

The logo for Equity Journey Partners (EJP) consists of the letters 'EJP' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white square border.The text 'Equity Journey Partners' is written in a blue, serif font, positioned to the right of the EJP logo.[About Us](#) [Services](#)[Resources](#)[Contact Us](#)

Jun 16

Elevating Student Voice to Drive Equity

Students come to their learning with different needs, interests, and dreams. An equitable school district commits to doing everything it can to meet these needs, interests, and dreams. Adults sometimes believe they know best, drawing parallels from their own student experience and relying on the cultural notion that age equates to wisdom, as they seek to eliminate barriers to student opportunities. These well-intentioned efforts often fall short because student voice is ignored or only included on the periphery of the conversation.

Seeking and embracing student voice is a key driver of equity. Student voice helps school districts identify how the interplay between educator unconscious biases and cultural competence and district policies, practices, and procedures contribute to student opportunity and achievement gaps. Responding to these gaps through student-driven design results in more culturally appropriate and sustainable solutions.

Student voice is an essential component of an equity journey when a district or school's staff demographics differ significantly from student demographics, as is the case in many public schools. According to a recent report by Chiefs for Change, the US teaching force is ~80% White while Global Majority students comprise more than half of all public school students.

Here are three key areas where districts and schools can elevate and incorporate student voice to drive equity and various ways to do so:

Student voice in planning, decision-making, and continuous improvement processes

Schools exist to teach children and students are the final recipients of every decision schools and districts make. They, directly and indirectly, feel the effects of all budgeting, staffing, learning, and support function decisions. They should have a voice in decision-making processes to ensure that their needs are being accurately reflected. Including students in strategic planning, equity audits, and school improvement processes will enhance school leaders' abilities to craft policies and practices that increase student engagement and learning.

Districts and schools can use a variety of long-term and short-term techniques to include students in decision-making, including Youth Councils and Student Equity Ambassadors, hackathons, What I Need (WIN) Circles, and participatory budgeting. It is important to ensure that the demographics of students participating in these techniques reflect that of the school or district and that involved students aren't the same students who are typically selected for or voted into student leadership positions.

Student voice in learning

All students attend schools to learn, and all students learn differently. Students know themselves best - though they sometimes need the guidance of adults and scaffolding techniques to articulate what they know - and therefore know what they need to learn successfully. Students' active participation in shaping instructional practices to meet their needs engenders ownership over their learning and helps develop valuable self-advocacy skills.

Elevating students' involvement in developing what they learn and how they learn is a daunting but necessary and equitable task. It is a continuous process whose form will be unique to each district's community and culture. Some schools and districts have instituted student-led IEPs or invited student input on curriculum development, hiring teachers, and observational rounds to gain insight into classroom and instructional practices through the lens of a student.

Student voice in social and emotional well-being

Rosemarie Powers, a junior high school student who advocated for more mental health support at her school during the COVID-19 pandemic, said students would appreciate schools that continuously seek to know how students are feeling. Regularly capturing and acting on students' emotional health and understanding how they cope with stressors in their lives is key to creating learning environments where students feel safe and valued. This is especially true for traditionally marginalized students who may come into learning spaces feeling afraid to be their whole selves for fear of retaliation or further marginalization.

Numerous schools use software tools to routinely survey students' social and emotional well-being as starting points for educators and school staff to probe further and take action. In Rosemarie's school, school leaders built on her advocacy to survey students' social and emotional needs and they increased counseling and mental health support for students and their families.

Equity requires students' voices to be sought, amplified, heard and incorporated into district and school policies, processes and practices because it is how adults can learn what they need and work with them to meet those needs.

Want to learn more about how to amplify students' voices to improve equity in your school or district, read about the [services EJP offers](#), [contact us](#) or [set up a 30min meeting to discuss](#).

Where do we start? >

Equity Journey Partners

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