PRESS RELEASES

18 MAY 2022

New Study Shows Academic Impact of Elevating Student Voice in CPS Schools

Impact of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Programs and Initiatives Highlighted in Study Published in American Journal of Education

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CHICAGO - Teachers, school and district leaders are typically responsible for local and large scale school improvement decisions. At Chicago Public Schools (CPS), another group increasingly holds a place at the table - the District's more than 330,000 students. Student voice and democratic practices are a fundamental part of the CPS vision to prepare all students for college, career, and civic life.

ideas and concerns tend to earn higher grades and attendance rates, which could have lasting effects on academic trajectories.

“Our District is at the forefront of centering student voice through initiatives, committees, and events,” said CPS CEO Pedro Martinez. “Our students are the most important collaborators within the educational experience.”

The **study**, named “Is Responsiveness to Student Voice Related to Academic Outcomes? Strengthening the Rationale for Student Voice in School Reform,” was led by the Civic Engagement Research Group, and published this month in the American Journal of Education. The study draws upon the District’s efforts, first initiated about a decade ago in 2012, to elevate the voices and perspectives of our most marginalized communities, particularly students, through inclusive and responsive education.

In 2019, CPS released a new **Civic Life** strategy that expanded student voice and engagement efforts rooted in its equity vision. This includes a plan to create a comprehensive student voice infrastructure that builds inclusive youth-adult partnerships in classrooms, schools, and District decisions.

CPS defines student voice as the valuing and prioritizing of youth values, beliefs, perspectives, participation and influence in all aspects of schooling. Today, 161 schools have a Student Voice Committee (SVC) that works with administration on school improvement, and 25 schools use participatory budgeting to include student perspectives in budget decisions. Multiple District-wide student leadership groups, including a Student Advisory Council, the Student Voice Fellows, Civil Rights Fellows, and a student representative on the Chicago Board of Education. CPS also expanded student representation on Local School Councils in high schools and elementary schools.

The District leads multiple student events throughout the year such as the student-led conference, Powerpalooza directed for teachers, a winter student leadership conference, the MLK Leadership Conference for elementary students, in addition to school-organized initiatives.

“There should be a space where students can share their voice, share their ability to see within their own community, and grow their leadership skills,” says Marlene Espinoza, SVC alum and Brooks College Prep High School student. “All student voices are important, and

This summer, students who are members of their school's SVC can register for the Student Voice Leadership Conference which will focus on developing and enriching student voices in CPS and at their schools. Recently, the District hosted a Student Civil Rights Conference, and students can apply for a Civil Rights Summer Fellowship.

There is also a District-wide strategy to help students learn about – and take action – on local and national issues in the classroom. These projects are a graduation requirement in high school, and are now expanding into elementary schools. Student voice in CPS has been elevated to the national stage through a partnership with Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity Program. CPS students like Araceli Gomez and Tri Ho have written blogs that share what they think every American should know. This program is an extension of the District's high school Participate Civics course curriculum.

Foreman Career and College Academy Principal Anthony Escamilla believes that students are the featured collaborators at their schools.

"The study confirms what we as educators already know when it comes to our school communities," said Principal Escamilla. "When we hear – and work with – our students to make sure they feel safe at their schools, everyone in and surrounding the school community is better equipped to meet life's challenges."

For more information about student voice initiatives led by the Department of Social Science and Civic Engagement Department, please visit https://sve.cps.edu/.

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