

Power to the Students!

Building Improvement in Our Education



Town Researchers

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Who We Are...

- The **TOWN RESEARCHERS** are a group of 8 students from different Oakland high schools who do research on how to improve Oakland Schools.
- **MSE (Meaningful Student Engagement)** is a new initiative that is a part of **OUSD (Oakland Unified School District)** that helps to increase student leadership and engagement in schools.
- **YOUTH IN FOCUS** is a nonprofit organization that trains young people to do action research in their community.

Our Project

- This year, we decided to focus our project on Student Empowerment because we felt that most students don't have power in their education.
- Student Empowerment is when students have an equal say in their education and the power to make a change in their schools.

After mapping the main issues in the district, we came up with our research question:

How does Student Empowerment improve education?

Student Engagement & Empowerment

- **Students:** Have knowledge of self, ability to identify problems and plan improvement projects, and are able to speak up to adults.
- **Schools:** Support mechanisms for student empowerment, and facilitate students' access to decision-makers.
- **School Districts:** Support district-wide student engagement efforts, and encourage schools to empower students.



What We Did.....

- 1. Orientation & Teambuilding**
- 2. Research Design**
 - **Develop Research Questions**
 - **Choose & Create Research Tools: Surveys, Interview Guides, and Focus Group Guides**
- 3. Data Collection, Entry & Organization**
- 4. Data Analysis**
- 5. Community Presentations & Action**

Where We Did Our Research....

We partnered with **9 OUSD schools** that are working with Meaningful Student Engagement to do our surveys and interviews.

Middle Schools

- Westlake
- CCPA (Coliseum College Preparatory Academy)
- Roots International Academy

High Schools

- Skyline
- Excel
- CBIT (Castlemont Business and Information Technology)
- Metwest
- YES (Youth Empowerment School)
- Rudsdale

Student Surveys

So far, we've conducted over 460 student surveys in over 27 classrooms at the 9 schools. These are some of the kinds of questions we asked:

- **Multiple Choice:** What would make you feel more empowered at your school?
- **Yes or No:** Do you feel that Student Empowerment is beneficial to your education?
- **Free Response:** Do you feel like you can identify problems at your school and work to improve them?



Interviews with Administrators & Teachers

We interviewed 2-4 administrators and teachers from each school to get their perspectives on Student Empowerment.

Some of the questions we asked are...

- Do you encourage student empowerment? How?
- Can you give one suggestion to improve Student Empowerment at your school?
- How much time and support are you willing to put in to help Student Empowerment?

Student Focus Groups

We ran 2 focus groups with 10 students who came from 5 different schools in the OUSD. The Students came to tell about their experiences and express what they think about Student Empowerment.

Some questions we asked are:

- How does student empowerment improve education in Oakland?
- Does having a leadership class increase student voice in school decisions?
- Do you care about students having more power over their education?

Finding #1

Students want more power over their education.

- 1] Over 80% of surveyed students said they want more power over their education.
- 2] "Students know what works and what doesn't."
-- Student Survey
- 3] "There should be a time when students can express their opinions, how they think the school year is going, what teachers need to improve on."

-- Student Survey

Finding #2

Students don't feel ownership over their school, in large part because they feel teachers and administrators don't listen to them or involve them in decisions.

- 1] 78% of surveyed students feel that they don't have ownership over their education.
- 2] "Students don't make the decisions, and students are at the bottom of the social pyramid of a school."
-- *Student Survey*
- 3] Over 3/4 of students at surveyed schools are not involved in any leadership or decision-making activities at school.

Finding #3

When students are encouraged to speak up, have a voice in school decisions, and feel that what they say actually matters, they will have more ownership over their education.

- 1] "I like when people listen to what students have to say, because we know the school and what we want."

--Student Survey

- 2] 79% of surveyed students said that more student voice in school decisions would make them feel empowered and feel like they have ownership over their education, but 70% haven't worked with administrators or teachers to improve their schools.

- 3] "When students are empowered, they feel safer in taking risks in their learning -- they voice their perspectives more easily and share their opinions and ideas."

-- Teacher Interview

Finding #4

If students have leadership and empowerment in school, participation and safety will most likely improve.

- 1] 88% of surveyed students said that their academics and attendance would or might improve as a result of more student empowerment.
- 2] In our interviews, most teachers agreed that if students have a say in what goes on in their school, their participation in decisions and in class will improve.
- 3] 89% of surveyed students said that more student empowerment would or might bring a safer learning environment to their school.

Finding #5

Leadership classes often help to improve schools and education, but are not necessarily given needed support.

- 1] Over 55% of surveyed students thought that leadership classes at their schools brought more student voice and better student activities.
- 2] "Only leadership classes will make teachers and administrators listen to us."

-- *Student Focus Group*

- 3] In a focus group, one leadership student said that she wasn't supported by administrators when she wanted to make a positive change in her school.

Finding #6

If teachers and administrators aren't effective or just with their students, students will be disempowered and won't be engaged in school.

•1] "A lot of teachers don't do their job right and think that their job is to send students out on referrals."

-- *Student Survey*

•2] "Schools impose rules that seem unnecessary, and students aren't offered an explanation." -- *Student Survey*

•3] "Make teachers teach better. I learn nothing from half of them." -- *Student Survey*

Our Vision

We envision a School District where...

- Students **speak up** and **take initiative** when they see problems to make schools better.
- Students are responsible for **decision-making in partnership** with teachers and administrators who are committed, supportive, and open-minded.
- There are empowering classes, community-building activities, and conflict mediation programs to create a **vibrant and safe learning environment**.
- **Leadership classes** are student-run and engaged with the whole student body, while **administrators** help to implement student ideas.
- Teachers are hired who can teach with **enthusiasm**, make classes **fun** and serious, **relate** to students, and see students as **equals**. Administrators are **present throughout the campus** and are involved with their students.
- These school conditions will help to make our broader **communities stronger, safer, and more just**.

Recommendations

1. School Improvement Dialogues:

- a) School-wide student workshops on school improvement.
- b) Community town hall meetings where students discuss and debate issues on school improvement on a regular basis, and teachers and administrators listen.

2. Action-Based Advisories:

- a) Peer-to-peer advisory systems, with advisory teachers trained to be advisors or experienced community-based advisors.
- b) Advisory time includes teambuilding and community-building to bring different types of students together and develop leadership skills to empower students to lead school improvement campaigns.

3. Student Evaluation & Participation in Hiring:

- a) Students evaluate their teachers and administrators at every school at least each semester.
- b) Student representatives supported to be on all committees to hire teachers and administrators with equal voice.

Recommendations

4. Resources Prioritized for Student Engagement:

- a) Money for more field learning trips, after school programs, and extracurricular activities that engage students in school.
- b) Hire and train effective and student-competent administrators to work with students to improve the school, modeling effective and empowering leadership for the school.
- c) Every school should have a Leadership Class with a trained teacher (student or adult) who has an empowerment coach.
- d) 360-degree support system for Leadership Classes, in which administrators, all teachers, and students give their support.

5. Measurable Student Empowerment for All Schools:

- a) Change the state School Accountability Report Card (SARC) to include measurement of student empowerment, leadership, and engagement at each school.

Upcoming Action Steps

- Present to and follow-up with All City Council student leaders.
- Present to and follow-up with Oakland Unified School Board members.
- Create a website with a digital toolkit that other students can use.
- Develop an underground media campaign to inform students.

Project Reflections

What We Learned...

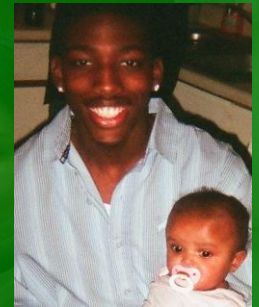
- All the schools that we researched are facing similar issues, and the majority of students have often very similar ideas to improve them.
- What we see across the school district is that unfair policies implemented without student voice have led to the decline of student engagement and higher drop-out rates.
- Next year, we want to research how to improve a specific issue that came up in our research, such as teacher engagement with students.

The Town Researchers



I'm Jenny Nguyen, 14 years old, a freshman at O-high. I love playing volleyball, and get good grades in school!!!

My name is Tony Robinson, and I am currently a senior at College Preparatory and Architecture Academy at Fremont High school in Oakland. I enjoy writing, I am an all around athlete, and I am also very family-oriented. HOPE YOU ENJOYED OUR PRESENTATION!!!



I'm Robert Zavala 15 years old, a sophomore at Met West high school, I love animals and like playing any type of sport that is fun to me.

My name is Lehabim Bravo, and I am a senior at Oasis HS. I enjoy school and animals, and I hope to become a veterinarian.



My name is Noemi Bravo. I'm a sophomore currently attending Envision Academy. I like going to school, learning new things, and also participating in different student clubs.



Hi, my name is Terriana Hill. I am senior at College Prep and Architecture Academy. My main focus is being a part of making the Oakland Unified School District students empowered.



Hey, my name is Marjorie Morgan, and I attend Metwest High School. In addition, I am a sophomore and proud of it. I have many talents such as writing poetry and dancing. I like to shop, love to talk on the phone, and enjoy meeting new people. I guess you can say I'm a pretty outgoing person!



My name is Amir Elhmdi, and I'm a senior at College Prep and Architecture Academy. I like music, and I would like to pursue a career in music, but I also understand that I need to have a Plan B in life.



Thank you!

感謝

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