

Student Council and Student Voice

The Question:

“How might we invite student councils to co-create environments that promote student engagement?”

The Answer:

Learn about the Student Voice Initiative through the following topics:

1. What is student voice and Ontario’s Student Voice initiative?
2. How can Student Councils become more inclusive and focused on engagement (academic, intellectual and social)?
3. Regional Student Forums- Students as Researchers
4. Resources: *SpeakUp* Grants and *SpeakUp* in a Box
5. The Minister’s Student Advisory Council: What have they done?
6. Five Questions to Ask in your school

1. WHAT IS STUDENT VOICE AND THE STUDENT VOICE INITIATIVE?

Student Voice describes the many ways in which youth are encouraged to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Fielding, 2001, Levin, 2000).

The three main components of the initiative are:

- Minister’s Student Advisory Council (MSAC)
 - 60 students from Grades 7-12; one year term
- *SpeakUp* Projects (micro-grants)
- Regional Student Forums

“Students say they want opportunities to be involved, to contribute and to have self-directed learning. They say that the truest form of engagement is self-directed and led. They want creativity, integrated technology, effective student governments and effective student representation. They want a voice to communicate with their teachers constructively, in the interests of improvement.” (Andrew Pawluch, Student, 2008)

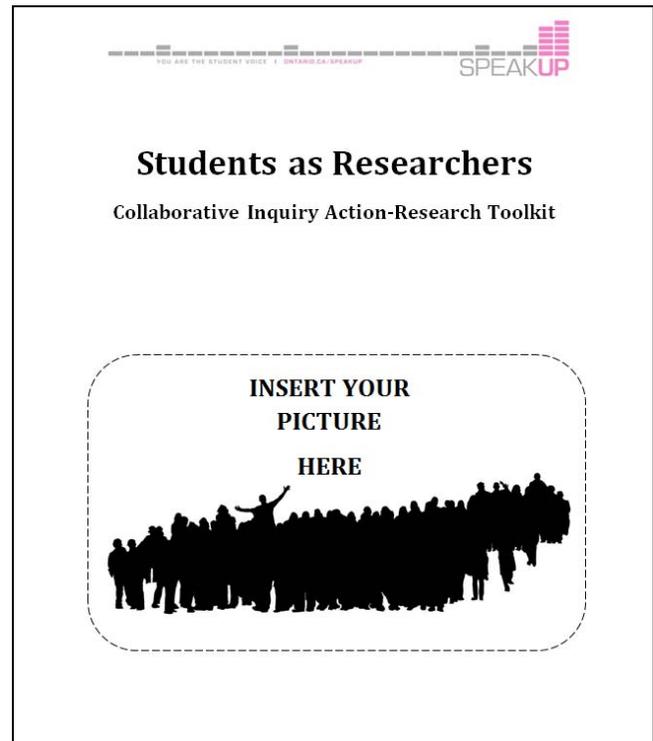
2. STUDENT COUNCILS

The Student Voice initiative has a direct impact on the student council because students can voice their opinions and take action on their ideas through council structures, procedures, interactions and involvements. Students have told the ministry that they want student councils to involve

more inclusive, distribute leadership and focus on students’ issues or priorities. With the support of adult allies, students can work towards “true engagement” between themselves and their school communities.

3. STUDENTS AS RESEARCHERS FORUMS

Forums allow students and teachers to come together to learn how students can conduct collaborative inquiry research. The research projects are rooted in students’ questions and theories about what they think might improve their education and their school communities.



4. SPEAKUP IN A BOX AND SPEAKUP GRANTS

1. Students stated that they wanted to hold *SpeakUp* forums in their own schools. In response, the ministry created *SpeakUp in a Box*, which contains everything required to run a student-led forum for 30 participants. The box includes facilitator tip sheets, a step-by-step forum guide and forum supplies.

Order a *SpeakUp in a Box* kit by emailing your request, to studentengagement@ontario.ca. Please include your mailing address.



2. Apply for a *SpeakUp* micro-grant (\$1000) to lead a project in your school. www.ontario.ca/speakup.

5. MINISTERS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

- Are you a student in Grades 7-12 with ideas and opinions about Ontario's school system?
- Apply for a chance to share your ideas and advice with the Minister of Education. Applications available at www.ontario.ca/speakup.

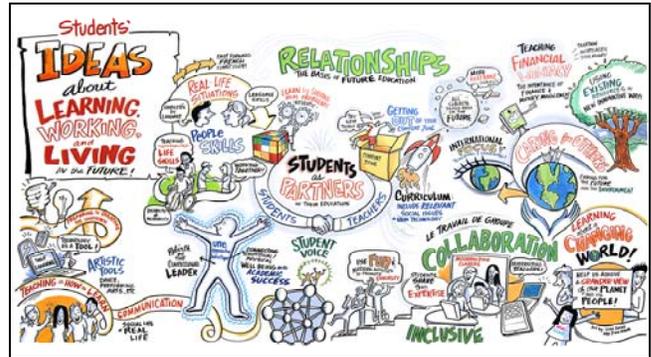
MSAC- 9 STUDENT VOICE INDICATORS

A school that engages students and ensures all voices are heard would:

1. Based on students' interests, expand the available co-curricular options to include enrichment, peer support, academic support and activities.
2. Make more explicit the strategies designed to support student learning of life skills (e.g. leadership, teamwork, communication).
3. Ensure the learning environment is inclusive socially (i.e. opportunities to talk about issues such as bullying, racism, diversity, inclusively)
4. Ensure the learning environment is inclusive academically (i.e. teachers know the individual students and their learning styles, what helps and hinders their learning).
5. Build on the *SpeakUp* initiatives to ensure all students feel welcomed and empowered in their schools.
6. Provide students with the opportunity to give feedback on their learning experience (e.g. how to incorporate technology such as Smartboards) in order to achieve success.
7. Consult students and inform them on decisions that impact their educational experience.

8. Ensure students' experience of education is equitable wherever they live in Ontario (i.e. curriculum, classroom materials, qualified teachers).
9. Are committed to ensuring eco-friendly practises in their schools and classrooms (i.e. composting, recycling, green roofs, healthier food options).

MSAC- Ideas on Learning, Working and Living in the 21st Century.



For a larger version of the students' ideas, please email studentengagement@ontario.ca

6. FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK IN YOUR SCHOOL

1. What opportunities do students have to work as partners in their learning?
2. Whose voices are being heard in the school?
3. Are students and educators familiar with the 9 Student Voice Indicators?
4. How might student council invite students to help co-create their learning environments?
5. Do students have opportunities to be action research partners in examining questions about learning?

Did you know that *SpeakUp* has a Facebook page? Join us!

