



COMPASS ACADEMY

Where learners and leaders grow.

1C: Approach to Student Governance

Summary

This document details Compass Academy High School's beliefs about and approach to student governance. The purpose of this document is to provide administrators, teachers and students with a guideline for the creation and implementation of student governance that is aligned with our values and beliefs, with current research on best practices and with XQ principles for youth empowerment, voice and choice. The ultimate goal of our student governance approach is to create a school culture that focuses on truly getting to know students, both inside and outside the classroom, and giving all students opportunities to build their identities and develop the capacity for change and autonomy.¹

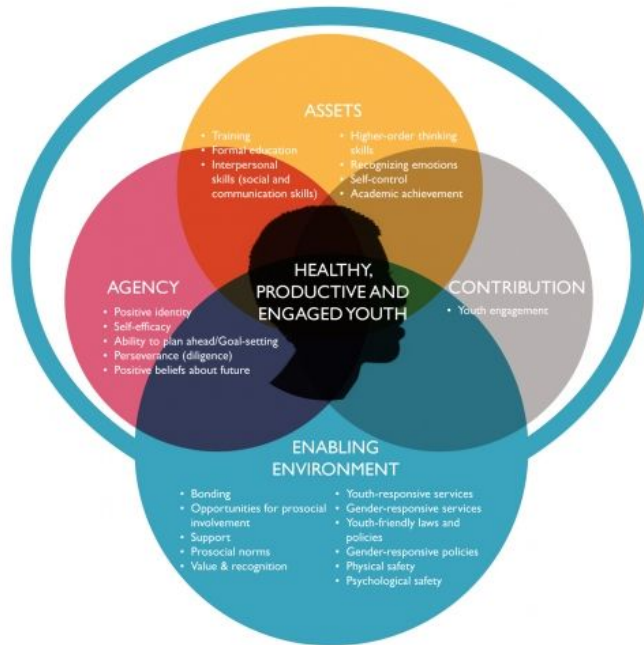
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¹ "Student Agency and Engagement." *XQ Module No. 6*, XQ Superschools , [xqsuperschool.org/knowledge-modules/XQ Knowledge Module 06 - Student Agency & Engagement.pdf](https://xqsuperschool.org/knowledge-modules/XQ%20Knowledge%20Module%2006%20-%20Student%20Agency%20&%20Engagement.pdf).



Grounding Framework



[Positive Youth Development Framework](#)

The following framework is being utilized as a guiding tool for HS Design Milestones pertaining to culture, rituals/traditions, positive behavior supports, student governance, and others. The intention of employing this framework is to cross-check and ensure that our final recommendations will lead to a cohesive and comprehensive school model that is in service of developing healthy, productive and engaged youth.

Each time this framework appears in a milestone, the designer is asking the question: what opportunities does this component of our school design (eg student induction, student governance) offer to develop assets, agency, contribution, or enabling environment for our students? What subcomponents are within each of these areas are fulfilled within these recommendations?

Student Governance provides the opportunity for:

1. Contribution. Through student governance opportunities, students will be able to develop the skills and mindsets they need to be able to productively contribute to their school and their community.
2. Enabling Environment. Our student governance structures provide ample opportunity for and models of prosocial involvement.
3. Agency. Our student governance structures are designed to develop students' positive beliefs about the future.
4. Assets. Through student governance opportunities, students will develop concrete interpersonal as well as academic skills.



Student Governance at CAHS: Guiding Principles

Our Belief	What This Means
Our students are the best judges of their high school experience.	At Compass Academy High School, we believe that our students' perspectives are the most authentic perspectives that we have. These perspectives are the most important in the creation of an innovative, students-first and community-oriented high school. We know that young people feel empowered and thrive when they are allowed to engage in decisions that impact their school experience and their lives. This approach is especially important for our population of students, who may have had a long educational experience in which their voices were not heard, for students who may be disengaged and struggling. We are here to serve our students, so we must start by first asking them, what do you need? When has learning been deep and rewarding for you? What do you see in our school that needs to change?
Students need an authentic voice in school decision making.	<p>At Compass Academy High School, education is a collaboration between young people and adults. As such, we believe that every voice matters, everyone deserves a seat at the table, and that students should be included in key conversations and decisions about their school. As such, student governance is not just the organization of school dances and fundraising. Instead, students have stake in issues that pertain to school culture, equity, disciplinary policies, school-wide projects, and community engagement.</p> <p>Giving students stake in critical decision-making provides opportunities to develop skills in key competencies such as advocacy, communication, perspective taking and positive risk taking. These skills, like any other learning experience, need to be taught, practiced and developed intentionally over time. Our responsibility as educators is to create a scaffolded model of student governance that ultimately allows students to not only improve school design, but to become self-directed, life-long learners and leaders.</p>
Motivation in the classroom is closely connected to community engagement.	Allowing students to have voice and choice in their community, both inside school and out, will have positive impacts on academic engagement and performance. Research suggests that students' sense of agency in the world correlates with higher academic performance. Surveys of 6th to 12th graders by the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations have found that students who feel a strong sense of purpose are far more likely than others to say they are highly motivated academically. In fact, we know students who believe they have a voice in school are 7x more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice. ²

² School Voice Report. Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016, quagliainstitute.org/dmsView/School_Voice_Report_2016.



Bringing student voices to the forefront of decision making—as informed, committed stakeholders—will improve our school.

When students get the opportunity to contribute to something they really care about, they learn and grow. As we commit to strong, substantive collaboration with students as a critical part of our high school design, we must ground ourselves in the following questions:

- 1. How can we involve students when planning new school structures or rethinking existing ones?*
- 2. How can students provide meaningful feedback on a regular basis about their own learning and their school experience?*
- 3. How can students consistently engage in the development and implementation of new school policies?*
- 4. How can we scaffold the student governance experience to intentionally develop key competency skills?*
- 5. How does our student governance approach support equity and remain responsive to our students' unique needs?*



Key Design and Implementation Recommendations for Student Governance

Recommendation	Description	Examples and Ideas
<p>Co-design governance structures with students.</p>	<p>Student governance structures cannot be dictated by adults or by traditional student government structures that we may have participated in during our educational experience. Instead, student governance must reflect the actual needs and wants of our students and our community. Accordingly, students can decide on, for example, whether or not they want a hierarchy within student governance, how and if students should be elected, how frequently they want to meet, and the issues that they want to tackle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Create governance and voice opportunities where all students have the opportunity to initially participate. At William Smith HS, all students have the opportunity to be a part of their Ambassadors program, where they can be the spokespeople for the school during site and important guest visits. Or, students can go to local middle schools and act as recruiters for incoming students. ❑ Ask students to do research on successful student governance so that they have input and insight into how they want to operate. ❑ Give students the opportunity to see what other schools are doing and learn from other kids. ❑ At Crosstown High School, students wrote their own constitution that outlines the goals, structures and systems for their Student Governance Association. Within this document, students decided on and documented the different branches of government and the responsibilities of each.
<p>Encourage a student governance that goes beyond “event planning” and into deeper levels of student-teacher collaboration and is</p>	<p>“Traditional Student Governance”, which reformers identify as student councils in comprehensive high schools that work on school dances and homecomings, often do not represent the needs of the whole student body and do not effectively address important issues in academic programming or social-emotional wellbeing. Additionally, traditional structures do not cultivate deeper commitment to community or self-confidence in students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ At Roosevelt HS in Des Moines, Iowa, students are doing professional development with their teachers. Teachers developed this protocol in order to get more authentic feedback from a more diverse group of students. Students provided teachers with feedback on how to make lessons more engaging and how to help struggling students. This school also has a 40-member diversity and inclusion council that meets regularly to address issues of equity within the school.



<p>an avenue for authentic feedback.</p>	<p>Co-creating student governance structures that are authentic and community-driven will result in meaningful change and better career/college readiness outcomes for students.</p>	
<p>Allow student governance and voice opportunities to develop as a result of what the school and students need.</p>	<p>The most effective student governance and voice structures are those that develop as a result of what is actually happening in the school building. Students can design and implement change that has an actual positive impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Develop a system for checking in with students and teachers to identify needs and opportunities for student voice on an ongoing basis ❑ At William Smith HS, next year teachers and students are implementing a Peer Mediation Group. The objective of this group is to help transition freshman students into the school culture and provide opportunities for older students to act as mentors and mediators. This program was born from the observation that recent freshman classes were struggling more with behavior and integration into school than in previous years.
<p>Use student voice and governance structures as a way to reengage at-risk students.</p>	<p>Numerous school-based studies demonstrate the efficacy of providing leadership opportunities for struggling, disengaged students. Instead of creating punitive disciplinary structures, it is critical to reengage students by allowing them to effect change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ At a Florida high school, teachers and community members created a leadership program for students who are at-risk of dropping out due to absenteeism. The school rebranded the process from a drop-out prevention program to a leadership committee designed to help other struggling students. The result was improved attendance for the targeted students.
<p>Connect student governance opportunities that are linked to academic content.</p>	<p>Student governance can become more rigorous when it is connected to academic content and the achievement of competencies. This elevates the structure that reaches beyond just an extracurricular activity to one that contributes to academic excellence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ At Crosstown High School, students governance is modeled after the United States government. Accordingly, there is an executive, legislative and judicial branches. Students are responsible for writing and upholding their own constitution. Teachers report that this experience translates directly to the expectations for AP Government, and will allow students to apply the learning from this course and succeed on the AP test.



Literature and Practice Review: Voice, Choice, Youth Empowerment and Best Practices in Student Governance

Finding	Research Citations and Quotations
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Link to full review [here](#)

Giving students voice in school has notable impacts on academic motivation, social-emotional development, and post-secondary readiness.

School Voice Report, 2016.³
According to research from the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, we know **students who believe they have a voice in school are 7x more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice.**

Also, students who affirmed that they have a voice in school were:

- **4x more likely to experience Self-Worth in school**
- **8x more likely to experience Engagement in school**
- **9x more likely to experience a sense of purpose in school than students who did not affirm having a voice.**

Nakkula, Michael, 2012.⁴
Students who have grown disconnected from school and who are leery of its intentions may not possess the necessary motivations to achieve. Starting with an alienated orientation, such students may wait for educators to draw them in, to feel invited, needed, interested, and even inspired before motivation rises to a level that propels achievement-oriented activity. For these students, engagement may proceed motivation. Therefore, **feeling welcomed into, included in, and validated by school can exert a profound effect on a student’s capacity to engage and his efforts to achieve.**

Time and again, research has shown that the more educators give students choice, control, challenge, and collaborative opportunities, the more motivation and engagement are likely to rise. **The enhancement of agency has been linked to a variety of important educational outcomes, including: elevated achievement levels in marginalized student populations, greater classroom participation, better self-reflection and preparation for improvement in struggling**

³School Voice Report. Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016, quagliainstitute.org/dmsView/School_Voice_Report_2016.

⁴Nakkula, Michael, and Eric Toshalis. *Motivation, Engagement and Student Voice*. Apr. 2012, studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Motivation-Engagement-Student-Voice-Students-at-the-Center-1.pdf.



	students, decreases in behavioral problems.
Engage at-risk students in leadership opportunities.	<u>Towne, Jason, 2016.</u> ⁵ Jason Towne, author of <i>Conversation with America's Best Teachers</i> , ran an experiment in a school in Florida with at-risk students. He engaged 100 students who were labeled as potential drop-outs due to high rates of absenteeism. The school's drop-out prevention was not working, so he decided to transform the dropout-prevention program into a leadership program , target at-risk students, and make it invitation-only. The result was a significant increase in attendance.
Student voice begets student-centered learning.	<u>Nakkula, Michael, 2012.</u> ⁶ We use the term student voice activities to refer to those pedagogies in which youth have the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers either in or outside of school settings . Overall, student voice programs demonstrate a commitment to the facilitation of student agency and to the creation of policies, practices, and programs that revolve around the students' interests and needs. Educators who openly discuss teaching and learning with students and invite them to provide critical feedback on instruction, curricula, assessments, classroom management, and school climate are tapping those students as a resource . This is because students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate [and they] have access to information and relationships that teachers and administrators do not, such as providing a bridge between the school and families reluctant to interact with school personnel, including first-generation immigrant families. In this sense, allowing for youth expression and eliciting their consultation is a prerequisite for student-centered learning since the development of personalized modes of teaching depends on knowing each person's context, needs, proclivities, and perspectives .
Student voice must go beyond traditional "high school government	<u>Nakkula, Michael, 2012.</u> ⁷ While some might claim that student government at the high school level is a perfect example of this sort of leadership, most associated student bodies exercise little power, focus primarily on social activities, and do not represent a

⁵ Towne, Jason. "Recasting At-Risk Students as Leaders." *Education Week*, 21 Feb. 2019, www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/08/06/37towne.h33.html?cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS2.

⁶ Nakkula, Michael, and Eric Toshalis. *Motivation, Engagement and Student Voice*. Apr. 2012, studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Motivation-Engagement-Student-Voice-Students-at-the-Center-1.pdf.

⁷ ibid



structures”.

cross-section of the school. In fact, a nationwide study of communities found no instances where student governments engaged in formal problem solving related to either the 'school's academic program or social-emotional climate, areas of concern that are far more important in terms of achievement and socioemotional well-being than a well-planned homecoming or prom.

By way of comparison, Shepherd Zeldin (2004) studied several community-based programs in which students and adults shared governance responsibilities and found that **when student leadership is part of the program, youth show deeper commitment to their communities, greater self confidence, increased ability to take on governance roles and responsibilities, and a strengthened sense of organizational commitment.** The skills and community connections the youth formed yielded college recommendations, internship offers, job opportunities, college application advice, speaking engagements, references for employment applications, and financial consultations, leading one youth participant to remark that “doors I didn't even know existed are now open”.



[Student Voice Rubric](#)

[Spectrum of Student Voice](#)

[How do we know when students have agency? Interactive Guide](#)

[Crosstown High School Student Governance Resources](#)

Next Steps

1. Continue to compile relevant resources.
2. Consider how we can test student governance structures at the MS level, especially with students who will potentially be our first group of leaders as freshman.

Sources Cited

Nakkula, Michael, and Eric Toshalis. *Motivation, Engagement and Student Voice*. Apr. 2012, studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Motivation-Engagement-Student-Voice-Students-at-the-Center-1.pdf.

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Towne, Jason. "Recasting At-Risk Students as Leaders." *Education Week*, 21 Feb. 2019, www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/08/06/37towne.h33.html?cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS2.