Adam Fletcher

Meaningful
Student Involvement

change

Guide to Inclusive School Change

rewarding

*"The work of Meaningful
Student Involvement is not easy
or instantly rewarding.
It demands that the system
of schooling change, and
that the attitudes of students,
educators, parents and
community members change."*

Adam Fletcher

Meaningful Student Involvement

GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CHANGE

Adam Fletcher

Presented by

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promoting meaningful student involvement in school change

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Introduction: The POTENTIAL

Imagine… The billboards across the city advertise candidates for the school board. Several are for students running for positions. As we arrive at the school, a number of students, parents, teachers, and administrators greet us. In the main hallway is the school's mission, proudly proclaiming that it was co-authored by students, and signed by the entire school community, including every student. A student-led tour of the school shows students teaching classes, administrators coaching teacher workshops on student empowerment, students conducting research on their school, and students completing evaluations of themselves and their teachers. Attending a school board meeting after school, we witness students proposing budgets and curricula and working with adult leaders to devise the district's ten-year plan. Next, we arrive at a meeting where students are partnering with community leaders to plan a neighborhood rally; we learn that they are earning credit in their civics class. That evening we present the school with the "Exemplary Student Involvement" award, knowing fully that they've earned it.

While this story is fictitious, the examples within it are not. Across the nation there is a growing movement to enrich the roles of students throughout schools. In Annapolis, Maryland, the local school district has engaged students as full voting members of the school board for more than 25 years. In Oakland, California a group of students recently led a district-wide evaluation of their teachers, curriculum, facilities, and students. Generation YES, a nationwide technology program, infuses students teaching teachers technology as a powerful way to engage students in learning as well as promote classroom efficacy, with educators raving about this powerful learning model.

> **"When adults… think of students, they think of them as potential beneficiaries of change. They think of achievement results, skills, attitudes, and jobs. They rarely think of students as participants in a process of school change and organizational life."**
>
> *- Michael Fullan*

Despite mounting pressure on schools, or perhaps because of it, recent evidence indicates a growing awareness among educators that students play a crucial role in the success of school reform. A number of recent educator- and student-written narratives proclaim that it is not about "making students happy," pacifying unruly children, or allowing students to run the school. These first-person accounts exclaim that when educators partner *with* students to improve learning, teaching and leadership, school change is positive and effective for everyone. However, in spite of these reports and continued proclamations of the dire necessity of actively engaging students in school change, many students still find that they are continually neglected – and sometimes actively suppressed – in many school improvement efforts.

The goal of this guide is to establish a foundation for an emerging movement that promotes democracy in education by engaging students in researching, planning, teaching, evaluating, leading and advocating for schools. This guide centers on a framework called **Meaningful Student Involvement**, devised to improve the quality of schools through inclusive, purposeful and active student engagement.

A philosopher once wrote that each generation must struggle to define democracy anew for itself, lest it die in antiquity and irrelevancy. When implemented, **Meaningful Student Involvement** gives students the chance to experience, analyze, and challenge democracy from their earliest years. This guide offers the first steps in that direction.

Definition: The MEANING

Meaningful Student Involvement is the process of engaging students in every facet of the educational process for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy. Instead of simply listening to the often contrived collective "student voice," **Meaningful Student Involvement** recognizes the unique knowledge, experience and perspective of each individual student.

What does **Meaningful Student Involvement** actually *do* in schools? For many students, being meaningfully involved in their education unlocks (🔓) the doors to learning; while poor experiences with student involvement can sometimes lock up (🔒) students' enthusiasm for leadership through experience.

Meaningful Student Involvement AIMS TO…

🔓 *Inform the core beliefs of every student, educator and administrator, including their approach learning, teaching, and leading in schools.*

🔓 *Provide students and educators with a sustainable, responsive, and systemic approach to engaging fellow and future students as leaders in school change.*

🔓 *Deliberately and actively engage students at all grade levels and in all subjects as stakeholders and partners in the teaching, learning, and leading process throughout the education system.*

🔓 *Continually validate the experience, perspectives and knowledge of all students through positive participation in school improvement.*

Meaningful Student Involvement AVOIDS…

🔒 *Regarding students as passive recipients in learning, or as empty vessels to be filled with teachers' knowledge.*

🔒 *Filtering student perspectives, experiences or knowledge with adult interpretations.*

🔒 *Promoting passive volunteering as the only way students can contribute to their schools, and otherwise disregarding students' potential for meaningful contribution within education.*

> **"We need to know what's going to happen, to agree on what's going on. Let us help decide. Let us approve."**
>
> *– A high school student in New York*

Several assumptions are key to **Meaningful Student Involvement**. Individually, each "key" is intended to validate the knowledge, experience and perspective of individual students without romanticizing their collective voice. Collectively, these "keys" are meant to unlock the myriad doors of a system that has historically denied access to the people it most affects: students.

Meaningful Student Involvement…

- Emphasizes the **practical and empowering involvement** of students throughout education in order to promote greater academic achievement, close the current engagement gaps in gender, class, and race, and create supportive learning environments for all students.

- Does not happen in isolation; rather, it is the implementation of a set of **interrelated strategies and activities** that is infused with other efforts directed towards increased school success for all students.

- Depends on a **sustainable structure of support** to build the capacity of educators and administrators in schools to involve students in meaningful opportunities in teaching, learning, and decision-making. Teachers and administrators become allies with students through student-adult partnerships in school-wide learning communities.

- Requires the consistent **support and willingness** of adults to integrate students in all aspects of schooling, including teaching, learning, and decision-making. The role of the student-teacher relationship becomes central to creating supportive learning environments and fostering academic achievement for all students.

- Engages students in **learning *with purpose*** – individually, to strengthen academic performance through relevancy and relationships; collectively, to promote lifelong learning through academic, cultural and civic engagement for all students.

- **Empowers students** – their knowledge, perspectives, experience and action – by positively engaging every student in learning, teaching, and leading schools today.

- Makes **applied learning** relevant through practical application in the school setting: teaching students about learning, engaging students through active processes, and promoting ongoing reflection about learning and teaching by students and educators.

> **"No one ever asks us our opinion. The truth is, we have the most to lose when our schools aren't working right, and the most to gain when they are."**
>
> *- A high school student in California*

Purpose: The OUTCOMES

By engaging all students through **Meaningful Student Involvement**, educators and administrators can positively impact all students in a given school. In turn, **Meaningful Student Involvement** can change the very framework of schooling.

Benefits to Students

Meaningful Student Involvement encourages every student's personal responsibility and shared accountability with adults. Research demonstrates that students' attitudes are most affected when students are engaged as significant contributors to learning communities. For the individual student, **Meaningful Student Involvement** can:

- Encourage motivation, commitment and connection with coursework;
- Promote positive academic, social, and cultural outcomes;
- Develop strong connections to other students and educators, and;
- Enhance lifelong critical thinking and community building skills.

Benefits to Teachers, Administrators & School Staff

Meaningful Student Involvement can support teachers and administrators by building strong relationships and increasing efficacy among students. For adults in schools, **Meaningful Student Involvement** can:

- Revitalize educators' love of learning;
- Increase educators' commitment to their students and schools;
- Invigorate personalized, effective approaches to school change;
- Promote urgency and purpose for the work of teachers and administrators.

Benefits to Schools

For the education system at large, engaging students is an invaluable component of the school improvement process. In schools around the nation, **Meaningful Student Involvement** can:
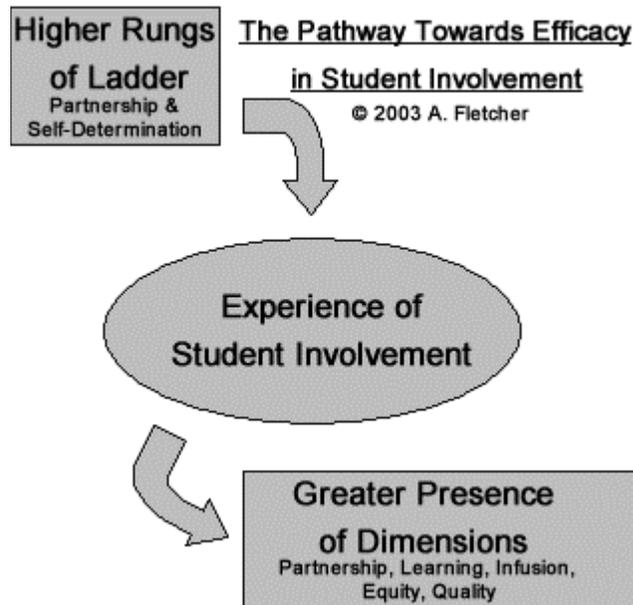
- Bridge the academic achievement gap;
- Develop connections between schools and communities;
- Foster dynamic, supportive learning environments, and;
- Engage increasingly diverse student bodies.

Assessment: The TOOLS

The following tools were designed to be easy-to-use, yet effective, assessments to measure the types of student involvement, as well as the personal and systemic effects of student involvement.

While students are involved in every school, the type of involvement varies. So does the effect of the involvement. The following are two tools to consider when measuring student involvement. The first, called the *Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools*, offers a variety of types of student involvement. This can help students and educators understand how students are currently involved, and how they could be.

The second tool is called the *Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement*. This tool explores the various outcomes of **Meaningful Student Involvement** on students and educators. When combined with the *Ladder of Student Involvement*, these tools offer a powerful framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating **Meaningful Student Involvement** across educational settings.

Higher Rungs of Ladder
Partnership & Self-Determination

The Pathway Towards Efficacy in Student Involvement
© 2003 A. Fletcher

Experience of Student Involvement

Greater Presence of Dimensions
Partnership, Learning, Infusion, Equity, Quality

The Ladder of Student Involvement in School

The *Ladder of Student Involvement in School* was adapted from the work of Roger Hart, a United Nations expert on children's participation in community planning. By mapping situations and activities that involve students on the rungs of the Ladder, schools can assess their levels of **Meaningful Student Involvement**. The higher the rung on the Ladder, the greater the meaningfulness of student involvement. This Guide seeks to help schools reach higher rungs – that is, increase the amount and improve the quality of student participation in schools. The rungs on this Ladder don't represent a developmental process that happens through finite increments. Student involvement can go from the second rung directly to the sixth. The Ladder is meant to represent possibilities, not predictions, for growth.

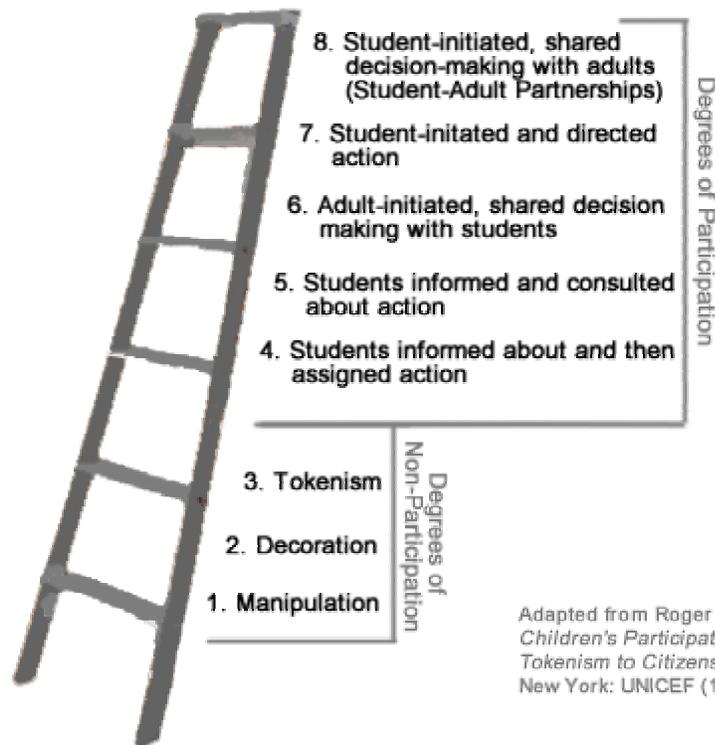*The degrees of participation include (8 being the highest):*

8) Student-initiated, shared decisions with teachers: Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by students, and decision-making is shared among students and adults. These projects empower students while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

7) Students-initiated and directed: Students initiate and direct a project, class, or activity. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with students: Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by adults, but the decision-making is shared with students involved.

The Ladder of Student Involvement in School
by Adam Fletcher*

8. Student-initiated, shared decision-making with adults (Student-Adult Partnerships)

7. Student-initated and directed action

6. Adult-initiated, shared decision making with students

5. Students informed and consulted about action

4. Students informed about and then assigned action

Degrees of Participation

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Degrees of Non-Participation

Adapted from Roger Hart's *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship.* New York: UNICEF (1994).

5) Consulted and informed: Students give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by adults. The students are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

4) Assigned but taught: Students are assigned a specific role, told about how, and taught why they are being involved.

The degrees of non-participation include (1 being the lowest):

3) Tokenism: Students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

2) Decoration: Students are used to help or bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by students. Causes are determined by adults, and adults make all decisions.

1) Manipulation: Adults use students to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by students.

Meaningful Student Involvement is more than calling an activity "meaningful." The following *Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement* are the primary indicators of what **Meaningful Student Involvement** looks like in action.

L E A R N I N G
Meaningful Student Involvement develops complex learning skills for students. Students should be able to articulate goals, connections to classroom learning, and reflect on the experience and its potential applications throughout their lives.

What to look for…
- Learning activities that engage students in practical, purposeful and relevant school change activities.
- Educators that engage students as proficient and critical consumers and co-creators in education through critical thinking, self-directed learning, active problem solving, clear communication, etc.
- Learning environments that empower students as active learners, teachers, leaders and citizens.

P A R T N E R S H I P
Meaningful Student Involvement engages students with adults as equal partners throughout education, emphasizing respect, communication, investment and meaningful involvement for all students.

What to look for…
- Learning activities that validate students' knowledge by intentionally growing honesty, transparency, accountability, and interdependence between students and educators.
- Educators that engage students with adults as equals in actively setting goals, designing and leading activities, and developing and conducting assessments, and making decisions in education.
- Learning environments that strengthen students' personal characteristics and group identities by centering dialogue and activities on social responsibility in school and community action.

E Q U I T Y
Meaningful Student Involvement contributes to educational excellence for all students without discrimination (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, economic status, etcetera).

What to look for…
- Learning activities that bridge the engagement gap between minority, low-income, and underserved students and mainstream student populations.
- Educators that convey high expectations for all students, regardless of race, class, grades, popularity, or other unjust treatment by encouraging multiple learning styles, diverse cultural characteristics of students, and cooperation instead of competition.

- Learning environments that reflect personal and institutional commitment to fairness and equity in society through school change.

INFUSION

Meaningful Student Involvement promotes deep, coherent, systemic organizational change, and lasting, personal attitudinal change.

What to look for…
- Learning activities integrate students' experience, knowledge, and perspectives as a method of practical systemic school change.
- Educators place empowering, democratic activities before tokenistic, decorative or authoritarian action in all education-related activities.
- Learning environments promote sustainability by aligning policies, funding, and practice in order to strengthen the capacity of schools to meaningfully involve students.

QUALITY

Meaningful Student Involvement seeks to continually address important educational issues, validate student input through action, and to be transparent in education design and goals.

What to look for…
- Learning activities are built upon student-inclusive designs in order to empower students in learning and school decision-making activities.
- Educators continually negotiate the purpose, activities, and outcomes of the educational experience for all students with all students.
- Learning environments are cooperatively designed and critically examined to promote every student's involvement in school.

EVIDENCE

Meaningful Student Involvement has measurable evidence of its effectiveness that meets generally accepted standards.

What to look for…
- Learning activities provides formal evidence of positive change among students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, and/or community members.
- Educators encourage participation by students in conducting, assessing and evaluating their learning experiences.
- Learning environments are examined with regular, relevant, and powerful measures that may include: improved student attendance; increased student achievement; greater interest engagement among students in school; diminished gaps in academic performance for students of color and low-income students; increased graduation rates; greater funding supporting student involvement; professional development requirements for student involvement.

> **"If students feel some ownership in the school where they learn, we might have better attendance, fewer suspensions and more respect for keeping our building clean. Also, having a choice in how we are taught might make most students more enthusiastic about learning."**
>
> *- From a student group's proposal for democracy in a district in Pennsylvania.*

Practice: The ACTIONS

In most schools today students must demonstrate their personal mastery of prescribed knowledge and prove their personal success in learning through performance on standardized tests. Few schools actually assess students' ability to substantially demonstrate classroom learning through "real world" problem-solving situations; fewer schools actually assess students' ability to contribute to their family or community.

Students do not inherently know *how to be* meaningfully involved in their schools. Likewise, most educators struggle to figure out *how to* meaningfully involve students. *Meaningful Student Involvement* requires focused learning for all participants to learn the potential of their individual and collective roles. For students, developmentally appropriate learning is needed to increase their capacity for empowered participation; for teachers, administrators and school staff, learning is focused on developing the school system's ability to involve students as well as individual teachers' ability to meaningfully involve students in different kinds of learning opportunities.

> "We can give you respect. We are able to understand the issues. We can think for ourselves. It's our education. If we have a say, it will make a difference."
>
> *- A high school student in Colorado*

This section outlines a variety of possibilities for students and educators to identify their common purposes, and to create the space that both students and educators need to share knowledge, experiences and perspectives as both learners and teachers. **Meaningful Student Involvement** is presented in characterizations at each grade level (Elementary, Middle and Senior High) and for educators. The suggested activities and topics described for all participant groups offer opportunities for *reciprocal leadership;* that is, adults role-modeling for students and students role-modeling for other students, and students and adults learning from each other.

The selected opportunities also offer the potential to create and sustain *collaborative learning communities* where students, teachers, administrators, school staff and community advocates can continuously learn from each other. Acknowledging that this doesn't happen intrinsically in many classrooms, several "Focused Learning" topics are included with each level. These topics are meant to serve as complementary building blocks that will enhance students' and educators' ability to experience **Meaningful Student Involvement** in a variety of settings.

Meaningful Student Involvement demands more than time from educators. It demands more than money from administrators. It demands more than instantaneous results from students. Instead, **Meaningful Student Involvement** demands that the system of schooling change, and that the attitudes of students, educators, parents and community members change. The following section provides an introduction to that change, and challenges the reader to envision **Meaningful Student Involvement** in their school.

Meaningful Student Involvement in elementary schools is experiential, tangible, and focused. Action is focused on the classroom, where students work in small groups and gradually build their skills. Students are on the middle and upper rungs of the *Ladder of Student Involvement in School*, with adults heavily supporting student leadership and offering guidance to students in many ways. The *Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement* are present in activities that teach students about learning and engage them in teaching.

Meaningful Student Involvement in Elementary Schools includes…

- Classroom-centered student leadership opportunities
- Student evaluation of self and teachers
- Service learning projects focusing on the school site
- Peer mediation
- Co-designed and evaluated curriculum

- Student-led school publications
- Peer teaching and coaching
- Active involvement in school improvement activities
- Student-led parent teacher conferences

Focused Learning for Elementary School Students includes…

- Introduction to Learning Styles
- Cooperative Leadership Skills
- Introduction to Critical Thinking
- Group Dynamics
- Facilitation Skills
- Individual Strengths Awareness
- Project Planning
- Consensus Building
- Appreciating Differences
- Introduction to Service Learning
- Teambuilding

Meaningful Student Involvement in middle schools is experiential and project-based, emphasizing teamwork and results for all students. Students take increasing levels of responsibility in these actions. The upper rungs of the *Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools* are visible throughout the school, as adults advise and mentor students throughout activities. The *Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement* are present through developmentally appropriate activities that include students learning about school administration and broader issues of community engagement.

Meaningful Student Involvement in Middle Schools includes…

- Actions on the Elementary School list

- Planning and decision-making in school improvement activities

- Student-led after-school activities

- Student evaluations of self, teachers, courses, environments, etc.

- Student-created school assessments

- Teachers' apprenticeships

- Student action forums

- Student-designed curriculum

- School-oriented service learning

- Mentoring younger students

- Student/teacher apprenticeships and student-led classes

- School-wide decision-making activities

Focused Learning for Middle School Students includes…

- Introduction to School and Community Leadership

- Teamwork

- Group Decision-Making

- Meeting Facilitation

- Project/Event Planning

- Participatory Research

- Action Planning

- Public Speaking

- Communication

- Advocacy Skills

> **"I heard teachers talking about students, saying, 'Those kids can't do nothing.' Kids want teachers who believe in them."**
>
> *- A middle school student in Pennsylvania*

Meaningful Student Involvement in high schools is experiential and intensive, offering direct connections between the school and the larger community. Action may happen in longer duration than in elementary or middle school years. Students occupy the top rungs of the *Ladder of Student Involvement in School* by leading action and taking full charge of many activities with adults as coaches, guiding students in a mostly self-directed process of inquiry and discovery. The *Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement* are present in activities where students lead others in educational settings, mentor fellow students of all ages, facilitate meetings, train fellow students and adults, explore school resources and needs in depth, conduct participatory action research, plan and implement well-developed cross-curricular activities for their learning groups.

Meaningful Student Involvement in High School includes…

- Actions on the Middle School List
- Participatory action research
- Teachers' and administrators' apprenticeships
- Mentoring peers and younger students
- Classroom teaching
- Student-designed curriculum, evaluations and assessments

- Training fellow students and adults
- Student-led service learning projects
- Speak-outs and action forums
- Full membership on school improvement committees
- Full site council membership
- Full district and state school board membership

Focused Learning for High School Students includes…

- Advanced Classroom and School-wide Leadership
- Classroom/Event Planning
- High-Level Decision-Making Processes
- Diversity, Oppression, and Empowerment
- Assessing School and Community Needs and Strengths
- Community Building
- Group Dynamics
- Defining Roles and Responsibilities
- Classroom Learning Facilitation Skills

Educators, administrators, and other school staff need orientation and training to prepare for duties in student-adult partnerships. Active engagement for all learners is a goal of many educators; however, the ability to infuse students throughout the entire course of schooling is a learned skill instead of an inherent gift. *Meaningful Student Involvement* also supports adults as they learn to engage the knowledge, perspectives, and experience of students in diverse education settings.

Meaningful Student Involvement for Educators includes…

- Student-adult partnerships in leading and evaluating school improvement activities

- Promoting Meaningful Student Involvement to students and educators

- Networks for practitioners of Meaningful Student Involvement

- Respecting student culture

- Infusing students into planning, implementing and evaluating learning activities

- Political and cross-cultural education and training

- Training to students and fellow educators to support Meaningful Student Involvement

Focused Learning for Educators includes…

- Listening to Students

- Student-Adult Partnerships

- Ensuring Rigor with Relevance and Relationships

- Teaching Students to Teach

- Student Engagement Planning

- Exploring New Possibilities for Democracy

- Motivating Students

- Teaching Methods for Meaningful Student Involvement

- Conducting Participatory Action Research

- Service Learning

- Social Justice In The Classroom

- Communicating as a Community

- Improving Schools *With* Students

Applications: The EXAMPLES

Meaningful Student Involvement happens when student-adult partnerships positively change schools. However, there is a growing tension that emerges when students begin to realize that the *way* they learn is hindering them from *what* are actually supposed to be learning. Around the nation educators and administrators are lifting the veil of secrecy that surrounds education leadership by promoting transparent, engaging relationships between educators and students. This is done when students, in the course of their education, learn to plan, research, teach, evaluate, lead and advocate for their education.

The following examples demonstrate how **Meaningful Student Involvement** promotes academic achievement, supportive learning environments, and lifelong civic engagement, as well as many other benefits. They are evidence of the broad practice of **Meaningful Student Involvement** throughout education today, and hint at wider potential in the future.

Meaningful Student Involvement in Education Research

Meaningful Student Involvement engages *students as researchers* of the education that they are the recipients of, promoting their roles as critical thinkers and engaged participants in learning. Students participate in research design, execution, analysis, and writing about schools, environments, the teaching and learning process, and more. *For more information on this area visit* www.soundout.org/research.htm

- **Student-led Research Affects Students & Their Schools** (Bear Valley, OR) – A high school principal here wanted to find out students' views of learning, so she engaged students as researchers. As part of the yearlong study, the student researchers participated in a course that focused on their work, and consequently, the students became the driving force in the data collection and analyses. *For more information, read "Look Who's Talking Now: Student Views of Learning in Restructuring Schools." (1997) by the Restructuring Collaborative, or visit* www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/

- **Students as Researchers: Creating Classrooms that Matter** (publication) – This exciting book explores several themes, including the roles of young students as researchers, how to nurture critical thinking in the classroom, and what teachers could learn from student-led research. *Form more information, read "Students as Researchers: Creating Classrooms that Matter" (1998) by S. Steinberg and J. Kincheloe (editors).*

Meaningful Student Involvement in Education Planning

Meaningful Student Involvement engages *students as education planners* by ensuring that they know what, how, how well, why, where, and when they are learning. This includes students designing curriculum, planning the school day, co-creating new school designs, or other activities that build upon to their experience, education, ideas and opinions. *For more information visit* www.soundout.org/planning.htm

- **From Researchers to Planners** (Orange, CA) – In 1991 a small middle school here was brought to life with an exciting students-as-researchers project. However, the school decided to take the research to the next step, and invited the student researchers to start

participating in curricular planning meetings. Students spent days with several teachers, planning and constructing learning units. They also met with the school principal, whom they pressed for changes in school rules and militaristic physical education practices. *For more information, read "Students as Partners in Research and Restructuring Schools." by Suzanne SooHoo in Educational Forum #57, Summer 1993.*

- **Planning of a New High School** (Puyallup, WA) – At Emerald Ridge High School, students co-created the mission, guiding principles, and wrote the school constitution. The result is a student-inclusive decision-making process beginning with every student participating in a leadership class everyday. *For more information, contact the school at* (253)435-6300.

- **Learning-Centered Curriculum-Making Project** (Cheney, WA) – In this program, second-grade students developed a curriculum for teachers to use as a classroom assignment. Their teachers believed that if students helped to create the curriculum, the classroom dialogue about this process would shed light on how to make learning experiences more cohesive and purposeful. All of the activities met state learning standards, and progressed by teaching students about a unit, and then having students re-invent the teaching plan. *For more information, read "Can Kids Design Curriculum? YES!" (1994) by J.R. Nelson and L. Frederick in Education Leadership #59, p42-46.*

> **"I think the curriculum should change. There are teachers who photocopy the same sheet for ten years, the same worksheet, every year the same thing… I would make teachers have to change their curriculum. Every year they would have to modify it."**
>
> *- A high school student in California*

Meaningful Student Involvement in Teaching

Meaningful Student Involvement engages *students as teachers* as a way to strengthen students' learning and teachers' efficacy. Students experience a variety of significant classroom teaching experiences, such as partnering with teachers or peers to deliver curriculum, teaching fellow students in lower grade levels, or teaching adults. *For more information visit* www.soundout.org/teaching.htm

- **Students Teaching, Teachers Learning** (publication) – English teacher Kathleen Shaw likes the maxim "To teach is to learn twice." After teaching students the basics of composition, she had her class teach each other about grammar devices, with the question in mind, "Can they explain grammar to someone else?" Several other stories are explored in this tremendous resource. The book explores students' perceptions of teaching, and the lessons adults learned from students in the process. *For more information read "Students Teaching, Teachers Learning" (1991) by N. A. Brandscombe, D. Goswami, J. Shwartz (editors.).*

- **Breakthrough Collaborative: Students Teaching Students** (International) – The goal of this international program is to empower both young and old students as dynamic, successful learners, teachers, and leaders. This program works as older students become teachers to younger ones, reciprocating their excitement for learning and teaching. *For more information visit* www.breakthroughcollaborative.org

- **Students Teaching Teachers** (Nationwide) – Many schools are increasingly relying on students to provide training to teachers in a variety of areas, including technology and service learning. In a program called Generation YES, students across the United States are receiving credit for helping teachers learn how to use complicated hardware and software in their classrooms. An alternative school in Washington State recently had students conduct an in-service for teachers across their district on service learning. *For more information visit* www.genyes.org.

Meaningful Student Involvement in Education Evaluation

Meaningful Student Involvement engages *students as evaluators* who delivering purposeful assessments that have an effect on their entire learning experience. Effective evaluations may include student evaluations of classes, teachers, and schools, student evaluations of themselves, and student-led parent-teacher conferences, where students present their learning as partners with teachers and parents, instead of as passive recipients of teaching done "to" them. *For more information visit* www.soundout.org/evaluating.htm

- **School tutors as evaluators** (New York City, NY) – Seven middle and high school students participated in a student evaluator program for the Teens as School Volunteer Tutors Project. Together with an adult evaluation facilitator, they decided to interview two groups of subjects: an adult group made up of school professionals and the tutors' own parents and a student group made up of both tutors and their tutees. The student evaluators devised interview forms, agreed on interview assignments, and drew up a time line for completion. *For more information, read "Students as Evaluators." by Patricia Campbell and Susan Edgar. Phi Delta Kappan, October 1994, pp160-165.*

- **Get REAL!** (San Francisco, CA) – This dynamic program engages students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds in a multifaceted classroom curriculum focusing on evaluation skills. One exercise has students watching the movie "Dangerous Minds," and then engaging in a discussion of critical reflections. "In the movie white people are shown trying to help us," said one student. "But in real life if we dress or act like that, they're not coming over to help us out." This sentiment, as well as the activity, are echoed across the Bay area. Students participate in critical analyses of society, schools and culture, among other things. Students begin as co-designers of the classroom curriculum, then take the task of classroom operations on fully. *For more information visit* www.cessf.org

Meaningful Student Involvement in Education Decision-Making

Meaningful Student Involvement engages *students as decision-makers* who partner with educators to make decisions about curricula, calendar year planning, building design, and many more issues. They join boards of education at all levels, including local, district, and state boards. Some education agencies engage students as staff in their programs and engage students in grant making, school assessment, and other areas. Students are also learning by establishing and enforcing codes of conduct, and making decisions about teacher and administrator hiring and firing. *For more information visit* www.soundout.org/decision-making.htm

- **Student Infusion!** (Anne Arundel County, MD) – For the past 25 years a high school senior has participated as a voting member of the district level board of education. These members vote on all issues, including all areas of the school budget. Also in this district, every advisory, curriculum, study committee, and special task force includes students, working on everything from grading policies to alternative learning. Students are also members of every local School Improvement Team in the district, with as many as 5 students on a 10 member team. *For more information contact the Student Leadership and Involvement Office at* (410) 222-5405.

- **Students Want a Voice in Decisions Made About Them** (publication) – Since the 1960s there has been a growing trend towards student participation on school boards. A recent report estimated more than 25% of district boards nationwide engaging students in some way. The same report showed that more than 30 state boards have student participation. Many of these positions are non-voting, and several are appointments are made by adults without student involvement. However, students everywhere are calling for more ability to influence change. *For more information, read "Meeting Kentucky's Educational Needs: Proficiency, Achievement Gaps, and the Potential of Student Involvement" (2002) by Zachariah Webb.*

- **State Migrant and Bilingual Education Program** (Olympia, WA) – This program's statewide advisory board engages 2 students every year in decision-making that will inform policy-making at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *For more information contact Sylvia Reyna at (360)725-6000 or visit* www.k12.wa.us

- **Federal Hocking High School** (Stuart, OH) – In an effort to infuse student involvement throughout school governance, this high school has embraced students in nearly every aspect of school management and governance. The decision-making is intended to be "real world" learning, often involving a nonpersonnel budget of hundreds of thousands of dollars and the lives of dozens of adults and hundreds of students. *For more information, read "The Power of Paideia Schools" (1998) by Terry Roberts, or visit* www.paideia.org

Meaningful Student Involvement in Education Advocacy

Meaningful Student Involvement engages students to work within the education system and throughout the community to change schools. Many students participate in committees, on special panels, and in functions that help raise awareness or interest in education issues. *For more information visit* www.soundout.org/advocacy.htm

- **"We could start a school!"** (The Bronx, NY) – According to a recent publication on small schools, a group of students have decided to start a school focusing on social justice and community leadership. The group, Sistas and Bruthas United (SBU), worked to improve their own schools for several years. They rallied and researched, and as one student said, "[We] got a lot of stuff fixed." The students are flexing their power in another direction now as they have begun working with the local school district and a coalition of organizations to start a new high school, called the Leadership Institute for Social Justice. *For more information, see "The Schools We Need: Creating Small Schools that Work for Us" (2003) by What Kids Can Do by visiting* www.whatkidscando.org/bronxbooklet.pdf

- **Become Your Own Expert** (Minneapolis, MN) – This program was developed to help high school students with learning disabilities gain an overview of self-advocacy skills. Students learn how to identify barriers to effective learning and ultimately to relevant lifelong tasks, such as coping skills, employment, and obtaining appropriate accommodations. In addition, students learn through careful guidance to communicate this knowledge when speaking on their own behalf. *Become Your Own Expert!* was designed to teach core self-advocacy skills, which in turn will enable students to address their unique needs. *You can learn more from Chapter 13, by W. Carpenter in "Making it Happen: Student Involvement in Education Planning, Decision-Making and Instruction." (1998) M. Wehmeyer and D. Sands, editors or visit* www.pbrookes.com/store/books/wehmeyer-3300/

- **Youth Undoing Institutional Racism** (Seattle, WA) - Students with the Seattle Young People's Project have designed a multi-point school change agenda that includes the mandated inclusion of Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States* in high school history courses, student positions on the district board of education, and more. *For more information visit* www.sypp.org

- **Student Action Fund: Improving Schools through Youth-led Projects** – Developed to increase youth voices in schools, the SAF provides cash grants to teams of students and teachers to take on challenges including increasing attendance rates, building better relationships between teachers and students; and improving the ways students are taught, and the kinds of things that they are learning. Students, working with adults in their school, can apply for up to $5000 to help jump-start their own project ideas. *For more information visit* www.yli.org/programs_SRPP.htm

> **"[We] have not been listening much to children in these recent years of 'summit conferences' on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, have been missing from the whole discussion."**
>
> *- Jonathan Kozol*

Continuation: The CYCLE

Every school in the country is focused on the question of how to improve student achievement in every content area and in every grade level. Each day, in schools with all types of individual challenges, educators use the diverse tools of school improvement to help make progress for students. While these tools often cite involvement as a key component of school change, that idea has rarely included students. For the sake of the future of education, it is time for students to be more than heard, and it is time for schools to take action. It is time for **Meaningful Student Involvement**.

> **"It is not 'utopian' or 'naïve' to think that learners can make responsible decisions about their own learning; those words best describe the belief that any group of people will do something effectively and enthusiastically when they are unable to make choices about what they are doing."**
>
> *- Alfie Kohn*

The work of **Meaningful Student Involvement** is not easy or instantaneously rewarding. However, in a time when the success of individual students is being leveraged against funding for schools, it is time to go beyond students planning school dances and leading mock elections. The intentional participation of diverse students in relevant, purposeful relationships with adults is vital. **Meaningful Student Involvement** is a strategy that gives students educators the means to establish a powerful foundation upon which to build those relationships. There is no finite model for engaging every student that can be adopted by all schools; what will be appropriate for one school might not succeed in another. **Meaningful Student Involvement** is part of a transformative cycle that should be continually re-examined, redeveloped and reconceived within each learning community as it evolves over time with new participants.

This guide characterizes **Meaningful Student Involvement** and its usefulness as a strategic process for improving the quality and quantity of student engagement. By making knowledge relevant to students' lives and providing supportive learning environments in which all participants can grow, **Meaningful Student Involvement** provides innumerable positive outcomes for all members of the education community. Most importantly, **Meaningful Student Involvement** shows that schooling can be a powerful positive and motivating force when it respects and values the contributions of each and every student.

Ultimately, **Meaningful Student Involvement** transcends schools. In a time when the health of our nation's democracy is at stake, everyone must reconsider their individual role in society. Research and experience illustrates that people who have been meaningfully involved when they are young are most likely to be informed citizens who are engaged throughout their communities. The complex leadership skills and applied learning that all students can experience through **Meaningful Student Involvement** serve as vital components in any education system and society that calls for a more engaging, sustainable and just democracy.

Resources

Online

Sound Out: Promoting meaningful student involvement in school change - www.soundout.org

What Kids Can Do - www.whatkidscando.org

Project 540: Students Turn for a Change - www.project540.org

In the Mix: Student Power - www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/show_school_reform_yia.html

WGBH 89.7 Student Voices 2002 - www.eyeoneducation.tv/students/

Student Leadership and Service Team – www.k12.wa.us/integratedcurr/yes

Youth Speak Out on Education – www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/projects/education/

Student Engagement in Learning and School Life - http://ed-lex.law.mcgill.ca/Pub-SE.htm

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About the Author

Adam Fletcher is the founder and director of The Freechild Project, a youth-driven think tank that offers training, research and consultation to schools and community-based organizations across the United States and Canada. Mr. Fletcher's work has included several years in community-based youth organizing and development, as well as working for the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to promote meaningful student involvement throughout the education system.

Supporting Organizations

The Freechild Project partnered with the HumanLinks Foundation to create this publication and its accompanying website, www.SoundOut.org - promoting meaningful student involvement in school change.

The Freechild Project

PO Box 6185
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Freechild was founded in 2000 as a youth-driven training ground, think tank, resource agency, and advocacy group for young people seeking to play a larger role in their schools and communities. Freechild offers training and consultation in many areas, including school improvement, program development, and community building. Our website is a worldwide resource center for social change by and with young people that includes a diverse listing of information around youth empowerment, including everything from activist learning to youth suffrage, and several free publications on youth leadership, cooperative games and more.

HumanLinks Foundation

6016 N.E. Bothell Way # 160
Kenmore, Washington 98028
Phone: 425-882-5177
Web: www.humanlinksfoundation.org

The HumanLinks Foundation was established in 1999 to help communities in Washington State make systemic improvements in Education, Health Care and Sustainable Agriculture. HumanLinks strives to strengthen voices and connections to make these essential systems more effective and responsible. HumanLinks develops partnerships that leverage resources in new ways to blend values, ideas, information and best practices.

www.SoundOut.org
promoting meaningful student involvement in school change

www.SoundOut.org encourages students and adults to work together to transform education and to validate student voice throughout education, from the classroom to the boardroom. The website is a national online resource center that posts success stories of student-led efforts to improve schools, including those where students participate in researching, planning, evaluating, and advocating for schools. Hundreds of online publications also make available bibliographies, articles, and research reports about meaningful student involvement. www.SoundOut.org also provides online discussion forums, links to other resources, and a monthly newsletter.