



Student voice data accelerates teaching and learning

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“I was pouring my heart and my soul into my class. However, instead of enjoying teaching, and instead of the students enjoying learning ... I was dreading coming into work every day, and the students could feel it.”

That’s how middle school teacher Anna Stewart felt when she began using the Elevate student voice platform in fall 2021 as part of Impact Florida’s

Solving with Students Cadre, a network of teachers focused on improving students’ experiences in math. When her students took the Elevate survey, only 29% felt that lessons were relevant to their lives and only 46% felt cared for in her class. Stewart knew things had to change.

With support from colleagues in the Solving with Students Cadre, Stewart shared the data with her students and,

together, they brainstormed ideas to make class more engaging. As she implemented students’ suggestions, Stewart recognized that her students were taking more ownership over their learning.

Stewart continued to administer the Elevate survey every few months to understand how the practice changes were affecting her students’ classroom experiences. By the end of the year,

ABOUT ELEVATE

Elevate is a professional learning platform that supports educators to measure and continuously improve student experiences. Elevate provides validated psychometric instruments to collect data from students about their experiences.

Teachers receive disaggregated data about their own students from brief (five- to eight-minute) surveys within a week so that teachers can collect data several times to track what's working. School and district leaders receive reports to track student experiences at a school or district level.

Elevate also provides professional learning support, including community of practice meeting protocols, practice guides, and access to educators across the country who are centering student voice. Learn more at perts.net/elevate

the survey results told an entirely new story: The share of her students who saw lessons as personally relevant skyrocketed from 29% to 83%, and the share who felt cared for grew by 40%. “We slowly became a family,” says Stewart. “I was no longer stressed and exhausted at the end of the day when I got home.”

Even though most schools collect student voice data, stories like Stewart's remain rare. The reason is simple: Teachers don't often get the right support to act on student feedback effectively. Fortunately, that's changing.

Stewart and many other educators and organizations are using a tool called Elevate to learn how student voice data can be used to drive transformation. Elevate is a continuous improvement platform designed to help educators measure, disaggregate, and track key classroom learning conditions.

Educators use Elevate surveys over multiple cycles of inquiry and action to fine-tune the learning environment for students, focusing on learning conditions that are strong predictors

of student engagement and accelerated learning outcomes (Gripshover et al., 2022). For example, an educator might use Elevate's meaningful work measure to learn that only 40% of their students find assignments to be meaningful and then reassess meaningful work to test the impact of a new practice that was intended to make work more meaningful.

PERTS, the organization that designed Elevate, is continually learning with and from the educators and organizations who are using it to systematically improve learning conditions. Many of the Networks for School Improvement funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which are highlighted in this issue of *The Learning Professional*, are incorporating Elevate into their work, and from them we have learned much about the professional learning required to support teachers in this kind of work. You can read more about their work and what they are learning from Elevate on p. 70.

We have synthesized our learning

into a brief series of reflection and planning exercises. We hope that the questions, planning prompts, and resources will prove helpful to school and district leaders who want to use student voice data for improvement.

REFERENCES

Gripshover, S., Ashoka, E., Diaz de Lewis, L., Zeiger, A., & Paunesku, D. (2023). *Elevate in Action case study series.* perts.net/elevate/case-study-series

Gripshover, S., Londerée, A., Ahuvia, A., Shyjka, A., Kroshinsky, F., Ryan, N., Farrington, C., & Paunesku, D. (2022). *Learning conditions are an actionable, early indicator of math learning.* perts.net/research/early-indicators

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ELEVATE IN ACTION CASE STUDY SERIES

Three organizations participated in the Elevate in Action case study series (Gripshover et al., 2023). Here is a brief summary of their experiences.

Network for College Success/Chicago Public Schools

As the third-largest school district in the nation, Chicago Public Schools serves over 350,000 students, 76% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The Network for College Success and the district began using Elevate in fall 2020 to understand young people's learning experiences during a challenging school year.

Based on their initial survey results, teachers sought additional insight from students about questions such as: "What kinds of schoolwork do students find meaningful and what kind of feedback inspires their intellectual growth?" Through these conversations, they realized that many young people had never even been asked to consider what makes schoolwork feel meaningful to them, let alone had teachers work with them to create more meaningful learning experiences. This insight has galvanized teachers to attend more carefully to students' learning experiences.

West Buffalo Charter School

West Buffalo Charter School in Buffalo, New York, serves about 460 K-8 students, 89% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The school has eight 6th- through 8th-grade teachers. West Buffalo teachers tracked learning conditions five times over the course of the 2021-22 school year. In some classes, students' experiences were overwhelmingly positive, whereas in other classes, their experiences were more mixed.

To understand these differences, teachers engaged in sometimes challenging conversations with each other and their students. Over time, many teachers saw their survey data tick upward, with students having more positive experiences. This boosted morale and built momentum so that at the end of the year, teachers had improved students' experiences significantly schoolwide, with 75% to 83% of students experiencing each of six positive learning conditions by the end of the year.

Bank Street/Yonkers Public Schools

Yonkers Public Schools is a large district in southeastern New York serving over 25,000 students, 79% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Teachers and staff worked with the Bank Street Education Center using Elevate as part of a broader effort to address disparities in mathematics education.

They considered Elevate data alongside other data sources, including test scores, attendance records, disciplinary data, and empathy interviews. The Elevate data pointed to an opportunity to translate their already strong social and emotional learning practices into deeper mathematics learning for students.

The network aligned on Feedback for Growth (perts.net/elevate/feedback-for-growth) as an actionable lever for creating more equitable learning in mathematics and set a collective aim to increase the percentage of students experiencing strong feedback for growth districtwide.

Six schools then made significant progress toward this aim between January and May 2022, improving by as much as seven to 14 percentage points. Interestingly, most schools made gains on all six learning conditions, not just Feedback for Growth. They are working in 2022-23 to deepen these gains.

HOW TO LEARN AND IMPROVE WITH STUDENT FEEDBACK

The following reflection questions and related resources are designed to help you make the most of student voice data and overcome common challenges in the process of obtaining, analyzing, and acting on it. Consider the reflection questions individually or as part of a team, and consult the resources that resonate with your current challenges and wonderings. The resources listed here are free Elevate resources that can be found on the PERTS website at perts.net/lp-tools. However, none of these insights or principles are unique to Elevate, and we believe these considerations are relevant to any effort to improve student voice and experience, regardless of what framework or tool you use.

QUESTIONS TO BUILD A CULTURE OF REFLECTION

Receiving critical feedback from students is sensitive work for most teachers. A trusting, growth-oriented professional learning community can give teachers the support they need to respond productively — rather than defensively — in the face of challenging feedback. Consider the following questions as you develop a plan for building a professional learning culture that supports teachers’ growth.

How will we build trust and create space for vulnerability and reflection in the professional learning communities where student voice data will be reviewed?	<p>RESOURCES AVAILABLE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample letter from a superintendent that provides clear reassurance that student voice data will be used to support teachers’ professional growth and learning — not for evaluation. • The National Equity Project’s <i>Reviewing Data: Norms & Pitfalls</i> for thoughtful guidance on recognizing and redirecting common data analysis pitfalls. • Elevate community of practice meeting protocols, designed to help educators build an effective and trusting community of practice. In particular, see the building community and launch meeting protocols.
How will we ease teachers’ anxieties about student voice data being used punitively against them?	
How will we scaffold the process of reflecting on data so that teachers stay focused on what they can do to improve, rather than blaming themselves or others for disappointing results?	

QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE

If student voice data is seen as an extra thing, separate from other school priorities, it will not be used meaningfully, even by teachers who really care about their students’ experiences. Answer the following questions to assess and refine your school’s vision.

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Unsure	Reflections
Has our school or district leadership clearly articulated why we are focusing on student voice?					
Do the reasons for focusing on student voice align with our school and district strategic objectives?					
Have these reasons been communicated effectively with teachers and school staff?					
Did teachers have input into the strategic vision?					
<p>RESOURCES AVAILABLE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Elevate support article “Align Priorities for Coherence & Synergy” provides simple guidance and a short case study that illustrates these principles in action. • <i>The Collective Vision</i> organizational condition guide from the University of Chicago explains why collective vision is important and how to establish it. 					

TOOLS

QUESTIONS TO ENSURE TIME AND RESOURCES FOR INCORPORATING STUDENT VOICE

Far too often, teachers are asked to do more without getting the time they need to do it well. If we want teachers to develop new ways to think and work, we need to give them time to do so. In our work with schools and organizations, we see multiple strategies for protecting time for reflection and planning in response to student voice data. Some schools set aside time for communities of practice to meet and discuss data. Others reserve coaching sessions to review data or devote professional learning days to engage with data. Consider the following questions as you work to ensure that teachers have the necessary time and resources to reflect and respond to student voice data.

<i>When</i> will student voice data be collected?	RESOURCES AVAILABLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Elevate community of practice meeting protocols provide one model for bringing teachers together to review and reflect productively over multiple cycles of inquiry and action.• The Elevate learning condition guides provide a research-based vocabulary for student motivation and engagement. They are designed to help teachers interpret student voice results and identify evidence-based practices that could help them improve students' experiences and outcomes.
<i>What</i> process will be used to review and respond to student voice data?	
<i>How</i> will teachers be supported to make meaning of their student voice data?	

QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN DATA ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

Educators who are most successful at improving student experiences find ways to talk about their data and goals with their students. Students know more about their own experiences than anyone else and can help educators understand and respond to the data. They are also more willing to complete surveys thoughtfully when they understand how the data is being used.

How will you introduce students to the feedback process and help them understand the purpose of collecting student voice data?	RESOURCES AVAILABLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Debriefing with Students Lesson Plan provides a protocol for engaging students in the process of interpreting their student voice data and identifying strategies that can be used to improve their experiences.• The Elevate support article "How can I debrief results with students?" features two teachers who describe how they use survey results as a starting point for deeper conversations with students.
When and how will you assure students that educators review their responses and take action in response?	
How will you engage students in the process of interpreting and acting on their feedback?	



MORE TOOLS ONLINE

For free tools on additional aspects of improvement described in this issue of *The Learning Professional*, see the list of resources on p. 25 or on our website at learningforward.org/department/tools/