on the field-informed feedback, this guide uses the following definitions of core youth-centered concepts:

- ✓ **Youth Voice** – an expression of youth ideas, thoughts, and beliefs through equitable opportunities in which youth expressions are respected and heard.
- ✓ **Youth Engagement** – an equitable access and opportunity for youth to participate in activities that are related to their schools, communities, and self.
- ✓ **Youth Leadership** – when youth are a genuine part of the decision-making process, identifying and implementing projects of their choice, and gaining the knowledge and skills to better advance the development of their schools, communities, and self.

The above definitions are consistent with the field's literature, with equity playing an underlying foundation. For instance, youth in Community Schools care deeply if they have access to equitable opportunities to express their thoughts and if their opinions are heard and treated equitably by school and community authorities. They also look for avenues for youth engagement and leadership.

In addition to the above definitions, the survey responses found that youth and adults have different understandings of youth engagement within their own schools and communities, but that both indicate the importance of youth leadership development as necessary to engage youth in their schools and communities effectively.

Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools

The national network survey results, alongside youth stories, indicate that youth and adults in Community Schools believe that opportunities and resources, leading knowledge and skills, and equity are effective elements of youth voice, engagement, and leadership in schools and communities, as illustrated in the emerging **Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools** (see figure). **Opportunities and resources** refer to the approaches and support that youth can have when expressing their thoughts, engaging in programs and activities, and leading the efforts in their schools and communities. **Leading knowledge and skills** refer to the capacity and strategies youth can acquire throughout leadership-building program/project/activities. **Equity** refers to the equity procedure schools and communities utilize to advance youth voice, engagement, and leadership in the field.

The intersection of the opportunities and leading knowledge is **youth to lead**. Young people benefit from skills and resources designed to place them in leading positions of a program/project/activity that directly impacts them. Therefore, the leading knowledge and opportunities are essential for youth to take leading roles in their schools and communities. The intersection of opportunities and equity are **equitable opportunities**, intentional sharing of opportunities for more equitable distribution of youth voice and engagement in Community Schools. The intersection of leading knowledge and equity is **youth being heard**. This is based on the responses that young benefit from leadership and advocacy skill building to ensure their voices are clearly expressed to adults, and that adults create space for youth voice. When all three key elements are met, youth are more likely to be comfortable making decisions and leading efforts in their schools and communities.

Using the above three key elements—opportunities and resources, leading knowledge and skills, and equity—this guide introduces a series of practical steps practitioners can take alongside students to foster youth voice following the Process for Youth Engagement, comprised of six stages: explore, engage, co-design, implement, study, and extend. Illustrative steps include: mapping assets, using data to inform practice, co-designing engagement protocols, developing opportunities and solutions for shared decision-making, and creating structures for youth leadership development and school/district practice change.

The implications of this guide point to the importance of: a) youth leadership opportunities in service to youth's acquisition of new knowledge and skills, b) support of youth through various services to help them identify and cultivate interests, c) opportunities for student-led decision-making, ultimately extending power, voice, and opportunities to youth. Building youth leaders cultivates more inclusive decision-making in schools and helps to activate the next generation of leaders in our communities.

The State of the Field

Two bodies of scholarship inform context to this guide: a) understanding concepts of positive youth development, engagement, and empowerment; and b) the role organizational readiness, school environment, and culture play in engaging youth voice and leadership in the school community.

Positive Youth Development

Youth.Gov (n.d.) defines positive youth development (PYD) as follows:

> *PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.*

PYD promotes positive asset building in youth as a critical step in youth development. Factors that impact PYD include "family support and monitoring; caring adults; positive peer groups; strong sense of self, self-esteem, and future aspirations; and engagement in school and community activities" (Youth.Gov, n.d.). Assets-based approach to PYD creates a path for voice and collaborative experiences of young people.

The Search Institute's (n.d.) Developmental Assets Framework has led the way in how the field understands an asset-based approach to youth development. The Developmental Assets Framework consists of 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed. This Framework introduces both external and internal assets that contribute to positive youth development. The external assets emphasize the role that adult encouragement, learning opportunities, and policy support play in youth development. Internal assets speak to such elements as positive values, identity, and social competencies. This framework offers important considerations about young people's needs that could guide opportunities for youth voice.

Additionally, the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research's Foundations for Young Adult Success (Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015) developmental framework posits that three factors—agency, integrated identity, and competencies—lead to young person's success. They further note that developmental experiences and relationships with opportunities for action and reflection could foster long-lasting impact on one's development.

Over time, studies have shown that youth are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors when they have more assets (Search Institute, n.d.). Young people can gain assets through positive youth engagement, leadership, and participatory activities designed to provide youth with leadership knowledge, skills, and practices.

Common Elements of Youth Engagement and Empowerment

In Richard Lerner (2007)'s book, *The Good Teen*, a six Cs framework reveals key elements of effective youth engagement and development. In the framework, Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, and Caring emphasize the importance of the leadership knowledge, characteristics, and skills that youth need to have for positive developmental outcomes. Moreover, Connection and Contribution also reveal the necessity of a safe environment and opportunities for youth leadership development.

Many Community Schools incorporate youth engagement in their design and implementation to create shared visions of learning and development among all participants (City of Services, n.d.; Forum for Youth Investment et al, 2021). Youth engagement programs commonly include the following elements: 1) youth leadership development, 2) youth learning about and improving their communities, 3) partnership-building, and 4) change planning (Grenwelge & Zhang, 2012; Martinez, Jones, & Connolly, 2020; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2018). Developing youth leadership often includes providing opportunities to build leadership efficacy, engage in a leadership role, and complete community-connected projects. In addition to leadership efficacy, youth build knowledge and skills to identify and assess community conditions, and opportunities to think critically about making a difference in their communities. Youth further advance their leadership skills by turning project ideas into concrete proposals that include project descriptions, goals, resources, and needed supports from others. To continue gaining knowledge, skills, and support they need, youth benefit from opportunities to build positive relationships with their peers and adults (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

Providing opportunities for positive engagement during adolescence prepares youth for successful futures (Gardner et al., 2008; Mueller et al., 2011). Programs that incorporate confidence building and positive community change lead to a stronger sense of psychological empowerment and prosocial outcomes (Zimmerman et al., 2018). Constructive community engagement is associated with identity, wellbeing, self-perception, and educational attainment (Coatsworth, Palen, Sharp, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2005; Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006). Studies find that youth significantly contribute to positive development pathways toward adulthood when provided with opportunities for voice and autonomy to lead their initiatives (Caldwell, 2018; Outley et al., 2018). Youth engagement also offers a prospect for school leaders, policymakers, and program planners to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence youth and community and, in turn, helps them to develop responsive policies and programs (Martinez, Jones, & Connolly, 2020; Mitra & Serriere, 2012).

Youth voice is the key element of youth engagement. Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement (n.d.) defines youth voice as "the active, distinct, and concentrated ways young people represent themselves throughout society." This definition includes young people sharing their perspectives, such as "paint a graffiti mural across the wall" or "speak at the city council hearing" (Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement, n.d.). Given the various ways that young people express their ideas, youth need active engagement and guidance on how to effectively communicate their perspectives to influence decisions that have an impact on them.

Programs that focus on providing supportive contexts for youth to build assets, connect with local resources and adult role models, and engage in community change activities are all based on the empowerment theory (Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). Empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000) is one of the key conceptual frameworks for understanding positive outcomes of youth development in afterschool programs. Empowerment speaks to youth awareness of the power of their voice, critical thinking skills, and practice skills in a real-life context. The empowerment outcomes have three interrelated components: 1) intrapersonal, 2) interactional, and 3) behavioral (Zimmerman, 1995). The intrapersonal component includes beliefs that one can make a difference, such as perceived leadership ability and self-esteem. The interactional component includes the awareness of the context environment and an understanding of the needed resources for their goals. The behavioral component is about actions that individuals can take to make desired changes in their environment. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became a key avenue for youth to speak about their experiences and perspectives (Day et al., 2020; Gabriel, Brown, León, & Outley, 2020; Santo, Phelps, Angevine, Lotero, & Herz, 2021). Both engagement and empowerment are connected to organizational readiness to authentically incorporate youth voice.

Levels of Participation and Organizational and Cultural Readiness

Youth engagement levels vary in different programs, activities, and situations. Hart (1992) demonstrates eight young people's participation levels in a project illustrated in the Ladder of Participation diagram. The eight levels range from non-participation to various participation levels (Hart, 1992). According to Hart, the non-participation levels include "manipulation," "decoration," and "tokenism," all which describe low levels of youth participation in projects.

These projects could include youth being consulted without feedback, asked to perform in a public event (e.g., sing or dance), or having limited opportunity to express their opinions. As participation levels increase, youth have an increasing opportunity for input, feedback, decision-making, and shared power. These levels include: "assigned but informed," "consulted and informed," "adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth," "youth-initiated and directed," and "youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (Hart). The highest level on the Ladder of Participation is when youth initiate, share in decisions with adults, and have management and authority alongside adult allies.

Studies have found that youth engagement spans the spectrum of Hart's Ladder, and engagement levels vary within programs and across activities (Hart, 2008; Martinez et al., 2020). This points to the importance of organizational readiness for youth engagement. Mckinsey & Company (2018) share the 7-S Framework that addresses the critical role of coordination, rather than structure, in organizational effectiveness. The seven organizational components include structure, systems, strategy, skills, staff, style, and shared values. For instance, even if an organization has a shared value of youth engagement, the outcomes might vary due to the lack of structures or skills to support authentic youth engagement.

In addition to organizational readiness, environmental factors might also influence youth engagement to different levels. Transportation, for instance, might be one of the barriers to youth engagement (Martinez et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to broadband and the Internet was one of the barriers to youth engagement (Gabriel, Brown, León, & Outley, 2020). Systematic assessment is needed to understand the youth engagement status and the challenges in including youth voice. It might require intentionality and incremental system changes to engage youth voice and promote youth leadership. Institute for Educational Leadership Coalition for Community Schools Next Generation Coalition addressed that "cultivating meaningful engagement that improves student outcomes and a collaborative school structure requires intentionality" (p. 7). The empowering youth engagement process suggests organizations, schools, and communities to identify essential conditions (such as prioritizing basic needs, engaging youth of diversity, and promoting historical and cultural awareness) to build capacity toward a sustainable youth engagement (Institute for Educational Leadership Coalition for Community Schools Next Generation Coalition, 2017).

School climate and culture also play an important role in the quality and extent of youth engagement. Youth voice and leadership are frequently limited to non-policy-making activities, such as social event planning (Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Møller, 2006; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Students seldom occupy positions of power to engage in budgetary or instructional decision-making (Ozer & Wright), and the decisions that students can influence would not make any difference to the existing conditions or school governing structure (Calvert, 2004).

Youth can increase the impact of the initiatives when they are given the opportunity to lead in the design and implementation of the initiatives (Duckworth et al., 2018). However, youth engagement and leadership approaches can be at times hierarchical. A gap between the youth engagement plan and the school practices on promoting youth engagement can exist (Yuen et al., 2019).

Inclusiveness and sustainability are also important elements of youth voice, engagement, and leadership. Studies have shown that leadership opportunities are often given to economically and socially privileged students who are already heavily involved in school activities or seen as well-spoken (Holdsworth, 2000; Silva, 2002). Meanwhile, some initiatives focused on expanding diverse student representation showed little to no impact on the inclusiveness and sustainability of youth voice and engagement (Pautsch, 2010).

Extensive infrastructure in schools and communities is essential to support historically non-dominant students (Lee et al., 2020). The UCLA Center for Community Schooling for instance, collaborates with community partners, schools, teachers, and students in research practices, and has received positive feedback pertaining to youth voice, engagement, and leadership (Franco & Perez-Swanson, 2019; Kang, Saunders, & Weinberg, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Their collaborative practices have contributed to trusting relationships and teachers' awareness of their roles in relationship to students (Kang, Saunders, & Weinberg, 2021).

The literature scanned selected existing studies and practices on youth development, engagement, and empowerment, noting the importance of youth voice in school community. School environment, inclusive of out-of-school time (OST) programs and culture, play an essential role in the quality and depth of youth engagement. Organizational readiness, such as strategies, skills, and well-trained staff, is also needed to support youth engagement and leadership development.

Building on the existing scholarship, this guide further explores concepts of youth voice, engagement, and leadership in Community Schools to provide evidence of the effective practices and strategies to engage youth in their schools and communities. Four guiding questions are:

1. What forms of decision-making structures exist within Community School 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 offer the context to the guide's development. The guide is produced drawing on field literature, a national network survey, and stories from youth from six Community Schools high schools from across the country. The following section addresses key findings pertaining to youth voice, engagement, and leadership in Community Schools.

Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership

To inform this guide, in addition to the literature scan, we conducted a national survey in Spring 2022 designed to capture field's definitions of key concepts and to understand the frequency of various decision-making structures in Community Schools. The national survey asked questions, such as definitions of youth voice, engagement, and leadership, strategies used to engage youth, level of the youth engagement, and challenges for engaging youth in their schools and communities. The survey was administered across three Coalition networks. The responses, 113, included 26 adults and 87 high school-age youth. Additionally, between March and May 2022, 12 students from six Community School high school (the number of students per each school ranged from one to four) engaged in writing stories to lift up youth voice practices within their schools. Below is the summary of findings and the emerging theoretical framework.

Understanding Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools: National Network Survey Findings

To understand the concepts of youth voice, leadership, and engagement, and to establish common definitions of these terms in the Community Schools context, the Coalition developed, administered, and analyzed results of a national network survey, asking adults and youth in Community Schools to define the three terms based on their perspectives and experience (please see Appendix for the methods overview and a detailed analysis of the survey responses). The analysis of the Community Schools network survey led to the following definitions:

- ✓ **Youth Voice** – an expression of youth ideas, thoughts, and beliefs through equitable opportunities in which youth expressions are respected and heard.
- ✓ **Youth Engagement** – an equitable access and opportunity for youth to participate in activities that are related to their schools, communities, and self.
- ✓ **Youth Leadership** – when youth are a genuine part of the decision-making process, identifying and implementing projects of their choice, and gaining the knowledge and skills to better advance the development of their schools, communities, and self.

The above definitions are consistent with the field's literature, with equity playing an underlying foundation. For instance, youth in Community Schools care deeply if they have access to equitable opportunities to express their thoughts and if their opinions are heard and treated equitably by school and community authorities. They also look for avenues for youth engagement and leadership.

In addition to the above definitions, the survey responses found that youth and adults have different understandings of youth engagement in schools and communities. Given that this network survey gathered responses from youth and adults in Community School from across the country regarding how they assess their level of youth engagement in their schools and communities, we find that there are different perceptions between youth and adults.

First, when offering definitions of youth voice, engagement, and leadership, adult respondents often think of these definitions from a perspective of "how to do this," such as ways to engage youth for better outcomes; whereas youth respondents think in terms of "what is it" and "why have it." For instance, youth define youth voice as an opportunity proceeding an action. This difference indicates that adults are thinking of strategies to engage youth, while young people are in a stage of gaining awareness of the youth engagement opportunities around them.

Second, from the frequency of youth in various decision-making opportunities, adult survey respondents believe that opportunities are frequently provided to youth while youth respondents indicated that they are often unaware of decision-making opportunities that might be offered by their school either due to lack of adequate communication or availability of an opportunity to a small group of students (see Appendix for details; given the spread of responses across schools, this finding is based on perception disparities across the board).

Third, regarding the engagement approaches, adults indicate that youth often participate in decision-making, and some also lead the process. Youth survey respondents on the other hand believe they are often unaware or do not have access to decision-making (See Appendix for details). Due to the balance of schoolwork and extracurricular activities, youth respondents note a need for guidance in discovering their own interests, build their own initiatives in a group setting. Both indicate the importance of youth leadership development as necessary to engage in their schools and communities effectively.

Understanding Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools: Throughlines from Youth Stories

To illustrate the diverse approaches Community Schools take to youth voice, engagement, and leadership, we selected a diverse pool of Community Schools high school initiatives from across the country. The schools identified youth who worked over a course of the spring semester to share illustrative examples of how Community Schools high schools engage youth in various programs/projects/activities. Participating schools were Batesville Public Schools (AR), University Pathways Public Service Academy (CA), Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA), Mann UCLA Community School (CA), Atrisco Heritage High School (NM), and North Division High School (WI). Please see Youth Stories section of this guide for the six school vignettes.

These Community Schools include schools in both urban and rural areas and with diverse student populations in each school. The participating schools incorporate youth engagement into their school culture so that students can have a welcoming and inclusive environment to express their thoughts comfortably. Students from Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA) are “able to express youth voices and opinions.” Moreover, their “school’s environment also allows for student growth, where teachers often encourage students to seek assistance. Teachers would stay after school, make accommodations for the office hours, and be students’ emotional support.”

The opportunities to include youth voice, engagement, and leadership in the six Community Schools can be categorized into three types: a) student opinion polls, b) youth-led project/program, and c) youth council/student organizations.

The six Community Schools examples offered in this guide provided opportunities for youth to express their ideas, opinions, and perspectives regarding students' needs and school decisions. Youth indicated that their schools collect students' opinions through an annual assessment survey, open communications between school administrators and students, and school decision-making meetings. For instance, Batesville Public Schools (AR) conducts an annual student needs assessment survey composed of questions about programs designed to support the students in the district. Survey questions address available student resources, recognition of achievements, and how administrators include students in decision-making. The responses are then used to develop a strategic improvement plan. Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA) gathers the input and opinions of all students through surveys and questionnaires and takes students' responses into account in decision-making.

> *"Student representatives in SSC have helped provide orientations for incoming high school students and have helped parents navigate our campus. This semester, the student representatives helped voice Junior students' opinions that have been urging for field trips and achieved the goal of field trips for this semester and the next." — Students from Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA)*

Youth-led projects/programs are the second type of opportunity to engage youth in schoolwork. Community Schools provide youth-led programs/projects for various groups of students. For instance, University Pathways Public Service Academy (CA) provides an all-girls program, EmpowHer, for young women to learn about courage and support surrounding issues in the community. Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA) provides students with opportunities, via EduCare program, to explore new experiences and aids in developing leadership as students are encouraged to complete schoolwork, helping them to have better time management and responsibility. North Division High School (WI) has Youth Rising Up (YRU), a student-led group in which students create their bylaws and agendas and make their own decisions. Any students who want to join this group can join. Youth advocate for issues in North Division High School, including "better school lunch, proper water fountains, a better schedule, and many other issues."

> *"By being a part of these groups students learn how to advocate properly for the changes that they want. Instead of choosing violence students learn to choose their voice."*
> *— Students from North Division High School (WI)*

Community Schools also have student/youth councils or other types of student governing systems to allow students to improve their communities. For example, University Pathways Public Service Academy (CA) has a unique "House System." The school is made of four houses connecting students to their community. The house system exists to unite students together to improve their community. During advisory, students unite and work together on things they want to improve. In Mann UCLA Community School (CA) and Atrisco Heritage High School (NM), students elect peers to represent their interests at school governing council meetings. These meetings determine how the school operates. Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA) has School Site Council (SSC), which also includes student representatives who meet once a month to discuss emerging issues that impact their school and community.

> *"We met members of the community who gave us advice and encouraged us to make good choices and remember where we came from. This is the power of belonging to a Community School. This is what we hope the future of education looks like for all young people. School should be a place where you not only learn but create connections with your peers and the community." — Students from Mann UCLA Community School (CA)*

Based on the existing literature, engaging youth in school programs, projects, and activities is the key to effective youth development. The stories told by students from Community Schools are also consistent with what we found in the literature. First, students acquire leading knowledge and skills via participating and taking action in their schools, which advance students' problem-solving abilities. Students also gain social competencies, such as becoming more confident in themselves. Second, participating in school events and clubs keeps students interested in attending school. Meanwhile, knowing that their ideas and thoughts will be respected and used in actual decisions or policymaking, students are more open to sharing their perspectives with adults, which leads to a healthy youth-adult relationship. Third, students and schools can grow together in many ways. Youth engagement is an opportunity for students to work with their peers and adults to make the Community Schools a respectful, powerful, and fun place to connect all partners in the community. Students also gain valuable resources and connections which will benefit all their future endeavors.

> *"The most important aspect to having a Community School is family and local involvement. Many people in the community seem more than happy to give us opportunities to help and get involved. One instance of this is a canned food drive led by ASB." — Students from Mann UCLA Community School (CA)*

> *"Ultimately, all schools should strive for an environment where youth voices are heard, so the future of our community and all communities can be one step closer to a more perfect union." — Students from Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA)*

Implications for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools

Figure 1. Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools

The national network survey results, alongside youth stories, indicate that youth and adults in Community Schools find that opportunities and resources, leading knowledge and skills, and equity are effective elements for youth voice, engagement, and leadership in schools and communities. Figure 1 demonstrates an emerging **Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools**. **Opportunities and resources** refer to the approaches and support that youth can have when expressing their thoughts, engaging in programs and activities, and leading the efforts in their schools and communities. **Leading knowledge and skills** refer to the capacity and strategies youth can acquire throughout leadership-building program/project/activities. **Equity** refers to the equity procedure schools and communities utilize to advance youth voice, engagement, and leadership in the field.

The domains of opportunities and leadership are consistent between our findings and literature. For instance, The Search Institute's (n.d.) Developmental Assets Framework consists of both external and internal assets. External assets, such as support, can be understood as the resources and opportunities for youth development. Internal assets, such as social competencies, can be understood as the leading knowledge and skills for youth development. Many out-of-school time (OST) programs and projects aim to build leading capacities to advance youth engagement and leadership (Caldwell, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Outley et al., 2018). Even for the level of participation ladder (Hart, 1992), the higher the level of participation, the more resources, support, opportunities, leading knowledge and skills are needed. Issues of equity are often discussed in the context of sustained youth engagement, particularly of traditionally marginalized youth (Holdsworth, 2000; Lee et al., 2020; Pautsch, 2010; Silva, 2002).

The intersection of the opportunities and leading knowledge is **youth to lead**. Young people benefit from skills and resources designed to place them in leading positions of a program/project/activity that directly impacts them. Therefore, the leading knowledge and opportunities are essential for youth to take leading roles in their schools and communities. The intersection of opportunities and equity is **equitable opportunities**, intentional sharing of opportunities for more equitable distribution of youth voice and engagement in Community Schools. The intersection of leading knowledge and equity is **youth being heard**. This is based on the responses that young people might need to know more about leading or advocating skills to ensure their voices are clearly expressed to adults. Meanwhile, adults should create space for youth to be heard. Once all three key elements are met, youth are more likely to be comfortable making decisions and leading efforts in their schools and communities.

Implications for Community Schools

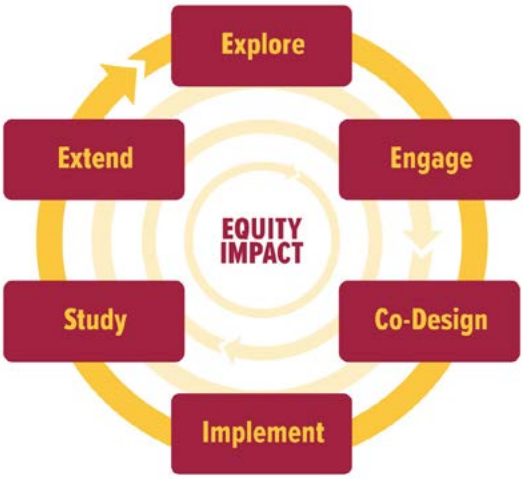

Figure 2. Process for Youth Engagement

Note: Adapted from the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) Community-Driven Equity Improvement Process

In this section, building off of literature, survey and story findings, coupled with the Coalition's decades of field and network-building expertise, we offer practical steps for meaningful and authentic youth voice, engagement, and leadership in Community Schools. Below are specific strategies and considerations organized by three key elements illustrated in the Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools: opportunities and resources, leading knowledge and skills, and equity (as described in the previous section). The rows of the table below reflect Coalition's **Process for Youth Engagement** (see Figure 2), comprised of six stages: explore, engage, co-design, implement, study, and extend. The cyclical nature of the process, both within a stage and across the stages, illustrates the iterative and ongoing nature of engaging youth in Community Schools decision-making.

The first stage of youth engagement process is one of **exploration**, a process for mapping current resources, groups, activities, and networks, as well as conducting a scan of existing student participation, with attention to inequities in access. The second stage, **engage**, entails identifying and engaging existing youth leaders and adults to gain their perspectives on ongoing practices, decision-making processes, and opportunities. This stage also includes reaching out to the broader school community, inclusive of all the students, to seek their input on the current state of decision-making processes and practices.

The third stage, **co-design**, serves to use existing structures, such as the Community School Council meetings, to design protocols for scaling leadership development opportunities for students and adults with attention to disconnected students. The next stage, stage four, **implementation**, elevates youth voice, engagement, and leadership by diversifying opportunities for authentic youth participation in various decision-making processes, whether that includes speaking at a school board meeting, testifying in front of policymakers, or developing school-based innovations. This stage promotes practice of learned leadership skills by youth in service to both their own growth and development, as well as systems-change that centers youth voice in collaborative decision-making.

Stage five, **study**, underscores the power of data to inform the success of the implementation of new processes and practices, following participation, engagement, leadership opportunities, change in school culture and student representation in the decision-making. Data should support the quantity, quality, and difference made through co-designed implementation strategies.

The final stage, **extend**, indicates a fundamental change in school and district policies and extension of power in the decision-making processes to be fully inclusive of students.

The guide contributes to existing literature by providing field-informed definitions of youth voice, youth engagement, and youth leadership, as well as by offering a new Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership, designed to be implement through the Process for Youth Engagement (see Table). The implications of this guide point to the importance of: a) youth leadership opportunities in service to youth's acquisition of new knowledge and skills, b) support of youth through various services to help them identify and cultivate interests, and c) opportunities for student-led decision-making, ultimately extending power, voice, and opportunities to youth, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized from such experiences. The guide is designed as a practical tool to advance Community Schools youth-oriented practices. Building youth leaders cultivates more inclusive decision-making in schools and helps to activate the next generation of leaders in our communities.

Table. Steps of Incorporating the Framework for Youth Voice, Engagement, and Leadership in Community Schools Using the Process for Youth Engagement

	Opportunities & Resources	Leading Knowledge & Skills	Equity
Explore	Map existing leadership groups youth are participating in Map potential opportunities for students to participate in decision-making for the school and district Identify adults and existing partner organizations that engage young people well	Identify leadership development opportunities for students Identify leadership development opportunities for adults on authentic youth engagement	Quantify students already participating in decision-making Identify disconnected student populations by chronic absenteeism and student mobility data Intentionally include the most disconnected students
Engage	Schedule meeting with existing student leaders from respective programs and adults they work with Prepare enrollment and attendance data for student leaders share challenges and opportunities Design meeting facilitation to learn existing student leaders experience and how they could be engaged with adults in school/district decisions (budgets, programs, civic engagement, partnerships, etc.)	Conduct first cohort of leadership development opportunities and supports for students, educators, partners, and families	Distribute school-wide survey allowing all students opportunity to share experiences, challenges and opportunities to contribute to school/district decisions Conduct focus groups for disconnected student populations by chronic absenteeism and student mobility data to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities to contribute to school/district decisions Conduct focus groups of disconnected students' caregivers to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities to contribute to school/district decisions

	Opportunities & Resources	Leading Knowledge & Skills	Equity
Co-Design	Use Community School Council meetings for students and adults to create the protocols that ensure student participation and equal voice in decisions, and identify indicators of success for addressing challenges and creating opportunities	Use Community School Council meetings to design protocols for scaling leadership development opportunities for students and adults	Work with students to develop protocols, tools, and reporting structure to ensure students attending Community School Council meetings are informed by student body with an emphasis on disconnected students
Implement	Conduct Community School Council meetings frequently for decision making around developing budgets, development opportunities, solutions to challenges, and innovations for advancing the lives of students and their families Arrange for student presentations at school board, city and county, and other meetings on Community Schools Council plans and outcomes	Create diverse opportunities for students to practice learned leadership skills	Quantify and disaggregate the data of the student body engagement contributing information to student representatives of the Community School Council Have students co-facilitate all Community School Council meetings
Study	Track % of ideas introduced/ created by students at Community School Council meetings being executed Track changes in school/district practices as a result of engaging students	Track the # of participants in leadership development Track the % of the enrolled students complete leadership Track the # and % of students involved in leadership opportunities	Track the # of students that contributed to informing Community School Councils Track % of disconnected students getting involved in leadership
Extend	Adopt district policy incorporating student school board members equal to their adult peers Adopt district policy and procedures for students informing school/district decisions that affect them and/ or their families	Create structure and protocols for students to conduct leadership development	Develop structure and process for students across Community Schools to assess aggregate engagement information of their peers, and review and write district policies and processes accordingly

Youth Stories

Batesville Public Schools (AR)

In a small, rural town of less than fifteen thousand people stands a school known for its academic and athletic excellence named Batesville High School Charter (BHSC). Established in 1915, BHSC has grown tremendously, now enrolling 934 students in grades ninth through twelfth. The school is constantly growing, with the number of students in each grade increasing yearly. As of the 2021-2022 school year, there are 221 students in 12th grade, 225 in 11th grade, 236 in 10th grade, and 252 in 9th grade. Additionally, the diversity at BHSC has grown over the years. School demographics include 66.6% White, 23.7% Hispanic/ Latino, 5.8% African American, 1.0% Asian, 0.7% American Indian, and 2.0% two or more races. BHSC works very hard every year to ensure that students get the best education possible and opportunities to continue their education after high school as well. To give students opportunities to engage in activities outside of the classroom, BHSC has 23 clubs available to join. These clubs allow students to develop leadership skills and build a voice for themselves.

A school's wellness is composed of many factors, but the most important is the performance and happiness of the students. At Batesville High School Charter, the administrators regularly consider student thoughts before making decisions. To ensure the youth has a voice, BHSC has a student council that is very involved with school events and EAST that develops projects that benefit the school and the community. In addition to these clubs, the school sends out a survey needs assessment at the start of every year for the students to fill out.

The annual student needs assessment is the biggest way that the school administration gets the students involved. This survey is composed of questions that are related to programs designed to support the students in the district. Survey questions address topics related to available student resources, recognition of achievements, and how administrators include students in the decision-making process. The responses are then used by BHSC's Community Schools Model Site Team to develop a strategic improvement plan.

The EAST program is involved in many projects that promote change across our district. Some allow them to enhance existing events, while others attempt to improve experiences for BHSC students. A recent project, Help Every Pioneer Get Home, entails surveying students to see how many would join clubs, sports, and other extra-curricular activities if transportation home was provided. The project team surveyed 6th-12th graders to compile data. They are now working with the transportation department before presenting the school board with a proposal and bus route map. EAST wants to help every student be as involved as possible, no matter how they get home.

The student council is the most active and influential club at BHSC. They plan teacher appreciation events every nine weeks, work at freshman orientation every summer, plan and host homecoming dances, and help with the annual Special Olympics along with many other events. Besides school events, the student council meets with the superintendent monthly to discuss what is happening in the district and any concerns for the high school.

These organizations at BHSC are all structured differently. The student council is composed of 30 students from 9th-12th grade who are recommended by teachers. The council meets biweekly to discuss and plan school and community events and is sponsored by a teacher at the high school. In contrast, BHSC's EAST program is a four-year class that any student can take. There is one teacher in charge but no elected officers in EAST. Instead, each student has an equal opportunity to lead their own project.

Student involvement is the most important aspect that a school can have. Participating in school events and clubs keeps kids interested in attending school. It also gives them opportunities to implement their opinions regarding the school. Our EAST program is a great example of this. The Help Every Pioneer Get Home project illustrates student leadership perfectly. The team involved interacted with the district's transportation department and the school board to propose and implement their plans to make a change. This not only provided the team with a voice but will soon allow many students to join clubs that will give them a voice as well. The skills these students acquire by taking action in their own school will develop them into great leaders.

University Pathways Public Service Academy (CA)

University Pathways Public Service Academy, also known as "The U," is located in the Florence-Firestone neighborhood of South Los Angeles, California. We are co-located with the Charles Drew Middle School campus and share some facilities. Firstly, the school has 24 staff members. The school has 9-12th grades, and there are 284 students. Freshman, there are 50, and for sophomore, there are 88. For Juniors, there are 79; lastly, for seniors, there are 67. Our school is a part of the local district south (LDS) and is a part of a smaller regional network called the Rivera Community of Schools. This network is represented by ten elementary schools, 2-middle schools, 7-high schools, and 4-early education centers. At University Pathways, student diversity comprised 74.2% Hispanic, 23.2% Black, 2.0% White, and 0.7% of two or more races.

At University Pathway, student voice and leadership are crucial to help students become confident, visionaries, dedicated, and charismatic individuals. As they become more confident in themselves, they can use that confidence to influence others into becoming Change Agents, which is the mascot of the school. The students do this by following the school's 5 core values which are "U Love," "U Respect," "U Work-Hard," "U Follow Through," and "U Get Results." When you follow all five core values, "U Boom." Although there are no school bylaws, the principal and his team encourage the holistic development of students. On-campus, several programs, resources, and partnerships provide students with a platform and opportunities to develop and find their voice. A lot of the staff collaborate with students to include them in meetings and events with district leaders and community partners. Teachers are welcoming and encourage positive relationships, allowing students to build trust with and support one another. This is how we see students becoming engaged with the school community and being open to becoming a leader and speaking up about their needs and concerns.

At University Pathways, spaces are created for students by bringing community members to nurture and teach students about different walks of life. For example, EmpowHer is an all-girls program for young women to learn about courage and support surrounding issues in the community. They also promote women's social and emotional well-being to improve their confidence and value their self-worth. This is one space where youth develop a voice to show resiliency during difficult moments. Champs Up is another program that helps students at our school to find purpose in their personal and academic lives. A highlight of this program is that students learn how to pursue their goals by learning how to advocate for themselves and become leaders in expanding their own business idea. Students show leadership by planning and executing a business plan with other students to gain professional experience from their own interests. The school also has a FireFighter Cadet Program that provides students with the knowledge and skills to become a firefighter after graduating high school. This program reflects youth engagement by introducing different career pathways for students to explore and develop a specific public service mindset.

Other ways that youth voice, leadership, and engagement are created are through the school's House system and governing Associated Student Body (ASB.) Every Monday morning, the principal hosts "FAMILY," which helps provide students the opportunity to come together through advisory or Kinship. The school is made of four Houses, or small learning communities, that connect students to their community. During advisory, students unite and work together on things they need to improve. There are four houses, KAP (Kapernick), Mobama (Michelle Obama), AOC (Alexandria Ocasio Cortez), and Hussle (Nipsey Hussle). The house system exists to unite students together to improve their own community. Several student spaces are student-led and supported by staff. Students have the opportunity to volunteer and vote for a leadership position. This includes a house lead and hype squad for the entire school year. The class supports the house lead-in events by getting materials. Students can initiate or create their own clubs and recruit students during a club rush event. Club rush is to promote student spaces and extracurricular activities. Club leaders are in charge of setting meetings with club members. The teacher sponsor supports the decision they make.

As the students become more confident, dedicated, and charismatic individuals, schools should open up and give students opportunities and experiences like programs that could not only help them learn and grow but help them think of their future career choices.

Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (CA)

Located in the heart of Los Angeles, California, UCLA Community School is home to 976 students, with 448 in high school. It is established in a diverse community of 83% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 2.4% African American, and 1.5% White. Interestingly, our school has a very rich history and a unique background. UCLA-CS is one of six Community Schools established on the RFK Community Schools campus, which was built on the former site of the Ambassador Hotel, the site of Robert F. Kennedy's tragic assassination in 1968. Visitors who enter through the gate and into the campus are greeted by multiple murals, including one of RFK located at the center of our school. These murals not only honor the memory of Robert F. Kennedy, but these murals are also a part of the students' experiences. Many of the murals surrounding our classroom hallways were painted by the students, whose artworks were inspired by their growth and development here as they attended school at UCLA-CS from kindergarten to graduation. Walking through our school is like walking down all of our memory lanes.

Being able to express youth voices and opinions is something that UCLA-CS values and prioritizes. Students in our school have many opportunities to engage and participate in these roles, including being leaders in classrooms, sports, and even councils. Students who show high leadership and engagement in decision-making are often given more opportunities to further their personal development in these fields. These can include internships at our Immigrant Family Legal Clinic — learning about immigration law firsthand and the chance to run for the School Site Council, a form of school government. Furthermore, our school often provides opportunities for youth to conduct research in classes such as AP Research. Our school's environment also allows for student growth, where teachers often encourage students to seek assistance. Teachers would stay after school, make accommodations for their office hours, and be students' emotional support. Our community cares for one another, and our motto is "A place where we grow together."

A vital leadership role students can work toward is the School Site Council (SSC). SSC at UCLA-CS is devoted to focusing on ways that our school can improve. The students who earn a spot in SSC are the ones that have the highest role in leadership. SSC emphasizes student input when making big decisions, including adjusting a new school schedule. The input and opinions of all students are gathered through surveys and questionnaires and taken into account in decision-making. Other leadership roles are offered to students through an afterschool program called EduCare. It provides students with opportunities to explore new experiences and aids in developing leadership as students are encouraged to complete schoolwork, helping them to have better time management and responsibility. EduCare also offers teamwork opportunities, as students can participate in sports, encouraging youth engagement.

Our School Site Council includes the principal, school officials, teachers, UCLA partners, parents, and five student representatives who meet once a month on Wednesdays from 3:45 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. Student representatives in SSC have helped provide orientations for incoming high school students and have helped parents navigate our campus. This semester, the student representatives helped voice Junior students' opinions that have been urging for field trips and achieved the goal of field trips for this semester and the next. EduCare is an everyday after-school program, and all RFK high school students, including UCLA-CS, can participate. EduCare provides student enrichment programs, including the Take Action Leadership, and this helps students develop problem-solving and leadership skills. EduCare also provides after-school sports, including basketball, soccer, volleyball, and dance along with art programs such as mural painting and fashion design. These activities increase student participation and youth leadership in the school community.

UCLA-CS believes the students attending will be the future leaders of our community and, therefore, allows for leadership opportunities in our school. Although UCLA-CS can allow more opportunities for students to participate in youth voices, the two main spaces our school provides excel in considering ways to support students and gathering student opinions as input for school decisions. This encourages growth and leadership development that prompt students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Ultimately, all schools should strive for an environment where youth voices are heard, so the future of our community and all communities can be one step closer to a perfect union.

Mann UCLA Community School (CA)

Mann UCLA Community School is located in Los Angeles, California. Mann is a 6-12 school serving approximately 600 students. In 2020-21, the student population was predominantly Black (48%) and Latinx (50%). We are four Youth Voice members: three seniors and one junior; a mix of African American and Latinx youth; a small sample of students that represents the demographic of the student population at Mann. The culture surrounding Mann is one of resilience. The aftermath of the country's largest instances of civil unrest left our community powerful, worn down, and still striving to overcome its challenges. The history of our community has inspired us to take matters into our own hands and to take roles in our community and school leadership.

Youth voice, leadership, and engagement play an important role in our school. Mann is excellent at building connections that lead to the practice of youth leadership. We have an Associated Student Body (ASB), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), and sports teams. We also have partnerships with UCLA, museums, and various nonprofit organizations. These opportunities enable students to shape their learning experiences and the school environment.

We have many ways for students to engage in decision-making and advocating for the culture and climate of the school. For example, students elect peers to represent their interests at Governance Council meetings. These meetings determine how the school operates. Also, at our school, we have a variety of clubs where students get the opportunity to explore issues of social and emotional learning: including a Students Deserve chapter– a group whose entire goal is to bring the Black Lives Matter movement to our campus. Through Students Deserve, students create a safe space to combat issues they wish to change that directly affect their daily lives. We also have an Anime club that students started at Mann.

The college center on campus focuses on helping students prepare for college and academics. College readiness counselors are prepared to aid anyone who might need guidance in the college center. Since the Los Angeles School Police was defunded, LAUSD has adopted alternative practices and hired people that introduce new restorative justice systems, specifically at schools that serve predominantly Black and Latinx students. Our mental health advisor also has her office open to students who might need advice or guidance. This has made a difference in our day-to-day lives. There is a noticeable difference in how students react to difficult situations knowing they have counsel and help from someone who has their back. This was something that was requested many times by students since the partnership was established. Having these new counselors is one of the many ways our school has made students' voices feel validated and heard.

As a Community School with many partnerships, there are certain things we feel are working well. For starters, having student-led programs seems to help students come out of their comfort zones and provide a sense of belonging. Secondly, having many opportunities to converse with school leadership and administration gives many of us the confidence to speak up. For example, this year, students voted for several sports selections that the school provided. This improved our school life greatly and gave us a better sense of community, from students playing on the team to those cheering in the stands. It has been heard on several occasions that many students want to stay at Mann just to join the teams established this year.

Family and local involvement are the most important aspects of having a Community School. Many people in the community seem more than happy to give us opportunities to help and get involved. One instance of this is a canned food drive led by ASB. This allowed us to work with new people and show how a Community School can be respectful, powerful, and fun while giving back to our community directly. At this event, we met community members who gave us advice and encouraged us to make good choices and remember where we came from. This is the power of belonging to a Community School. This is what we hope the future of education looks like for all young people. School should be a place where you not only learn but create connections with your peers and the community. These connections last a lifetime and remind us that we are not alone on our road to success.

Atrisco Heritage High School (NM)

Atrisco Heritage Academy is a public school located west of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Jaguars walk onto a spacious campus overlooking Albuquerque, with a view of the beautiful sandias, and "golden hour" rays of sunshine. As Jaguars walk onto campus, they are greeted by groups of people they feel supported by. This space motivates us to succeed. Atrisco is Albuquerque's largest high school, with approximately 2,211 jaguars attending the school. Nine hundred twenty are in ninth grade, 641 in tenth, 450 in eleventh, and 500 in twelfth. There are about 1,116 males and 1,095 females. The student body is ethnically diverse, reporting their race/ethnicity as follows: 2,010 Hispanic, 99 White, 41 American Indian, 26 with two or more races, 24 African American, 6 Asian, and 5 Native Hawaiian.

Atrisco believes youth voice is important and demonstrates this by allowing students to share their thoughts freely and encouraging involvement in their community. Jaguar Nation feels students should have a safe space in their school to express themselves and protects the right to express their ideas in the student handbook. Atrisco staff works hard daily to push Jaguars to express their views in class and on campus because they want them to strive for the best education. As a community, we allow students the space and prompt them to share their ideas in class debates, through clubs, and in discussions with friends and teachers. Jaguars continue to evolve by voicing their thoughts, receiving feedback from their peers, and processing it. This cycle allows Jaguars to find not only their voices but also gain knowledge.

Jaguars make ideas come alive by sharing them with the activities' office, where a team of dedicated staff members coordinates most of the student events. Atrisco is full of amazing groups and organizations, like numerous clubs, athletic teams, and student councils. The student council is one of the biggest groups found in our school. It includes an activities director, student body officers, class officers, and committee chairs. Student Body Officers follow laws passed down each year from prior classes. Jaguars are chosen to be part of the student council by running yearly elections. Anyone can run to represent their class by campaigning and showing they are qualified. The student body is divided into four committees.

These committees all have different tasks and activities. The Activities Director is in charge of organizing projects, an action plan is made, and tasks are evenly distributed to the student body. This system makes sure everyone is participating. Members of the student council meet every other day during class time. Since the student council makes up a large part of school organizations, they have a lot of power when deciding movements and events. The Student Council recently initiated the ¨See something, Say something" movement. This movement was created to help students who feel unsafe on campus advocate for themselves. There are flyers around the school with a scannable QR code to anonymously report any troubles seen. So far, we have seen positive outcomes like higher attendance rates in class.

With more than 35 clubs, Jaguars have gained confidence and left a legacy for future Jaguars... a legacy of why it is important to share their thoughts and voice them in a way that helps others listen. Jaguars work to set an example for the community by using teamwork to build pride in academic excellence. Most clubs do community service and look to spark special interests in members. Jaguars for positive change (JPC) allows students to uplift one another and maintain positivity. Any student can be a part of JPC. Members meet weekly.

Students of JPC team up with organizations to better the environment by drafting plans and gathering as a group on weekends to finish their tasks. This year members of JPC were able to visit Valle de Oro. There they planted trees to continue work to protect our wildlife. If other events need additional volunteers, the JPC sponsor recruits from the community by word of mouth and flyers. Adolescents should prioritize their involvement in their community and school grounds to improve personally. Developing leadership and decision-making skills allows the youth to be well prepared for their future. At Atrisco, we make sure everyone's voice is heard by building an open environment for new ideas by growing our student-led programs. Youth opinions and beliefs matter. Let your voices be heard and share your thoughts as we do at Atrisco!

North Division High School (WI)

North Division High School is a school with rich tradition located in the Milwaukee Public School District. As of the fall of the 2021-22 year, there are 450 students enrolled at our school. 91.5% of our students are African-American, 6.2% Hispanic, and 1% are White. Ninety percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. That means at least 90% of our students are considered "economically disadvantaged." Like many schools in the city, North Division has its struggles, but it is a great school for students who want to learn and grow. NDSHS's legendary alumni list includes figures like Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Golda Meir, and The Honorable Vel Phillips. NDHS also produced the first African-American Acting Mayor, fire captain, and police chief in the city of Milwaukee. North also has a very nice building. We have a brand-new Green School Yard, basketball courts, football fields, and repaved track. Many actions that have been made to improve the community at North Division have led to more student engagement and have uncovered better ways to involve students.

Youth voice, leadership, and engagement are very important at North Division High School. The administration supports any idea that students have. Students and parents are always invited to the meetings where decisions are made. NDHS also has all kinds of clubs that are focused on students. We have clubs like Youth Rising Up, Gay Straight Alliance, Green Club, Youthology, Sisters Club, 414life, Violence Free Zone, and the Community School Leadership Group. Students' voice is so important at North Division that it was a student who created the school hashtag #legacystrongfutureready. The hashtag refers to the school's rich history and is meant to encourage students to make history next.

There are clubs at NDHS that serve all kinds of purposes. Groups like Sister's Club and 414Life work with students to have a voice and behavior struggles. Youth Rising Up is youth lead and fights for student voice, social justice, and equal rights. YRU has protested and fought for our school to fix several issues. Many YRU members were also a part of Youthology before the pandemic. Youthology is a student-led podcast where students discuss the topics that are most important to them. While school staff makes sure that the content on Youthology is appropriate, they allow students to be creative. These groups create a safe space where students gain confidence and comfort during their journey. Community Conversations are held every year where the Community School Coordinator hosts conversations with students to gather their opinion about the school culture and climate.

Youth Rising Up and Youthology are the only groups that are student-led. In YRU, students create their own bylaws and agendas and make decisions. They decide what issues are important, acceptable and unacceptable, and other things. Other groups are run by staff members who care. Neither YRU or Youthology have ever turned a student away. Any student who wanted to be a part of these groups was allowed to. Once they are a part of groups like YRU, it's up to the group to decide what type of decisions they will make and what they will fight for. Youth have fought for issues at NDHS, including better school lunch, proper water fountains, a better schedule, and many other issues. By being a part of these groups, students learn how to advocate properly for the changes that they want. Instead of choosing violence, students learn to choose their voice.

Overall, North Division is a school that cares about student voice. North must work to recruit more students who want to attend our school and are going to care enough to use their voice. If all of the groups have the same students in them, we aren't going to get very far. North also needs to do a better job telling our story on social media and in the real media because people have very negative opinions about the North division. If the school can commit to raising student voices, then the community will have more people willing to speak positively about the school instead of outsiders. North Division always has and continues to produce some of the most talented people in the city of Milwaukee. It is now time for that talent to speak up!

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