

Student Engagement: A Rubric for Education Policymaking

Proactively building relationships and co-creating policy with stakeholders will not only help to ensure that policy effectively addresses their needs and aspirations, but it can also help state leaders be more effective and broaden ownership of policy solutions.

This rubric was designed by students to help state leaders take stock of their current practices around engaging students and can be used to identify strengths and opportunities.

	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	MASTERY
VISION SETTING	<p>We develop our vision and goals for student success without significant input from students. We do not prioritize students as a key target audience and assume districts and schools will do so.</p>	<p>We work with some students to develop our vision and goals for education, but our engagement is not consistent or inclusive of all students we serve.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have identified key students in crafting our education vision but do not know how to engage them. 	<p>Our vision and goals are inclusive and created in collaboration with a diverse group of students, and they remain consistently engaged in monitoring progress toward our vision and goals.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We create our statewide vision and goals for student success in collaboration with a diverse group of students that is representative of our state. We create and monitor progress on our state ESSA plan in collaboration with students. We have a student member of our state board of education.
	<p>We do not seek or incorporate students' input on new education programs or policies.</p>	<p>We are open to incorporating students' ideas for new programs and policies if they advocate for them but may not actively encourage or seek their proposals.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students mention their policy ideas to us during meetings or events and we take note of them. If students protest, hold demonstrations, or have political events we may take note of these issues but discourage these activities or characterize them as disruptive. 	<p>We actively make decisions with students on how we can best support their success. We respect their policy ideas and solutions and lead them to the resources to power their change initiatives (e.g., funding, time with policymakers, communications support).</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We co-create our policy agenda with students. We make specific asks of students, for example by hosting a challenge or competition, and provide time and resources to develop and present solutions. We invite students to the state capital to share their feedback, hopes and dreams. We accommodate and/or provide chaperones. We invite students to the state capital with sufficient advance notice (i.e., 2-3 weeks) to lobby for and against education policies. We support student organizations in drafting policies and draft them on their behalf.

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RELATIONSHIPS	<p>We do not have relationships with students or student-facing organizations.</p>	<p>We have relationships with some students or student-facing organizations, but we may not reach all types of students or consistently engage with them.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have contacts for students or student-facing organizations but do not meaningfully coordinate with them and only reach out if the issues are pressing. 	<p>We continually seek out opportunities to build partnerships with a diverse group of student organizations and individual student leaders and develop and maintain trusting relationships.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have strong relationships with student governments/student councils. We differentiate our engagement strategy for different age groups and provide age-appropriate opportunities for input and feedback. We designate a seat (or multiple seats) for student representatives on all advisory committees and governing boards and make sure we are engaging new voices and perspectives. We provide meaningful and age-appropriate opportunities for student internships or apprenticeships with our office.
	<p>We do not understand the history and ongoing institutional barriers that make it difficult for the students we serve to trust us.</p>	<p>We understand the history and ongoing institutional barriers that make it difficult for the students we serve to trust us but are unsure how to earn their trust.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We understand why students may use specific tactics to communicate with policymakers but may not actively encourage it or feel uncomfortable with these tactics. We understand how students may not feel welcome in certain spaces but have not identified changes to practice or engaged with allies who can help facilitate stronger connections to students. 	<p>We understand the history and ongoing barriers that make it difficult for students to trust us and take active steps to change the narrative.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We understand and communicate about the history of institutions and how they affect students today. We tell students how to best influence our opinion and make their ideas known to our office. We create space for students to tell us or other trusted allies when we are perpetuating systems that erode trust within the community. We don't make assumptions about students or pigeonhole them; we are patient with them as they learn about democratic participation, are honest about the complexity of challenges, and genuinely value student solutions.
	<p>It is unclear who within our organization is responsible for developing and maintaining relationships with students.</p>	<p>We may have one person or a handful of staff who are responsible for engaging students but we do not have a coherent strategy for ongoing relationship building.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our internship coordinator struggles to design meaningful events and projects for our students to take part in. Students volunteer but there is not a record of their contributions. 	<p>Everyone on our staff understands that partnering with students is part of their job, and this expectation is reflected in job descriptions and performance management.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office staff has routine communication with student or student-facing organizations. Student interns are given meaningful time and help support the staff in achieving measurable goals. We have student engagement goals and measures of success for our organizations and for leaders within the organization.

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COMMUNICATION	<p>We offer relatively few ways for students to provide feedback and may only share updates with students after decisions have been made.</p>	<p>We have created opportunities specifically for students to connect and share feedback but may be inconsistent about sharing updates and proactively seeking input from students or may only share one-way updates.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We send press releases to student-centered outlets like university papers. • We hold assemblies on campus to communicate with students but can't have a meaningful interaction with all the attendees. • We develop relationships with student newspapers in K-12 schools and share pertinent information with them. 	<p>We offer students a variety of ways to provide feedback (i.e., written feedback, 1:1 meetings, roundtables, listening sessions, visits to communities, surveys), maintain two-way feedback loops to actively share updates, and actively seek feedback about what is and is not working, and work with them to co-create solutions.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We regularly include student feedback sessions in each school/community visit. • We offer student speaker roles or host student panels at key conferences or meetings (i.e., legislative retreats, statewide superintendents meetings). • We host a monthly Q&A for students via our social media channels. • We engage students during the school day by visiting classes, meeting with student clubs, and using class assignments as opportunities to engage policymakers. • We include student reporters in media outreach, press conferences, etc. and proactively make leaders available for interviews with them. • We have a corps of students ambassadors to expand outreach efforts.
TRANSPARENCY	<p>We do not consistently share data, policy priorities, and information with students.</p>	<p>We share data, policy priorities, and information with students, but it may not be easy to understand or used to seek input and improve practice.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We tell students about upcoming policy decisions but have not provided context or explained the significance of the policy decisions. 	<p>We actively share data, policy priorities, and information with students, ensure it is understandable, and facilitate discussions with students about what it suggests for how we can better serve them.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We ask students what information or data they want to see and use this information to guide policy development from start to finish. • We invite students to generate policy ideas based on the data we share.
INCLUSIVITY	<p>Accommodations are rarely made for students so they can participate meaningfully in our events.</p>	<p>Accommodations are sometimes made to remove barriers (e.g., time of day, location) to student participation, but these can be inconsistent or incomplete.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We host meetings with students after school to avoid disrupting the school day but know some students may not be able to participate due to work schedules or family obligations. 	<p>We understand the barriers to participation facing our students and consistently engage student groups to decide the best times and locations to reach students. We offer a range of accommodations (including transportation, childcare, food, and permission) to remove major obstacles to their participation.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We host meetings at a variety of times or find ways to engage with students during the school day. • We ask to be added to the agenda of already-scheduled student-led meetings, rather than adding a meeting at the capitol for them to attend. • We analyze demographic data of our student interns and take steps to ensure diversity of race, income, gender, age, and hometown.

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INCLUSIVITY	<p>We talk to students who reach out to us, but have not cultivated authentic, ongoing relationships with the many types of students in our state.</p>	<p>We make some effort to proactively reach out to students who represent the diversity of our population, but we do not have a concerted strategy or definition of success.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a means of contacting student or student-facing organizations but do not regularly reach out. 	<p>We proactively engage with students based on a strategy designed to gather input from a breadth of students fully representative of our state context. We have a process to measure the success of our student engagement efforts and when we are unable to engage a fully inclusive group, we listen to learn why and then adapt our strategy.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our SEA's strategic plan includes goals and measures for student engagement (i.e. we will meet with students in every region of the state, we will talk to 100 students per year, we will invite 3 students to shadow the state chief per year, we will offer three jobs or internships to individuals under age 22, etc.). We limit jargon and acronyms and make language accessible. We have a section of our website dedicated to students that is co-developed with them. We engage with a variety of students, including those who may not traditionally be engaged with our organization and/or with policymaking (e.g., incarcerated students or disconnected youth).

Additional resources:

- **Council of Chief State School Officers**
 - » [Let's Get This Conversation Started: Strategies, Tools, Examples, and Resources to Help States Engage with Stakeholders to Develop and Implement their ESSA Plans](#)
 - » [Let's Continue this Conversation: How to Turn New Stakeholder Connections into Long-Term Relationships](#)
- **Aspen Challenge, [How It Works](#)**