

Engage your students in creating a thriving school community

Listen to your students and involve them directly in effective school planning.



Eric Hardie

Superintendent of Instruction at the
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

Background

Former user of the OurSCHOOL Survey, Eric Hardie has worked closely with The Learning Bar data over the past 6 years. This article showcases his work on effective school planning and the power of involving students in school improvement decisions.

Collaborate to enhance your school improvement initiatives

School improvement initiatives often fall short of their intended goals. One reason cited within the school community is the lack of student involvement in the process. Our students provide us with a wealth of information, their participation in data analysis and planning facilitates the identification of effective interventions and their successful implementation.

“so many school improvement initiatives fail and so many dollars are wasted every year because the adults in the school are always guessing at what might work for students. Why guess? Just ask your students. They’ll develop plans they know will work.”

(Hardie, 2015, p. 96)

Make students the drivers of change

Fostering an open and collaborative approach to shape school action plans allows students to take ownership in creating a positive school culture for learning and personal growth. Schools that used their perception data and involve students in creating and sharing initiatives, preparing custom questions or using data walls and infographics are far more likely to achieve success.

“Three factors that motivate people are autonomy, mastery, and purpose.”

(Pink, 2009)

These principles can be extended to illustrate the value of meaningfully involving students in decisions that affect their educational experience.

When schools are reflecting on the amount of student voice currently being accessed, Hardie encourages them to ask themselves these guiding questions:

- 1 How much input do students have into the school improvement plan?
- 2 How frequently are students invited to participate in staff meetings and professional development in which the topic is increasing student learning and school improvement?
- 3 What percentage of the school budget is committed to student-led initiatives that are aligned with the school improvement plan that students helped developed?

Use expert tips to get started

Hardie suggests the following tips to get started:



Form and engage a group of students that are representative of the student body.

Remember, some of the most valuable student feedback comes from those who are not engaged in school so be sure to hear from those who do not always have a voice.



Involve students in the analysis of their perception data.

Students will often have different interpretations of the data than adults whose perceptions can sometimes present an unrealistic and/or idyllic school experience.



Promote open-ended solutions.

Encourage safe and doable solutions and don't limit students through overly-restrictive criteria.



Give students time and autonomy.

By trusting in students they will engage more seriously in the process of data analysis.

“All schools have the resources required—they just need to start really listening to their students and create opportunities for students to take the lead.”

(Hardie, 2015, p. 94)

Hardie has worked closely with both teachers and school leaders to provide professional training and development. He is an advocate for actioning student voice in order to create safe and inclusive school experiences for all.

Use Hardie's [School Culture Surveys](#): [School Self-Assessment](#) to gauge your school's success in effectively using student perception data.

References

- Hardie, E. (2019). Giving Teens a Place at the Table. *Educational Leadership*, 76(8), 18-23.
- Hardie, E. (2015). When students drive improvement. *Educational Leadership*, 72, 92-96.
- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Riverhead Books.