

STUDENT VOICE

Let Students Lead the Dialogue With Parents

Giving students more say in communicating what happens in school reinforces their commitment to learning and teaches them life skills.

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Does it seem like we talk *about* students with parents and guardians instead of talking *with* students? How often do students lead or even contribute to the conversation?

Let's address inclusion—and student ownership of the learning is at the center of this. It's certainly a popular topic among educators, with profound research supporting it, particularly regarding [self-efficacy](#), [self-reported grades](#), and [goal commitment](#), for example. After all, whose learning is it? If the learning belongs to the student, it follows that students could benefit from a larger role in the communication, bringing their ownership over their learning to the forefront.

There are times when a parent or guardian wants to hear and should hear directly from the teacher, and we should acknowledge that their perception of school might be based on their own experiences. We can make parents and guardians feel more included by offering structured opportunities for them to hear from their kids about learning.

After all, parents and guardians love hearing from their kids about school and often expend serious energy trying to extract information about how it's going and what they're learning, particularly as students get older and the direct involvement of parents and guardians diminishes. It doesn't take an overhaul of our classroom practices to make this happen. We don't have the time or energy for that anyway, right? Here are some ideas to give students a place in the already established communication channels.

NEWSLETTERS, CONFERENCES, AND PROGRESS REPORTS

Cultivating in students the skills they need to lead the conversation can make our practices more robust without significant effort on our part—maximum benefit with low expenditure—using common existing practices like newsletters, invitations to sign up for events or volunteer, conferences, and progress reports. Students could benefit from having a voice in any of these.

Start small by shifting a single classroom practice that's already in place, like using exit tickets to find out what students think should be shared in a newsletter. Provide templates to give kids a starting point—for example, sample emails or newsletter formats that allow the student to just fill in the information. This can build life skills, like teaching what it means to copy someone on an email.

Class newsletters are all about writing for an authentic audience. Students selecting content, writing, editing, giving feedback, and sharing with parents and guardians brings a focused awareness to the students about what they're learning.

With conferences and progress reports, what about shifting the preparation for these to the students? What do they think their parents or guardians need to know about their progress, their strengths and struggles? Share a Google Doc template with students (the same one you may already use) that guides their preparation. The parent or guardian can't make a conference? No problem. Have the student record a short video with key highlights and email it.

If students will be sending an update to their parent or guardian using email, show them how to copy the teacher on that email. This means that the teacher can give the student feedback on their writing and open the door for parents to contact the teacher directly with any questions or concerns. The best part? Ownership. The students experience real leadership with authentic opportunities for audience, purpose, and voice.

ACROSS THE GRADES

Leading the dialogue is powerful regardless of age. In a primary classroom, utilizing the common [station rotation](#) model to our benefit is an easy integration. If you have stations of activities for students to rotate through or select from, one of the stations for a reading/writing block can be recording a short video update for parents using iPads or other devices you have access to. There are lots of apps for this, including [WeVideo](#) and [Animoto](#), and learning management systems like [Seesaw](#) and [ClassDojo](#) have video built in.

Students can make individual or class videos. It's likely that your school or district requires a media consent or opt-out form with registration; your school office will have a list of students you can post recordings and images of. This also captures evidence for ELA standards that we need to assess.

In the intermediate grades, students can share at conferences by using a checklist template for what to share with key points to include and examples of their work that demonstrate where they are in their standards progression. This could include the most recent skill they mastered and what they're learning next.

Middle school is a great time to learn email etiquette. A quick shift in practice is that instead of the teacher sending announcements home, the students let parents and guardians know about upcoming projects they may need support with. A specific request from the child is really powerful.

High school students can utilize any of these strategies and additionally use persuasive writing to recruit chaperones for events or share with their parents and guardians key successes to celebrate, including credit completion, highlights in learning, or unique experiences or opportunities.

INCREASING STUDENT LEADERSHIP

If shifting standard communication practice from teacher to students seems pretty doable, expansion of student leadership in the relationship with parents and guardians can be a calculated next step. Consider letting students share their learning goals with weekly updates to parents and guardians. This keeps all members of the student's support team in the loop. There's an opportunity here for students to articulate strategies they're using and how their team might support them.

Additionally, when students propose projects or research ideas, they could share this with their parents and guardians for feedback. Quick, simple—and parents and guardians are included, directly offering relationship-building and support opportunities.

It's about the team—the student's support team. Why keep the students on the outside? Why have teachers do all the work when the student voice matters as much or even more to the parents/guardians? There's no doubt that there are times when a teacher needs to lead the conversation, but even then, copying or sharing with the student is often very appropriate. If we put the students at the center of the dialogue about their learning, they have a true opportunity to take more action and own the results.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/let-students-lead-dialogue-parents>