

Luciana Piarulli

Mrs. Small

Humanities

7 October 2024

### Should Students have a Voice in School Politics?

It is not every day you see students voicing their opinions at a school committee meeting. There are many reasons against students having a voice in school policies, including the maturity levels of students, how it would affect student engagement, and the fact that students cannot vote (due to age). However, these arguments can all be debunked and countered. Students are more mature than people think and have been taught how to make good decisions. Letting students participate in school politics may increase engagement, since students would be voicing what they need to be changed. Finally, students are directly affected by decisions made by school admin and have every right to advocate for themselves. Overall, although some may argue students do not have the mental capacity to understand school policies, students should have a greater voice in how their school policies are made.



*Students and parents at a rally for students that survived a school shooting in Florida - Seattle, WA. Credit: SouthCoastToday*

One of the most prominent arguments against student voice has to do with the maturity levels of students, but they are more mature than people realize. Some think that students are immature and not “equipped to make long-term decisions about their education” (Urist). However, this is not true for most students. There are students out there, such as Raquel Gonzalez, who are “questioning [their] education system”, since students are hardly involved in it (Gonzalez). Students who can question the motives behind the decisions made for the school are also able to recognize the problems that need to be changed and how to change them. These students can be labeled as mature, since they are able to acknowledge that there are things that need to be changed, whereas other students may think that everything is all well and great with the school. For example, in the image above, students can be seen protesting their disgust of gun violence in Florida (Sherman). Many adults think that students are unaware of the issues around them, but, on the contrary, students are taking a stand for other’s rights, which is a very mature thing to do.

This may lead to another argument – not every student may not make the right decision when it comes to solving a problem. However, they were taught the consequences of actions, and “they understand what they make happen now will affect them down the road” (Gardner). Many students are mature enough to make a reasonable decision, even if adults refuse to recognize this. In fact, reporters went around Hong Kong to ask students their opinion on student voice, and students as young as 12 were able to justify their opinions about what they thought (“Talking Points”). If young students like this can make mature decisions, what else could be preventing them from gaining a voice in school policy making? It may have to do with other fears held by parents, teachers, and students alike.

One of these other fears is that students may be less engaged if given a voice, but letting students participate in school politics may allow students to change policies to fit their needs. Students are the ones mainly affected by decisions made, so "nothing changes really unless students voice their discontent or their happiness." (Gardner). If students were to be the ones to address these issues and change them, they would be advocating for the problems that *they* need to be changed. This would lead to the needs of a broader range of students being met. Meeting more students' needs would lead to more students having the resources to be successful in school, which would lead to more engagement in the classroom, even if slightly undermining the power of the teachers.

However, people still find one more reason to exclude students from school politics. They argue that students cannot even vote in elections or buy cigarettes, so they should not be allowed to participate in school politics either (Urist). There are still reasons to counter this. Students pay a lot more attention than adults realize, and the teachers "just don't get the perspective" that students do (Gardner). This would then bring a whole new set of perspectives to school committee meetings, a new perspective that comes right from the people that see the results of policy decisions every day.

Overall, students should be able to participate more in school politics. This could lead to decisions that benefit students more, to more engagement in the classroom, and to better decisions being made for the school, too.

## Work Cited

Gardner, Elizabeth. "The Pony Express | Student Voice Necessary for School Policy Making." The Pony Express, <https://www.facebook.com/SAHSponyexpress>, 28 Nov. 2022, <https://sahsponyexpress.com/110274/opinion-3/student-voice-necessary-for-school-policy-making/#:~:text=Policies%20affect%20students%20the%20most,their%20discontent%20or%20their%20happiness.>

Gonzalez, Raquel. "Students Need to Have a Say in Their Education — Assembly | Malala Fund." Assembly, Assembly, 15 Mar. 2023, <https://assembly.malala.org/stories/students-need-to-have-a-say-in-their-education>.

Sherman, Eli. "Should Students Have a Say on Policy?" SouthCoastToday, 3 Feb. 2019, <https://www.southcoasttoday.com/story/news/local/the-gazette/2019/02/03/should-students-have-say-on/6064051007/>.

"Talking Points: Should Students Have More Say in What They Are Taught at School? - YP | South China Morning Post." Young Post, South China Morning Post, <https://www.scmp.com/yp/discover/your-voice/opinion/article/3060178/talking-points-should-students-have-more-say-what>. Accessed 26 Sept. 2024.

Urist, Jacoba. "Should Students Sit on School Boards? - The Atlantic." The Atlantic, <https://www.facebook.com/TheAtlantic/>, 23 Apr. 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/do-school-boards-need-student-members/361127/>.