



Engage Protocol

Description in the Youth Voice Guide

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.

Introduction

How might schools engage large groups of students in discussion on meaningful issues? “The Listening In” protocol is designed to help schools employ democratic processes. Unlike surveys, “Listening In” allows for deeper conversations on critical issues and actual dialogue among participants. Using a chalk talk model, which is a silent conversation that plays out on chart paper or walls, students can express their ideas on a variety of topics and then comment on other ideas, thereby extending ideas through silent dialogue. The protocol supports teams to:

- ✓ Engage larger groups as active participants in a design process
- ✓ Understand critical and complex feelings and understandings of groups that may be impacted by the leadership teams’ work
- ✓ Surface new ideas and resources

Purpose and Goals

- ✓ Engage large groups of people in conversations about meaningful participation in their community, organization or school
- ✓ Collect evidence of community thinking
- ✓ Create avenues for multiple kinds of learners to express their thinking and beliefs on particular topics

Process

1. Students and adults work together to establish norms for the work. For example:
 - a. Assume best intention from everyone
 - b. Embrace disagreement with respect. Disagree with the idea and don’t make it personal about the person presenting the idea.
2. Establish a lead facilitator group: This group should primarily be made up of students. Adults (CS Coordinator, teacher, admin) only serve in an advisory role.

3. Lead facilitator group determines questions that they would like to engage the community. For example, if you want to know more about how students about youth leadership, you might ask:
 - a. What issues should students have a voice in?
 - b. What should student leadership look like in our community?
 - c. What issues would you like to be able to have a voice in?
 - d. What kind of power should students have in our school and community?
4. Post Chart paper in library or other common spaces for students to respond.
5. Students come in smaller groups throughout 1-2 days.
6. Members of the lead facilitator group monitor the whole process and at least three members of the group are present when students are posting comments.
7. The lead facilitator group establishes agreements. Here might be some things to consider:
 - a. Help students stay focused on providing responses that will help to improve the student experience. The lead facilitator group should determine what responses should be removed (blaming, shaming sarcastic and complaining comments). Once this is determined, it should be clearly communicated to students. These comments can be removed - but don't throw them away – put them off to the side on another chart paper. You want to honor all voices but having negative off topic comments can dilute the seriousness of the work and start a cascading event with students.
 - b. Each chart paper is for one question (you will need multiple pieces of chart paper for one question. You could also do this on a wall – each question gets one wall.
 - c. Keep it reasonable – try not to ask more than three questions – maybe just two
 - d. Students write comments on sticky notes and then post on the chart paper
 - e. Comments should be specific and realistic – avoid sarcasm, blaming, shaming, and complaining
8. Once you have all the comments you can begin to analyze:
 - a. First, do several gallery walks to understand the comments.
 - b. Then, determine the themes that you see in the responses. A category is something like:
 - i. Student participation in discipline policy
 - ii. Student choice in project topics and research
9. Make recommendations
10. Make it all public – show gratitude for all those that participated (even the adults)