

**Student Engagement Recommendation for the Colorado State Board of Education
SCEE Student Engagement TAG Report
February 2011**

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Background

In recent years, education research has begun focusing on the important links between student engagement and student achievement, and the importance of engagement for academic success, attendance, and graduation rates (Fullan, 2001; Noguera, 2002; Ruddock et al., 1997 as cited in Mitra & Goss, 2009). Meaningfully engaging students in school renewal efforts and evaluations of systems and staff have the power to teach them democratic principles, empower and motivate them towards academic achievement, and show them that their voices and unique perspective in the educational system are important and valued.

As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in Denver in 2008, “Students know what’s working and not working in schools before anyone else.” Additionally, as the initial findings from the \$45 million Gates-funded Measures of Effective Teaching Project seem to indicate, surveying students about their perceptions of the education they receive is effective for several reasons. First, “students seem to know effective teaching when they experience it: student perceptions in one class are related to the achievement gains in other classes taught by the same teacher” (MET Project, 9) and student perceptions of good teaching corresponded with value-added data for teachers based on student achievement gains on “existing state assessments” (MET Project, 2) and assessments that measure “higher-order conceptual understanding” (MET Project, 2). Secondly, student perception surveys are practical because student views are so accessible and affordable. As both new and seasoned teachers at Bruce Randolph School in Denver have stated, student feedback for teachers allows them to immediately improve their practice. Additionally, they exemplify an idea that most successful businesses rely on – asking for feedback from the customer to improve your product. While some may

view the surveys as only a popularity contest for teachers, MET Project data found that effective survey questions instead ask students to “give feedback on *specific aspects* of a teacher’s practice,” (MET Project, 7).) which requires students to reflect on actual ways in which a teacher’s classroom actions, behaviors or demeanor are influencing their experience.

Project VOYCE is a Denver non-profit organization with the mission of increasing student voice in school renewal to improve engagement and achievement. This work group has worked closely with Project VOYCE for guidance on recommendations based on their work with Colorado schools (especially in Denver.) Over the course of almost two years of work at Bruce Randolph School, Project VOYCE has seen the power of student-teacher partnerships to change the culture of a school and academic achievement. There is no reason this type of transformation can’t happen on a state-wide level in conjunction with other improvement strategies.

I. Student Evaluations of Teachers

Rationale:

The intent of Colorado Senate Bill 191 is to improve education for all students in Colorado by improving educator effectiveness. From the U.S. Secretary of Education, to a growing body of research, to actual teacher practices in Colorado, shows that student input in the quality of teaching they experience is accessible, affordable and is unique because of its proximity to daily teaching practices.

Teachers will be evaluated on student growth, on principal perceptions, and on peer evaluations. The only people left out of the mix are the people teachers spend most of their time with...their students. Integrating student perception surveys with other data sources builds a more complete picture. The integration of different data sources, including student surveys, will allow teachers and administrators to identify more effective teaching practices for every teacher in Colorado. According to Taylor Betz, a Bruce Randolph math teacher with 17 years of experience, “I can’t teach without asking my students for feedback.”

Recommendations:

To better provide teachers with feedback enabling them to become highly effective and truly serve the students they are teaching, and to improve current systems of educator evaluations in schools, local school systems and schools are strongly encouraged to administer surveys to students in grades 6-12 in order to gather student perceptions of their learning experience. The survey data should be used to provide teachers with feedback on their performance. Where appropriate, districts are strongly encouraged to use these data as part of the multiple measures of teacher professional practice outlined in the Council’s evaluation framework recommendations.

1. Districts may administer surveys to gather student perceptions of teaching practices;
 - a. Student surveys shall be independent and weighted separately from parent surveys

- b. Require the administration of surveys and collection of data for all students in grades 6-12.
- c. Strongly encourage the development and utilization of frequent feedback practices for all students in grades K-5.
- d. Surveys will be distributed; data collected, and analyzed no less than once per grading period at each school.
- e. Student surveys will be weighted no less than any of the multiple measures that are not associated with student growth.

To ensure student, teacher and administrator input is included in survey development, The Colorado Department of Education should...

- 1. Assemble a body of students, teachers and administrators and collaboratively approve the surveys and distribution procedures that are created or adopted on a local level.

II. Student input in teacher and principal selection

Rationale:

Colorado Senate Bill 191 intends to improve systems of evaluation for educators and principals to improve the quality of instruction for students. However, selecting the right personnel for each building is vital to create a culture of achievement for administrators, teachers and students.

Including students in leadership decisions in a school is a key way to engage them in a meaningful way. When students know their voices are heard and their perspectives are used to collaboratively make leadership decisions, they are more likely to be emotionally and behaviorally engaged with their school environment.

Additionally, students are often able to provide a unique perspective when it comes to identifying candidates for teacher and principal positions who are culturally competent, engage all students, and are firm in the belief that all students can learn.

Recommendations:

To staff schools with teachers and principals who are committed to engaging students to increase achievement rates, local school systems and schools are strongly encouraged to...

- a. Utilize students as partners in decision making processes;
- b. Involve selected students in the interviewing process and final decision-making when hiring teachers and principals

Works referenced and other sources

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