

30 Places for Student Voice in Schools

1. **Classrooms.** Student voice happens all the time in classrooms. It is students talking to each other and the teacher, and so much more. Students' behavior, attitudes, and actions are also forms of student voice. The student sharing their life experience is sharing student voice, just like the student cheating on a test or bullying.
2. **Class evaluations.** When students evaluate themselves, their teachers, their peers, the curriculum, physical classroom, or other parts of the school, they're sharing student voice. Its easy to incorporate listening to student voice this way- but it doesn't mean anything unless action comes from it.
3. **School boardrooms.** Students can present ideas, share concerns, and sit through school board meetings just like adults. When school boards involve students as representatives of their peers, they are listening to student voice. However, meaningful involvement means giving students full-voting positions on school boards, just like many counties in Maryland and a growing number of districts across the US.
4. **School planning.** Student voice in school planning includes creating school culture, planning school activities and operations, promoting school improvement, and designing the physical building. Student voice can be engaged throughout these processes and procedures with intention and purpose.
5. **Hallways.** When a student graffitis on the wall "Mrs. Jones Sux!", they're sharing student voice. So are students who gossip, form cliques, and share lockers. Student voice happens informally throughout schools all the time, with or without adult supervision and/or approval.
6. **School research.** Students who research their schools examine learning, behavior, funding, policies, and more for efficacy and purpose. Both sharing and collecting student voice, engaging students as school researchers can help identify gaps and secure data in ways that many adult researchers cannot.
7. **School protests.** Student-led school advocacy can include school protests. When adults don't engage student voice in meaningful ways throughout the school environment, students may feel compelled to make their voices heard by adults. This is one way how that happens.
8. **Policy-making.** More than one student voice campaign in the 1960s had the motto, "Nothing about me without me," and they were frequently talking about education policy-making. Always the target of formal decisions in schools, students are rarely engaged in the processes that affect them most.
9. **School reform.** Where adults stand on either side of a school building a poke sticks at each other in the name of improving schools, they have frequently lost sight of students. They do this because they haven't engaged students as partners in school reform. Student voice can have a role when students share what they think about schools and how they can improve; students can be engaged as partners when they have substantive roles in school reform activities.
10. **Afterschool.** Student voice can be engaged throughout afterschool activities, both educational and recreational, in school and otherwise. Students can plan, evaluate, facilitate, research, advocate, and more for the activities designed to serve them.
11. **Clubs.** Clubs and other extracurricular activities give the appearance of being an appropriate outlet for student voice. However, along without earning credit for their contributions or otherwise being acknowledged for their contributions, and with the intentional positioning of student voice as relevant to school day learning, students may learn from clubs that their voices are best

tokenized if not entirely ignored. Club activities must be integrated into learning and supported throughout the school day to be an effective outlet for student voice.

12. **Teaching.** Engaging student voice in teaching means giving students opportunities to teach other students. This can happen in curriculum planning and delivery.
13. **School Year Planning.** Looking over the scope of learning activities gives students insight into how education operates. Allowing student voice to inform and drive school year planning provides a collaborative basis for Student/Adult Partnerships by giving students purpose in schools.
14. **Sports.** The first occurrence of the phrase “student voice” in my research emerges from [a 1956 newspaper article](#) on college sports at Columbia University. Since then sports in elementary and secondary education have taken root, and adults’ responses to student voice have varied. Students can share a lot, including essential play information and more.
15. **Educator hiring.** Hiring adults to work with students throughout the education system is generally done by adults. However, including student voice in educator hiring, administrator hiring, and the hiring of school support staff can help foster environments that are more responsive, safe, and supportive for students *and* adults.
16. **Political rallies.** Engaging student voice in political rallies has to extend beyond simply using young people to decorate adult causes. Propping up a student and telling them what to say is not student voice. Engaging students as partners in planning, facilitating, and participating throughout political rallies is authentic.
17. **Discipline.** When students help make classroom guidelines, school policies, and district regulations, student voice is being engaged in discipline. Student courts are another approach, as is having students engaged in deciding remediation and conflict resolution.
18. **Curriculum planning.** Curriculum planning can be made richer and more effective with student voice. By participating as partners, students can help decide topic areas, curricular approaches, teaching methods, and other essential parts of the process. Student voice can be most effective in equal partnerships through regular curriculum committees, as well as individual teacher planning.
19. **District offices.** District, regional education units, and state education agencies can engage student voice throughout their processes. Grant planning, delivery, and evaluation; policy creation and evaluation; school improvement planning; building assessment; and many more locations throughout education administration are some locations.
20. **Technology.** Student voice in education technology begins with simply listening to students in teaching. Further, student voice can be engaged by having students teach students and teachers about technology; students maintain and develop educational technology infrastructure in schools; and students design ed tech policies on the building, district, state, and federal levels.
21. **Teacher training.** When students teach teachers about youth culture, student rights, learning styles, and other topics important to them in schools, student voice is being meaningfully infused in teacher training.
22. **Principal’s office.** Student voice in the principal’s office has an important role in decision-making on the personal level and affecting the whole student body. In addition to advocating for themselves, students can work with building leaders to affect school improvement through Principal Advisory Councils and other formal and informal mechanisms.
23. **Grant evaluations.** Evaluating the efficacy of the grant-making designed to serve them positions student voice to impact learning beyond the classroom. Adults gain important skills and

perspectives, as well as energy for implementation, while students gain important understanding about the purpose of funding for their learning.

24. **School budgeting.** Engaging students as partners in complex education budgeting gives student voice a purposeful outlet to affect the school system. Educators and administrators can gain important insight to the effectiveness of decision-making and implementation.
25. **Playgrounds.** When student voice has an intentional role in playgrounds, playing and conflicts have purpose that can be captured for learning. Observing, but not facilitating, playground interactions allows adults in schools to help students navigate where and how to use their voice appropriately in interpersonal relationships, as well as school-wide applications.
26. **School culture.** The attitudes, policies, and structures of education may change when students voice is engaged. Culture includes the spoken and unspoken norms in a school, as well as the beliefs, ideas, actions, and outcomes of students and adults. Engaging student voice deliberately can improve all these things for everyone in education.
27. **Cafeteria.** Student voice in the school cafeteria extends far beyond student complaints about food quality and fighting. Students are rallying schools to provide healthy choices, improve menu selection and pricing, and eliminate competitive foods from their buildings.
28. **Building design.** Student voice can be engaged throughout building design processes and in all grade levels. From design to redesign to improvement to reconstruction, students can inform, co-design, and implement building planning in all areas.
29. **In the news.** Its increasingly popular to quote students in education articles. Engaging student voice in the news includes that, as well as student-created articles for mainstream websites and newspapers, student-led video, student school twitter feeds, and other news distribution channels.
30. **Committees.** Student voice in education committees can happen within school buildings, at district and state levels, and at the federal level. Students can participate as full partners in policy-making, grant distribution, curriculum selection, teacher hiring and firing, and more.

The number of places where student voice has an essential role in schools is countless. There are many important things to remember though:

- [Student voice is not the same as student engagement or Meaningful Student Involvement.](#)
- [Student voice is just the beginning of engaging students- not the end.](#)
- [Meaningful Student Involvement yields the greatest outcomes for student voice.](#)

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