THE POWER OF VOICE IN SCHOOLS

Listening, Learning, and Leading Together

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A self-scoring inventory, My Voice Potential, is available online for you to reflect on personal attributes that affect the potential of your voice being heard, valued, and acted on:

www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/books/quaglia2020_120021.pdf

About This Book

For nearly four decades, we have been working to inform, reform, and transform schools. *Inform* with the data gathered from the voices of students, educators, and parents. This is different from test scores, to be sure, but it's no less valuable as a basis for driving decisions. We have gathered hundreds of thousands of surveys, conducted thousands of focus groups, and participated in countless conversations with students and teachers in this effort. *Reform* because the data we have collected suggest the inherited, industrial model of school has been failing a majority of students for quite some time. We are not alone in this assessment. The dropout rate in both secondary and postsecondary schools in our country is worrisome; the persistent academic achievement gap is intolerable; and the racial inequality in the discipline meted out in our schools is unacceptable, to say the least. Finally, *transform* because what is required is not simply an improvement to current approaches—we need a radically new approach.

Student Voice: The Instrument of Change (Quaglia & Corso, 2014) introduces the Aspirations Framework, which is an approach that ensures every student has the ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those goals. That book is filled with practical suggestions grounded in research and the real experiences garnered from educators working in schools. *Aspire High: Imagining Tomorrow's School Today* (Quaglia, Corso, Fox, & Dykes, 2017) uses the Aspirations Framework and student voice to create the ideal school. This book emerged from decades of studying schools and imagining all their best practices together in a single building. *Aspire High* was

written to inspire you to pursue or renew the reasons you became an educator in the first place.

Principal Voice: Listen, Learn, Lead (Quaglia, 2016), *Teacher Voice: Amplifying Success* (Quaglia & Lande, 2017), and *Parent Voice: Being in Tune With Your Kids and Their School* (Quaglia, Fox, & Young, 2017) each discuss and suggest how adults in a young person's life can tune in to and amplify students' voices and the voices of one another. Finally, *Cay and Adlee Find Their Voice* (Quaglia & Quaglia, 2018) is a children's book written to encourage the youngest among us to stand up and speak out. In these books, as well as in journal articles, keynotes, presentations, and workshops, the authors have advocated that the transformative way forward lies in a partnership between students and adults. We have tried to embody this by having student panels as part of our learning sessions, by having students deliver professional development with us, and by working with blended student and teacher teams as part of our School Voice Process.

We are firmly convinced that a transformative future in education is best accomplished *together*—by students and teachers actively listening to one another with mutual trust and respect, learning side by side in ways that promote ever deeper understanding and expansive creativity, and leading with shared responsibility to bring about everyone's hopes and dreams.

To make this collaborative effort successful, you must believe, as we do, that

- Students and teachers have something to teach us.
- Students and teachers are the potential—not the problem.
- Working together is the only way to ensure that every student and educator reaches his or her fullest potential.

We need to realize there is no "us" versus "them" in education; there is only "us"—all learners on a journey of aspirations and growth together. This book addresses the importance of everyone's voice in the school community; articulates what we have learned from listening to these voices over the past

decade; and suggests concrete, practical strategies for combined teams of students, teachers, parents, and administrators to make a difference together.

This book reflects our dream of a true partnership in listening, learning, and leading *together*. The "us versus them" paradigm must become a thing of the past. We invite you to stand together with all the stakeholders at your school to create a new paradigm of partnership toward a better teaching and learning environment for all.

We hope this book inspires you to start, or strengthen, your own voice journey with the students and colleagues at your school. We would love to hear your voice! Please share your thoughts about this book and your experiences with fostering voice in your school community. We can all learn from one another's journeys!

Please feel free to contact us at info@quagliainstitute.org.

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Hindsight Helps Us Move Forward

"Do or do not. There is no try."

—Yoda

As an educator, what have you learned from the students you teach or the colleagues with whom you work? Have you learned about Instagram (or Finstagram) or Snapchat . . . or the newest social media trend that's come out since we wrote this book? Have you learned a new way to teach a tired lesson? Have you learned how to solve the latest Rubik's cube, which isn't a cube at all? Have you learned how to see something from the perspective of a 7-year-old? Now ask yourself, has what you've learned from working with students and colleagues influenced the ways you teach and your students learn? Opportunities to learn from one another are everywhere, but they should be more than incidental events; we must make a conscious effort to learn *from* and *with* one another.

Over the course of almost four decades of working with students, educators, and parents, the Quaglia Institute has learned the value of listening to their voices. We have listened intently, and we have asked the crucial follow-up question: *Why?* In the process, we have learned a great deal about what is important to the individuals who are in our schools every day. We have learned that a process that honors others' voices simultaneously fosters

respect, creates lasting partnerships built on trust, and develops a sense of shared responsibility. With this as a foundation, every stakeholder in education will be poised to work collaboratively (at the school, district, state, or national level) to lead in a united way that improves our educational system. If this book does not invite—indeed, *compel*—you to initiate dialogue for change, then we have fallen short of our mission . . . or you need to find another career.

This book is rooted in a simple idea. Namely, in order for schools to be successful, they must listen to, learn from, and lead with the students, educators, and families who comprise the very life of the school itself. Whether schools choose to accept our view that their goal should be to support every student's aspirations, or not; whether schools believe, as we do, that self-worth, engagement, and a sense of purpose for every student and teacher is critical to their academic and professional success, or not; whether schools think ensuring each student's sense of belonging, fun and excitement, and confidence to take action are part of the job of teaching, or not—we urge schools to consider the voice of students and teachers in all projects and programs moving forward.

We view voice as a process that leads toward collective action. The School Voice Process involves *listening* to what people are saying (and not saying), *learning* from what is being said, and *leading* together on what actions need to be taken. This process supports schools in their journeys to be places where learning is meaningful for all. To better understand student voice and perspective, we therefore went straight to the source—the students, teachers, parents, and administrators in our school communities.

The data referenced in this book were gathered during the 2009–2018 academic years. The following surveys were administered from the Quaglia School Voice suite of surveys:

- Quaglia Student Voice surveys were taken by 452,329 students in grades 6–12 and 102,750 students in grades 3–5. These school-level surveys were administered in 979 schools across 34 states.
- Quaglia Teacher Voice surveys were taken by 30,489 teachers in 415 schools across 26 states.

- Quaglia Parent Voice surveys were taken by 20,230 parents in 244 schools across 14 states.
- The Quaglia iKnow My Class survey was administered by 1,524 teachers in grades 6–12 for a total of 142,189 completed surveys. In grades 3–5, the survey was administered by 269 teachers for a total of 8,866 completed surveys. In total, these surveys were administered in 149 schools across 23 states. (The survey for grades 6–12 is available in both a 50- and 20-statement version. The former includes all the statements in the latter. References in this book will be drawn from the 20 statements included in both versions.)

Through the school voice surveys and focus groups, it's clear that all too often adults try to solve school problems *for* students (rather than *with* them), which typically results in a "misdiagnosis" or the implementation of yet another program. Consider the persistent challenge of students not completing homework assignments. At one time or another, all educators have been part of adult-generated solutions—zeros on assignments, notes sent home, and after-school detentions. If these solutions were effective, then incomplete homework would not be a perennial problem. Students would reliably complete their homework. However, when educators involve student voice in the dialogue and search for solutions together, they learn other reasons for incomplete assignments—for example, a lack of understanding and clarity, a lack of purpose in assignments, and even a lack of relationships with teachers. We repeatedly hear from students that they withhold effort from teachers they dislike! When educators stop and actually listen to students, they learn that repeated detentions (for instance) do not solve homework issues, yet a better relationship with their teachers can.

Likewise, this same scenario occurs when administrators tune out teachers' voices. For example, a district may try to improve teacher attendance by "buying out" unused sick days. Although the extra pay is always welcomed, it does not significantly reduce teacher absenteeism. Listening to teachers can

have a greater impact than a few extra days of pay! Teachers want to be valued and acknowledged for their efforts. They want their ideas to be truly listened to, and most important, they want to be part of the decisions that affect them.

Similarly, parents also want and need to have their voices heard. Consider a situation where educators assume that parents do not care about their children's education simply because they have not become involved or don't attend meetings. However, once engaged in a conversation, it becomes clear that language, transportation, or childcare issues are the real barriers to engaging with the school. Often, the answers are simple to find—we just need to stop, ask, and listen. This is a simple yet critical part of collaboration that supports students' success.

Schools are charged with the admirable and daunting tasks of educating students, fostering their success, and helping them achieve their dreams. There are countless approaches and philosophies that can lead to success; education is the antithesis of one-size-fits-all. Although there are frameworks and standards that can be valuable in guiding education efforts, every school—and every child—is different. It is imperative that the voices of those who make education at *each* school happen are heard. That means students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Students are best served when all stakeholders work in partnership, listening to one another, learning from one another, and leading together. This collaboration is the most effective way to support students on their educational journey, including developing their own voices—in school and in life.

It is important not only to understand how voice has evolved but also to capitalize on the 20/20 nature of hindsight. In life, a great deal can be learned by paying attention to what has occurred before. Voice is no exception. Learning from the past helps guide the future.

Student Voice: An Evolving Partnership

The concept of student voice is not new. In fact, Socrates saw the necessity of learners sharing what they know as part of the learning process. More recently,

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989; UN General Assembly Resolution 44/25) gives children a right of participation—that is, a right to express their views, to be heard, and to take part in decisions that affect them. Over time, student voice has been viewed through many lenses, ranging from a skill to a process to an outcome. Student voice is all of this and so much more. Even though student voice has a positive impact on learning and engagement, incorporating student voice is often met with resistance by educators, as it is viewed as an isolated action or add-on—another item to include on an already too long to-do list. That could not be further from the truth!

Terms Associated with Student Voice

Student Agency: Learners having choice and voice regarding what is to be learned and the opportunity to co-create learning.

Autonomy: Control to make decisions for oneself.

Self-Determination: The ability to think for oneself, make your own choices, and assume responsibility for those choices.

Empowerment: The ability and authority to make decisions and changes in a respectful and supportive environment.

Partnership: A relationship where both parties are valued, respected, and necessary for action.

Student voice is not a task or a survey or a seminar. Student voice is the inclusion of students' thoughts and ideas in school decisions at all levels, and it is not yet fully realized as a "way of being" in classrooms, buildings, and districts. Student voice challenges the current norm where the state, district, and teachers decide what students will learn, direct how they will learn, and dictate the assessment of that learning. Meaningful student voice requires students to play an active role in all that a school does, from instruction to assessment to curriculum design. The ability to responsibly share one's ideas and opinions is a lifelong skill—even a civic duty.

Fortunately, we have seen some progress. The power of student voice to transform learning being recognized by the education community as an integral aspect of education. Today, most educators embrace the idea that student voice matters for authentic learning, and progress is being made toward fully implementing voice as a way of being in schools. Student voice influences students' success in school, and national, state, and district policies are beginning to mandate that student voice be an integral component in school improvement efforts. Student voice is even integrated into many schools' mission and vision statements.

Much of this recent attention on student voice in schools is due to the research that supports the value of student voice. A recent Harvard study, sponsored by the Raikes Foundation, suggests that student agency may be as critical to outcomes of schooling as basic academic skills (Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander, 2015). Additional research points to numerous benefits of providing students with more decisions and ownership in their educational experiences:

- According to Ryan and Deci (2000), students experience varying levels of motivation that often depend on the extent to which they feel their actions are, or will be, self-determined.
- Studies show the connection between student voice and engagement (Fisher, Frey, Quaglia, Smith, & Lande, 2018; Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007).
- When students experience voice, they are more likely to experience self-worth, engagement, and purpose, which lead to academic motivation (Quaglia & Corso, 2014).
- Increasing student voice has been found to improve student learning, especially when student voice is linked to changing curriculum and instruction (Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).
- Additional research into student voice initiatives show that related efforts can improve teachers' classroom practices (Cushman, 2000; Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; Kincheloe, 2007).

Student voice should be more than a supplemental part of a curriculum—it should be an integral part of students' learning experiences.

Student Voice Influencers

Student voice has an extensive history in both educational theory and pedagogy. Many pioneering educational theorists and contemporary researchers contributed to its increased importance, and the following is a brief summary that touches upon a few of the many factors that led to student voice becoming a more integral part of learning for today's students.

Student voice owes much of its classroom-based practices to the constructivist theory of learning, dating back to Dewey's earliest writings. Constructivism places students at the center of their education rather than in a classroom that is fully teacher directed. This theory supports the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, and learning is perceived as an active—rather than a passive—process. In other words, knowledge is constructed by the learner. Students are full participants in their learning, leading one to conclude that voice (not literal, but voice as represented by one's experiences, thoughts, and construction of meaning) is required to participate. Learner-centric pedagogy is grounded in the foundational education theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, all of whom supported a student-centered learning model. Dewey (1938) believed that students should be provided with opportunities to think for themselves and articulate their thoughts. Piaget (1974) explained that active methods should be utilized to allow all students to construct their own truth rather than have it distributed to them. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) supported the notion that students should be empowered to construct knowledge and take ownership of their own learning.

Similar to the constructivist learning theory, democratic education sees students as active cocreators of their own learning, and student voice is deeply connected to democratic principles. In democratic classrooms, students experience autonomy and choice. They see that their ideas inform instruction and

assessment, and they develop an understanding that what they say matters. Indeed, fostering student voice teaches young people the responsibilities required to be a citizen in a democratic society (Counts, 1932; Dewey, 1916; Fielding & Prieto, 2002; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1989). When students apply the skills required to utilize their voices effectively, they become citizens who express opinions, articulate ideas, vote, and reflect on their responsibilities toward others.

Leading educational theorists from John Dewey to Paulo Freire have articulated the need to support core democratic values in our school systems. Freire (1970) viewed voice as a path toward freedom and liberation. Though connecting democratic values with the educational process is not a new idea, intentionally seeking student voice and partnering with students has not yet become a standard foundational practice in schools. As Shor (1996) argues, "Power-sharing . . . creates the desire and imagination of change while also creating the experience and skills for it. The critical-democratic class, then, is a context for change that develops the desire and imagination to make change" (p. 176).

The Vote Is In!

In the fall of 2018, while adults in the United States were voting in the midterm elections, students at Woodcrest Elementary in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, were also voting. They took to the polls to name their shark mascot. Their voices were heard. Go Chompers!

The fall of 2018 was an exciting time for voice in the United States. Regardless of one's political beliefs, record numbers of voters turned out for the midterm elections, which saw one of the most diverse group of candidates in history. This level of civic involvement is the hopeful outcome of students' learning and practicing the democratic values of shared decision making and freedom of speech. In government classes across the country, high school students registered to vote, including 16- and 17-year-olds who

registered for future elections. Even though they could not yet vote, elementary school students were provided with opportunities to practice using their voices. Students voted for school mascots, center activity options, and homework assignments. When students' votes have real-life consequences, they are able to see that their votes—their voices—do indeed matter. Through this process, students learn that if they want an eagle mascot rather than a pigeon, for example, then they must seize the opportunity and use their voices wisely.

Contemporary researchers continue to share the multifaceted benefits of student voice in education. Although the list of researchers and their findings in Figure 1.1 is by no means comprehensive, it represents the array of research related to the importance of student voice in education.

Student voice is no longer on the fringes in the world of education. Some may still see student voice as merely listening to students' ideas, but most educators who closely examine the benefits of student voice realize that it must become far more than that. Student voice is a democratic process that results in taking action and responsibility.

Teacher Voice: Emerging Empowerment

Teacher voice as a practice in schools has a long and challenging history. The design of schools at the turn of the 20th century did not consider the voice of teachers. Teachers' work in the classroom was highly controlled, and teacher autonomy was on the decline. Decision making related to school hiring, curriculum design and delivery, and resource allocation was historically made by school principals or members of administrative teams. The hierarchical administrative school system kept teachers voiceless (Freire, 2000; Giroux & McLaren, 1994). Through the 1920s, bureaucratic structure and control on classroom practices remained strong. Industrialization perpetuated the need for standardization and thus created a factory-like setting in most schools. Accordingly, the expansion of public schools in the United States did not include a focus on teacher voice within the school building or on larger decisions such as policy planning.

Figure 1.1
Benefits of Student Voice

Researcher(s)	Findings Related to Student Voice
Nelson Beaudoin (2005)	Purposeful elevation of students' voices can help connect the school and students to the community in meaningful ways.
Alison Cook-Sather (2001)	School activity and teacher evaluations are more authentic and valuable when students are central evaluators and assessors of data.
Kathleen Cushman (2003)	Involving students throughout education can build participation skills that young people need today and in the future.
Michael Fielding & Jean Rudduck (2002)	Consulting students about teaching and learning results in (1) a stronger sense of membership (the organizational dimension) so students feel more positive about school and (2) a stronger sense of respect and self-worth (the personal dimension) so students feel positive about themselves.
Adam Fletcher (2005)	When educators work with students in schools—as opposed to working for them—school improvement is positive and meaningful for everyone involved.
Michael Fullan (1982)	Student opinion matters in the introduction and implementation of school reforms.
Henry Giroux (1989)	Engaging student voice throughout education teaches young people the responsibilities required to be a citizen in a democratic society.
John Hattie (2012)	When teachers empower students to use their voices through specific strategies, such as small-group learning, classroom discussions, and self-reported grades, student achievement is positively influenced.
Dana Mitra & Steven Jay Gross (2009)	Partnering with teachers helps students develop positive relationships with teachers where none had existed previously.
Russell Quaglia & Ray McNulty (2007)	Student voice is the conduit for students to experience self-worth, engagement, and purpose, all of which lead to higher levels of academic motivation.
Jean Rudduck & Donald McIntyre (2007)	Consultation can help learners have a more positive attitude toward learning.
Eric Toshalis & Michael J. Nakkula (2012)	Fostering student voice—empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so that they feel they have a stake in the outcomes—is one of the most powerful tools schools have to increase learning.

Researcher(s)	Findings Related to Student Voice
Bruce Wilson & Dick Corbett (2007)	Listening to student voice can encourage adult leaders to make important decisions and effectively prioritize decisions in schools.

During the next 50 years, various education movements influenced teaching and learning, yet teacher voice was of marginal concern. Unions representing teachers made sure teachers had a voice in some aspects of their profession, but policies and mandates were still primarily determined by bureaucrats. In the 1980s, with the publication of the infamous report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), Americans became convinced that schools were failing—and that teachers were part of the failure. As a result, accountability and teacher training became part of the nomenclature, leading to more top-down reforms and mandates for teachers.

The need to restructure schools and localize decisions slowly emerged. In the late '80s to early '90s, restructuring of schools focused on teacher empowerment, site-based management, local management, and decentralization. In addition, the main projects of school educational reforms included local school management and teacher empowerment programs (Hixon, 1990). Lieberman (1989) defined teacher empowerment as "empowering teachers to participate in group decisions and to have real decision-making roles in the school community" (p. 24). "Schools in which teachers have more control over key schoolwide and classroom decisions have fewer problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and cooperation among teachers and administrators, have a more committed and engaged teaching staff, and do a better job of retaining their teachers" (Ingersoll, 2007, p. 24). Site-based management dominated the '90s, with a goal of having the appropriate people participate in major decisions (David, 1994). Local school management, also called shared decision making, was popularly considered to be the involvement of teachers in the processes of school-level decision making (David, 1989; Weiss, 1993).

In spite of the success of teacher involvement in key school decisions, the 21st century has proven to be a challenge for teacher voice. Teachers widely view the standards movement and high-stakes tests as reducing their autonomy in classrooms and diminishing their voice. In the current educational climate in the United States, teachers are under a great deal of public pressure to raise students' test scores (Crocco & Costigan, 2006; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). These demands lead to teachers having less influence over what is being taught—and how it's taught. "To silence the voices of teachers by asking for compliance (just follow the script) rather than ideas and feedback is dehumanizing—treating teachers like objects rather than thinking creative professionals" (Knight, 2011, p. 35).

Teachers, however, are not a silent group. In 2018, teacher voice was heard loud and clear during an increased number of strikes, including well-publicized ones in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina. In the same year, 170 teachers ran for state offices, and 42 of them won (Will & Schwartz, 2019). At the start of 2019, over 30,000 teachers went on strike in Los Angeles for the first time in 30 years; they were soon followed by teachers in Denver. Their voices expressed needs far beyond salary issues. Teacher voice has proven to be influential through action research, professional learning communities, Edcamps, and social media. As teachers gain more control over their learning, they will increasingly affect the direction of education.

"Teacher voice should be a nonnegotiable in establishing the 'what' and 'how' of teacher professional learning" (Tomlinson, 2018, p. 88). Teacher voice is far from being fully actualized in schools, but it is now front and center in many current school improvement efforts. Finally, school communities realize that supporting teacher voice leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and goal attainment (Quaglia & Lande, 2017).

Parent Voice: Beyond Booster Clubs

You may be thinking, "Parent voice . . . *really*?" Many educators prefer (and sometimes justifiably so) to close their doors, plow ahead with purpose, and

cross their fingers and hope that the calls from parents will stop and that their e-mail inboxes will stay empty. One more complaint, or even suggestion, at the end of a day can sometimes just be too much. When we refer to parent voice, however, we are talking about much more than one-way input—whether it's a compliment or complaint. Parent voice goes beyond that; it includes parents being valued partners whose ideas, perspectives, and actions are necessary for schools to be able to fully support all learners. Countries around the world support parent voice in myriad ways. For example, the Australian government recognizes parent bodies to give parents a voice in education policy development (see www.education.gov.au). In the UK, PTA UK and Parent Councils UK are both committed to building parent participation so that schools can meet the needs of their communities (see https://sewales.org.uk).

The history of parent voice in U.S. education formally began with the advent of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and now includes federal and state laws requiring family engagement. In 1897, the PTA was founded as the National Congress of Mothers. This organization was dedicated to improving the education and overall health and safety of children. As parents' roles in their children's education became more peripheral, this organization was committed to making sure parents were still effective by giving them a voice. In 1970, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (National PTA) merged with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, and the new group had a unified commitment to support all children.

Just as the National PTA's membership expanded over the decades to include not only mothers but also fathers, caregivers, teachers, students, and members of the larger community, so too has the participation of parents evolved. Parent participation at one time focused on being an "extra set of hands," including soliciting volunteers for bake sales, chaperoning field trips, and organizing fundraisers. Their involvement subsequently expanded to a more engaging role, which included volunteering in the classroom to share knowledge of their careers, cultural heritage, or hobbies and contributing directly to their children's education. Though parents were viewed as knowledgeable and valuable to support their children's education, they often

worked in parallel or in conjunction with schools, rather than working with them as partners.

The U.S. Department of Education acknowledged the importance of parents as more engaged partners with the development of national education laws. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* highlighted the importance of parent involvement, recognizing parents as essential sources of support for enhancing their children's education. In 2002, one of the four pillars of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was "expanded parental options" (ed.gov, 2003), underscoring the importance of keeping parents informed about their child's progress and the performance of the school. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) referred to *family engagement* rather than *parent involvement*. The ESSA gave states more authority in decision making and simultaneously required schools to involve various stakeholders in decision making, including parents and families. Further demonstrating its commitment, the U.S. Department of Education formed a team dedicated to improving family engagement in education: the Family and Community Engagement Team.

At the state level, parent engagement is becoming mandated. Most states now have legislation designed to foster family engagement in schools. In 1995, California established the Family-School Partnership Act, a law that allows working parents, grandparents, and guardians to be granted time off to engage in their children's experiences at school or place of childcare. In September 2018, California law made family engagement a state priority. The mandate requires schools to seek parent input in making school and district-level decisions, and it emphasizes the importance of employing research-based practices to foster family engagement.

Starting in 1991, Florida schools were required to have a School Advisory Council (SAC). Through the years, the SAC's responsibilities increased and now include assisting in the development and assessment of school improvement efforts. Membership has also evolved, and each SAC must include various members of the school community, including parents and students. This

type of commitment is becoming more common as parent engagement is incorporated into the structure of schools' decision-making practices.

Research shows that parent engagement is a significant predictor of a student's academic success (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017), and steps have been taken to develop more meaningful home-school partnerships. Even though there has been progress, parent voice is still evolving (or reevolving). Schools must recognize the valuable insights parents have and commit to engaging parents in the meaningful decisions for school improvement. As alternatives to public school (e.g., charter schools, magnet schools, homeschooling, online degrees) continue to expand, it is necessary for educators to work with parents rather than against—or without—them. Parents know their children, have valuable insights regarding the type of learning environment that is most suitable for them, and should be engaged in home-school partnerships that help their children reach their goals. The groundwork has been laid to engage parents; in order for family engagement to be effective, schools and parents must work as partners—listening, learning, and leading together (Quaglia et al., 2017).

Administrator Voice: The Connector

School administrators are a constant presence in the middle of a changing educational landscape. The passage of education laws can shift authority from the federal to local level and back again. School districts may dictate policy for individual schools. But throughout it all, administrators inherently, and consistently, have a voice—a voice that can be used to decide how to implement policies in the way that best serves the students in their school. Principals are the beacons for schools, charged with guiding the way and ensuring that schools remain true to their purpose: educating students. They have a voice in the decisions made at their schools, including those that affect curriculum, students' academic and personal growth, teachers' professional development, and parents' engagement in their children's education. Though the degree of decision making school administrators have may be determined by federal,

state, and district mandates, *how* administrators use their voice is a key determinant in how effectively changes will be implemented within their school.

Administrators are now charged, by federal and state laws, with involving all stakeholders in education. These stakeholders all have meaningful contributions to make; the challenge for administrators is to determine how to engage all participants effectively in school change efforts. Administrators inherently have a voice, and they bring to their roles expertise and experience. But it is still one perspective. Administrators must listen to, learn from, and lead with all stakeholders (Quaglia, 2016). They must create an environment that welcomes and values the insights of others—parents, teachers, and students.

The time of top-down directives from principals has long passed. The most effective way for a school administrator to use his or her voice is to listen to the voices of others. As the hub in a school's wheel of education, the administrator's job is to keep everyone moving in the same direction—toward student success.

Moving Forward, Together

In one way or another, voice has been a component of educational reform movements for quite some time. However, it is not yet a driver for all that happens in schools. Historically, student voice has been viewed as gathering students' opinions and thoughts, rather than engaging students in school improvement efforts. Teacher voice was directed more toward addressing working conditions than creating a partnership for learning. And parent voice was seen as sufficient if schools had a PTA or booster club.

None of these initial efforts integrates voice in a way that honors the stakeholders and optimizes opportunities for positive change! When all these voices are engaged in dialogue and the sharing of ideas, when they work in true partnership with one another, meaningful change is achievable. Fostering voice requires all participants to be open to learning from one another and recognizing that everyone has something to teach others. Incorporating student voice into pedagogy is not an optional add-on—it is simply great teaching.

There is no need to guess about the positive impact of voice on learning, school culture, and school improvement. The evidence is in. Student voice, partnered with teacher, administrator, and parent voice, does indeed matter. It is time to move forward *together,* engaging the voices of the entire educational community.

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About the Authors

Dr. Russ Quaglia is a pioneer in the field of education, known for his unwavering dedication to student voice and aspirations. His innovative work is evidenced by an extensive library of research-based publications and media appearances. He has authored the School Voice suite of surveys and best-selling books, including *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* and *Engagement by Design*. Dr. Quaglia's most recent award-winning publication is a children's book, *Cay and Adlee Find Their Voice,* which was cowritten with his daughter, Cali. His commitment and lifelong dedication to student voice led him to cofound the recently formed Australian Institute for Voice and Aspirations. Dr. Quaglia has become a frequent visitor to schools and institutions around the world, demonstrating his passion for ensuring that the voices of students, teachers, principals, and parents are always heard, honored, and acted upon.

Dr. Kristine Fox is a senior field director at the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations. She has led professional development initiatives at the state, district, and school levels throughout the United States, Canada, and England. Dr. Fox is a former school administrator and author of several books, including *Aspire High: Imagining Tomorrow's School Today* and *Parent Voice: Being in Tune with Your Kids and Their School,* as well as the ASCD quick reference guide *Fostering Student*

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Dr. Lisa Lande has dedicated her professional endeavors to advocating for teachers and students around the world. It is her aspiration that every classroom in every school is one that she would want her own three children to learn in. Dr. Lande is a former high school teacher, college professor, and director of several large-scale school improvement projects. She currently serves as a senior field director for the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations. Dr. Lande is coauthor of *Teacher Voice: Amplifying Success* and *Engagement by Design: Creating Learning Environments Where Students Thrive*.

Deborah Young is the director of operations and a program specialist for the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations. Young earned a Master of Education degree from Smith College, has teaching experience in both public and private schools, and coauthored *Parent Voice: Being in Tune with Your Kids and Their School*. Young holds a strong belief that mutual respect between teachers and students is essential to fostering students' aspirations and that a key component of developing a positive, respectful learning environment is honoring the voices of all stakeholders.

Related ASCD Resources: Student Voice

At the time of publication, the following resources were available (ASCD stock numbers in parentheses). For up-to-date information about ASCD resources, go to www.ascd.org. You can search the complete archives of *Educational Leadership* at www.ascd.org/el.

Print Products

All Learning Is Social and Emotional: Helping Students Develop Essential Skills for the Classroom and Beyond by Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and Dominique Smith (#119033)

Cay and Adlee Find Their Voice by Cali Quaglia, Russ Quaglia, Daniel Minter, and Donald Ely (#117080)

Fostering Student Voice (Quick Reference Guide) by Russell Quaglia and Kristine Fox (#QRG119034)

Mobilizing the Community to Help Students Succeed by Hugh B. Price (#107055)

Partnering with Parents to Ask the Right Questions: A Powerful Strategy for Strengthening School-Family Partnerships by Luz Santana, Dan Rothstein, and Agnes S. Bain (#117011)

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