

## **Preamble**

The Yakima School District commits to recognizing that students are leaders in their education, deserve the right to feel safe and empowered in their school environment, and have valuable insights and opinions. Yakima School District needs Student Voice to assure educational engagement, academic achievement, self-growth, and active citizenship. The Yakima School District recognizes that Student Voice requires centering the student at the heart of educational decision-making because students

- are directly affected by policy and administrative decisions
- are valuable and unique learning partners, sources of insight, and maturing leaders
- should be heard and empowered to take action and develop their individual agency and leadership capacity
- experience greater learning efficacy and achievement through student engagement and communication.

## **Definitions**

1. *Student Voice*: the authentic communication of all students' perspectives and ideas, where students are empowered and student voice structures are implemented by the whole school community to advance educational equity for generations to come.
2. *Student Voice Structures*: the systems, processes, programs, or councils that facilitate and empower consistent, intentional, and meaningful engagement between students and staff on educational issues.

## **Principles**

1. Staff and students share a dual responsibility for the performance of public education and are both responsible for securing an authentic seat at the table for student voice.
2. The District will work towards a holistic culture of Student Voice that:
  - Integrates clear avenues of communication among all teachers, students, and administrators;
  - Creates and sustains respectful, authentic, and open dialogue;
  - Promotes a culture of student advocacy among all educational stakeholders;
  - Supports and resolves student concerns fairly while considering the diverse experiences of everyone involved.
3. Families, teachers, and communities work together to cultivate student character and skills. All stakeholders have a responsibility to equitably empower student voices with character and leadership skills.
4. Student voice structures and communication methods are integrated into applicable practices, programs, procedures, and professional development *through an equity lens*.

## **Practices**

The District believes that Student Voice requires innovative approaches to empower students and authorizes the Superintendent to implement this policy using practices including, but not limited to, this policy.

### **1. District**

- 1.1. Ensure that District resources are made publicly available for, and distributed to, students to learn about policy governance and the responsibilities and operations of the Board.
- 1.2. Maintain a safe and open channel for dialogue directly between the Board of Directors and student voices across the District.
- 1.3. Ensure equitable student representation to district-wide departments and committees, where applicable, to improve student-focused programs and practices.
- 1.4. Convene a diverse student voice structure to discuss upcoming developments, share feedback, and recommend changes in district-wide practices and procedures no less than once every academic quarter.
- 1.5. Maintain a compensated student-led program that conducts research, recommends policy changes, and supports student voice structures across the District through communication and leadership.
- 1.6. Use multiple forms of communication to update and engage students on district-level activities, initiatives, and policies.

### **2. School**

- 2.1. Allow student leaders to assist in collecting, analyzing, and publicizing data and information that provides insight into different aspects of their school environment for student voice structures and publication throughout the school district.
- 2.2. Give student leaders the opportunity to co-facilitate or co-create staff-administered online surveys which will be shared with student leaders, teachers, and staff. Students will engage in viewing publicly available data about school systems and practices.
- 2.3. Assure that every middle and high school maintains a dedicated student voice structure that will address and confront school problems and structures to create a safe and positive environment for students. These diverse student voice structures may engage in school policies, systems design, and student input on educational issues. Principals are expected to meet and engage regularly with at least one school-based student voice structure, and, when appropriate, encouraged to place student voices in school staff committees and meetings in order to improve committee diversity and perspectives. All middle and high schools will create a student voice structure by December 2024.
- 2.4. Assure that every elementary school maintains a dedicated student voice structure that will gather the experiences and perspectives of students to create a safe and positive environment. Principals are expected to meet and engage regularly with at least one

school-based student voice structure. All elementary schools will create a student voice structure by December 2024.

- 2.5. Offer the opportunity of the assembly of student leaders from clubs and extracurricular organizations in student voice structures in order to discuss school issues, coordinate activities, and collaborate on project planning to better serve the student community.
- 2.6. Ensure that there is a consistent and accessible channel for feedback, ideas, and suggestions from students on school practices and procedures. Principals and/or designee will respond to feedback and ideas in a timely manner.
- 2.7. Assure that schools plan and execute regular school forums in conjunction with students at district buildings for secondary students and stakeholders to ask questions and facilitate open dialogue about education systems, practices, and pathways in a respectful and constructive manner.

### **3. Leadership Development**

- 3.1. Assure that secondary schools develop and maintain a school-specific plan, in collaboration with student leaders, to maintain focus on supporting after-school activities. Clubs and activities will be actively supported, developed, and promoted in order to foster more equitable experiences, develop emerging leaders and their abilities, and create safe environments for students to practice self-expression and soft skills.
- 3.2. Ensure student access to character education that directly enhances the development of voice, agency, self-confidence, and communication skills.
- 3.3. Ensure that students with formal positions in student government and other student organizations and clubs have the opportunity and access to meaningful and equitable skills training on how to become more effective leaders to improve the school environment.
- 3.4. Equip members of student voice structures with skills that further develop their understanding of leadership, with an emphasis on problem solving, critical thinking, and project management.

### **4. Teaching and Learning**

- 4.1. Encourage teachers to work towards creating equitable mechanisms for students to give ideas, thoughts, opinions, and feedback on their learning environments.
- 4.2. Encourage administrators to engage student feedback on teaching and learning through surveys and adjust teaching practices and supports based on feedback.
- 4.3. Ensure that teachers have access to additional training on topics including, but not limited to, trust-building, student-centered instructional skills, and approaches to better understand and support diverse student communities.

Adoption Date:

240624