



Students as Allies in Improving Their Schools

KEY FINDINGS FROM STUDENTS AS ALLIES STUDENT AND TEACHER SURVEYS

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In too many classrooms across the country, students speak of being barely visible, while just as many teachers struggle merely to get kids to show up—a symptom of a persistent divide, pitting teachers and students on seemingly opposing sides. In a 2001 national survey, for instance, 65 percent of students agreed with the statement, "My teachers don't understand me," while 33 percent of teachers reported inadequate preparation to reach students with backgrounds different from their own. In too many schools, neither students nor teachers feel smart.

Students as Allies (SAA) takes on these negative dynamics. Coordinated by What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) and funded by MetLife Foundation, this eighteen-month project has worked with local partners in five cities—Chicago, Houston, Oakland, Philadelphia, and St. Louis—to help students become stakeholders not just in their own success but also in that of their teachers and school. It has done so by supporting students in the role of action researchers.

As part of the project, student-teacher research teams in 20 schools across these five cities designed and administered a survey to students and faculty. Questions covered a range of issues related to school climate and teaching and learning. In all, more than 6,350 students completed surveys, and in St. Louis and Chicago 446 teachers did so as well. (Houston teachers will be surveyed in fall 2004.) Student teams determined whom they would survey within their school, aiming for a representative sample, and administered surveys during class time. The schools, by and large, were medium to large urban high schools facing numerous challenges; few would end up on a district's "high performing" list.

Here we present key findings. For a report on the project as a whole, as well as resources for engaging students in action research, please see:

www.whatkidscando.org/studentsasalliesintro.html

Much good will and intentions among both students and teachers

Students...

- 89% of the students polled across the five cities said, “I really want to learn”
- 87% said they respected most of their teachers
- 84% said their teachers respected them
- 84% gave their teachers an “A” or a “B” on “knowing their subject well”
- 76% gave their teachers an “A” or “B” on “being well organized” and “believing all children can learn”

Teachers...

- 93% of the teachers surveyed agreed that their school’s faculty was committed to teaching and doing what’s best for students
- 89% thought their colleagues respected all races and cultures
- 87% believed their school’s curriculum challenges students
- 81% said their colleagues have high expectations for students

Concerns about treating students as individuals and with respect

While 52% of students gave their teachers an “A” or “B” on teaching students according to their abilities, 17% gave them a “D” or “F.”

Only half the students agreed that:

- the majority of teachers at their school regarded students as individuals and did not stereotype them
- their school’s disciplinary policy was fair
- faculty and administrators value what they have to say

Among students who reported they had considered dropping out of school (18%), 58% cited not getting along with their teachers as the biggest factor. Only a quarter picked bullying or school safety.

Discrepancies in views of student-teacher relations

- 66% of the students said their teachers don't understand them or their life outside school
- 25% of the students said there isn't a single adult in their school whom they feel they could approach with a problem

- In Chicago, only 27% of students said their teachers often talked to them one-on-one about classroom participation and academic performance, while 80% of the teachers said they brought up these subjects often in one-on-one conversations with students.

<i>St. Louis students and teachers who report often or very often talking one-on-one about...</i>	Students [N=4,460]	Teachers [N=358]	Percentage Difference
class behavior	19.0%	40.4%	21.4%
plans for college or work after high school	32.4%	58.8%	26.2%
academic performance	28.6%	66.5%	37.9%
completing homework assignments	24.9%	67.0%	42.1%
interests and things important to students	29.6%	77.7%	48.1%

What students say would help them do better

- ... more real world learning (47%)
- ... more one-on-one attention from teachers (37%)
- ... more challenging classes (22%)

- ... [Chicago] more parent/guardian involvement (40%)
- ... [Chicago] being able to take textbooks home (33%)