

STUDENT VOICE: FROM TOKEN PARTICIPATION TO ENGAGED
PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

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The education system is under increased scrutiny, imposed accountability, and transparency while school leaders are expected to seek input from a range of external stakeholders including parents, community officials, organizations, politicians, and businesses to improve schools and increase student achievement (Fullan, 2000). Unfortunately, there is a wealth of untapped insight from key stakeholders and educational beneficiaries, students, who are excluded from sharing their perspectives and ideas in determining school policy and practice (Zion, 2009). Due to their positional lens and unique perspective, designating students as authentic stakeholders so that they have space to participate in the democratic decision-making of educational reform requires systemic changes in the school organization, beginning with the superintendent's influence as a change agent. The specific problem is the lack of space in the educational organization for students to be included in the decision-making process in their education. Past research discusses the positive outcomes of students partnering with teachers to identify and improve relevant issues in their school. These initiatives based on student voice have been linked to increased student achievement. My research focused on interpreting students' descriptions of their school experiences through with a focus on participation in decision making against a framework of student voice participation and

relating it to the superintendent's role as a change agent. This study examined one case in the summer after the completion of an academic year. This case study reflected the perception of student voice in one suburban school district. The purpose of this design was to describe the uniqueness of each representative role, while still allowing for analysis of themes across all data. This researcher looked at the implications and challenges the superintendent faced when including students as active participants in the democratic decision-making process of education. The findings used in this study may guide future superintendent groups to study the benefits and challenges of including students as stakeholders in education to develop active citizenship skills, to include students in participatory decision-making within the school organization and empower students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In an era of disruption, where questioning conventional wisdom and social conditioning have led to the rapid advancement of industries and economies, the decision-making process in the education system continues to remain stagnant. The education system is under increased scrutiny, imposed accountability, and transparency while school leaders are expected to seek input from a range of external stakeholders including parents, community officials, organizations, politicians, and businesses to improve schools and increase student achievement (Fullan, 2000). Unfortunately, there is a wealth of untapped insight from key stakeholders and educational beneficiaries, students, who are excluded from sharing their perspectives and ideas in determining school policy and practice (Zion, 2009). Darling-Hammond (2010) identified that the amount of technical information doubles every two years; as a result, education can no longer rely on transmitting pieces of information displayed on standardized tests without authentic student participation. Rather, students need to be encouraged to think critically and learn for themselves so that they can quickly access and leverage knowledge so that they might effectively apply knowledge and navigate the demands of evolving information, technology, employment and social conditions.

School districts should consider organizational changes such as youth-adult partnerships where student voice is utilized to provide students with a sense of belonging, motivation, and power over their education which could provide unrealized benefits (Mitra & Gross, 2009). When students have agency in their education, the school

community benefits from their perspective and idealism (Cooks-Sather, 2006). Most researchers working in the field of student voice agree that “empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so that they have a stake in the outcomes is one of the most powerful tools schools have” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 29). Including student voice in organizational change has the potential to transform educational outcomes as students become leaders in their education rather than passive recipients (Mitra, 2007).

Most schools emphasize raising test scores and use an educational "banking model" (Freire, 2009) that treat students as passive recipients and invalidates the important skills and life experiences that students bring to the classroom. This conventional form of education persists despite research suggesting that students who are more involved in their schooling are more professional and have a higher level of self-esteem when given opportunities to be part of the decision-making process (Deci & Ryan, 2008). While student outcomes are measured and calculated, students are an underrepresented stakeholder in education without decision-making opportunity and power. Conversations about the needs of students are at the center of effective schools, be it at a Committee on Special Education (CSE) meeting, district planning meetings, or staffing committees. School district superintendents are evaluating best practices in education, analyzing test data, and synthesizing research findings to improve student achievement, educational outcomes, and school climate (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004). Yet, the voice of the students is missing in all the meaningful work about children. Students are affected by adult decisions that reform their education, although they are

continually excluded from the processes and decisions that influence major changes (Zion, 2009).

Many studies have discussed the value of having students included as educational partners. Mansfield (2014), cited empirical evidence indicating that students engaged in student voice activities develop a civic mindedness that is essential to democracy. Much of the literature discusses the positive outcomes of students partnering with teachers to identify and improve relevant issues in their school. These initiatives based on student voice have been linked to increased student achievement (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002), increased student engagement (Fielding, 2001; 2004), improved school climate (Voight, 2015), and an increased sense of civic engagement (Bringer, Studer, Wilson, Clayton, & Steinberg, 2011). When students' voices are involved in a school reform, it is more likely to be successful (Mitra, 2009). Despite the benefits of student voice, there is a lack of genuine opportunities for student voice in schools, while the role of the superintendent in supporting meaningful student voice practice is relatively unexplored.

Educational policies and analysis portraying students as numbers and numerical scores neglect students' social realities, trivialize student experience, and fail to achieve their goals (Fielding, 2001). All these decisions have an impact on student learning and educational outcomes. By nature of their position, students have the potential to be the greatest resource of information due to their positional lens. One of the founding goals of public schools in the U.S. pertained to uniting Americans by instilling common values, both civically and morally. Such educational objectives continued in the 21st century, with government policies still relying on schools to instill in the moral values of students, collective cultural identity, and civic values (Spring,

2019). The ramifications of students not having a voice include decisions being made without true representation which leads to disengagement (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Additionally, students have the right to be involved (Damiani, 2012). Student voice advocates challenge the passive role of students within schools to re-define student-teacher relationships as a joint endeavor in learning (Fielding, 2007). The transformation of school cultures into successful collaborative systems that seek unified goals will require leaders in leadership positions to be intentional in seeking feedback from the students who are the most affected about school policies and decisions (Leithwood, Anderson & Wahlstrom 2004). According to DeFur and Korinek (2009), honoring student voice led to school systems that provided space for meaningful experiences for their students, which ultimately led to school improvement and higher academic standards. Creating school systems where ideas and thoughts are shared collaboratively and effectively includes students on a variety of levels of participatory decision-making creating space for sharing views that led to the potential for increased problem solving toward improved academic outcomes for all (Mitra, 2003). Moreover, research indicates including students in the decision-making process improves school climate (Voight, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to determine to what extent students experience authentic democratic participation as it relates to the decision-making process of education. The current research will study common patterns in the superintendent's and students' perceptions of students as decision makers and focus on the perceptions of representative student groups in middle school and high school. The superintendent is the school district's top executive and, as such, can be critical to influencing organizational

change. Local school boards are representatives of the community and have been an integral aspect to the public education system for many years (Beckham, Wills & Weeks, 2016). School board members are formally designated as stakeholders in education and hold positions of influence within the school district on decision making (Gemberling, Smith & Villani, 2000). As such, a school board is the elected body that serves as the policy making arm of a school district. Among its functions are the approval of the annual budget, final approval of items submitted by the superintendent and the selection of the superintendent (Leithwood, 1995). Decisions by superintendents often result from interaction and influence with this stakeholder group to whom they are held to account (Coburn, Touré & Yamashita, 2009). While the role of the school board is significant and essential in school decision making, this study focused on the role of the superintendent to drive systemic change in organizational reform and create space to include students as influential stakeholders.

By creating an environment conducive to meaningful student voice inclusion, superintendent leadership can be vital to setting the stage. Research indicates a limited to moderate correlation between superintendents and academic achievement (Hart & Ogawa, 1987). While there are only a few empirical studies on the instructional leadership role of superintendents (Castagnola, 2003), this research focused on the perceptions of the Superintendent of Schools and students in one suburban school district in grades seven through twelve.

As leaders of an organization, superintendents are essential in the planning and implementation of organizational change (Ireh & Bailey, 1999). Creating and sustaining thoughtful and deliberate improvement is a high priority for school leaders.

Organizational change can lead to cultural change, and superintendents can inform organizational change. According to Senge (2000), the establishment in which we put our greatest hopes for the future of children is often inculcated with tradition and industrialized mindset. By nature of their position and perspective, students have information that leaders need in order to make informed decisions that can have enduring and impactful results. While there has been a rise in student surveys conducted to measure perceptions of school climate, the lines of inquiry are one-directional and do not reveal what students can provide on improving engagement, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Damiani 2012). Cook-Sather (2006), pointed out that school leaders must help students realize and exercise their own power.

Providing space and opportunities for students to use their voice in school decision making has the potential to greatly impact their learning and development. By including students' perspectives when deciding how to create space for student voice will help district leadership in partnering with students as stakeholders. Students report that adults rarely listen to their views and they rarely involve students in important decisions (Mitra, 2008). The current research examines the structures and practices, both instructional and institutionally, as pertaining to students in the democratic process of schooling. In secondary education specifically, there is an absence of engaged partnership with students due to a lack of opportunities for students to truly be included in the process of authentic decision making in their schooling.

Presently, students can have a token partnership through clubs, such as student council or participate in site-based management teams. Typically, student council is a non-representative group of students making decisions on social events and other low-

level decisions. When student government in American schools was first created in 1894, it was designed to replicate citizen participation in a democracy, providing students with opportunities for voice in their school (Johnson, 1991). Yet, the school government structure has failed to reach its potential to serve as the main arena for students to have voice partly because of the lack of meaningful involvement in school decision-making (Rudduck, 2017). Rarely are students sitting on interview committees, rating teacher effectiveness, choosing curricula, or participating in organizational change. To graduate good citizens to participate in a democratic republic, research is needed about elevating and utilizing student voice to inform superintendents to actively include students as part of the democratic decision making in schools.

After the Parkland shooting, students showed up in large numbers to protest gun violence. Some students are using their voice to drive change and “a new era of youth leading the charge for justice is being introduced across the country as massive marches and movements take place demanding student safety and gun reform” (Stanley, 2018, p. 3). Driving change in education must include students as partners in the democratic process due to their unique perspective and insight. Mansfield (2015) noted, “the recent events in Parkland, Florida and subsequent student activism illustrate that not only can students be a catalyst for change, but it is important for adults to listen, value, elevate, and respond to their voices” (p. 5). Accessibility and proliferation of social media platforms encourages participatory behaviors, promotes content development, and supports public participation (Doldi, 2009). Social media has been recognized as a means for improving young people’s participation in public spaces as well as enhancing their civic engagement (Greenhow & Li 2013). In terms of student voice and engagement,

young people chose to utilize social media to organize and participate in civic activism. Scholars and researchers who study students discover not so much the shortcomings and limitations of adolescents, but rather their surprising and extraordinary strengths and abilities coupled with an inexhaustible need for expression and fulfillment (Malaguzzi, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

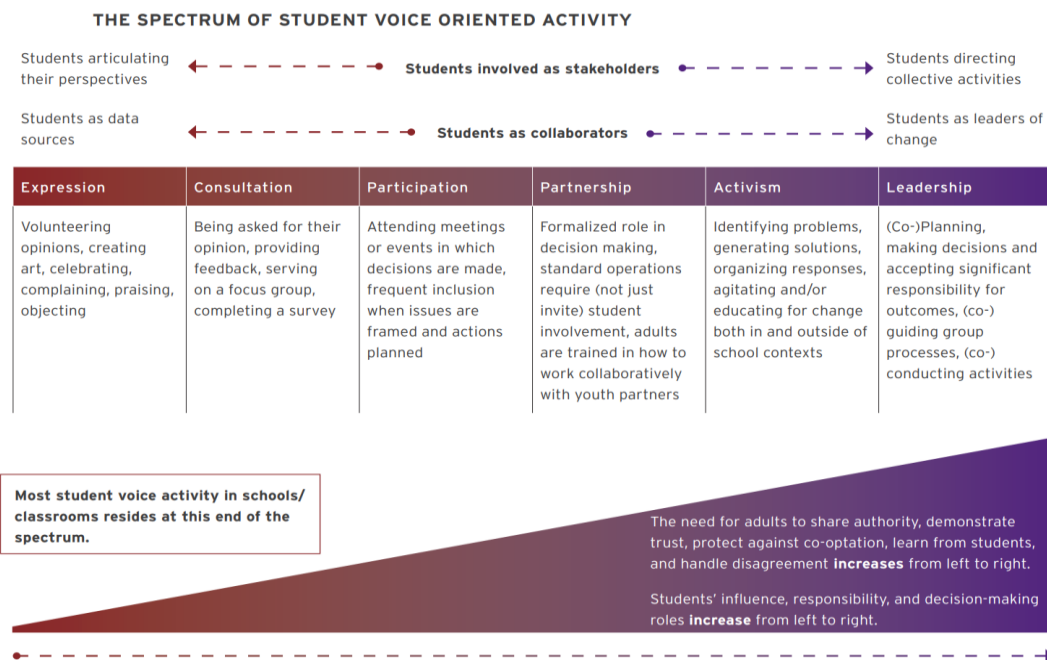
The conceptual framework used for this study is grounded in Eric Toshalis and Michael J. Nakkula's (2013) notion of the student voice spectrum as it applies to the space created for students to experience authentic democratic participation in their schooling. When viewed through this lens, the educational organization assumes that stakeholders do not include students. There is a need to develop policies, practices, and programs that include students as partners in decision-making.

This researcher analyzed the interviews of student participants, the superintendent, reflective field notes, and artifacts within a school district to elicit major themes and assess the range of alignment with the student voice spectrum. The conceptual model provided in Figure 1 is intended to show how student voice is perceived in one school district. Using this conceptual lens, with an awareness of a relevant group of stakeholders, will provide the framework to examine and expand on student voice dialogue.

To help make sense of the field student voice discourse, the visual model in Figure 1 was used to frame significant themes within the school district. This visual model displays a range of student-voice activities. As the figure shifts from left to right, the tasks, duties, and decision-making authorities of students develop. Student voice operation on the left is limited to youth speaking their minds; on the right, students can

direct the collective actions of peers and adults alike. Likewise, on the left side, students tend to be data sources but are more often seen as leaders of change. The central areas are where events combine both orientations in ways that identify students as partners while allowing them to work alongside, but not yet lead adults to achieve specific objectives (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013).

Figure 1: Spectrum of Student Voice Activity



Note. Reprinted with permission from “*Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice Toolkit*,” by E. Toshalis and M.J Nakkula 2013, *Jobs for the Future*.

Theoretical Framework

Although the goals of the school organization promote student learning, the organizational and administrative structures, as well as the accountability requirements, may alter the organization's ability to create an environment conducive to the inclusion of students in participatory decision-making. Adults frequently justify excluding students from valuable systems and processes of decision-making by accepting a system and

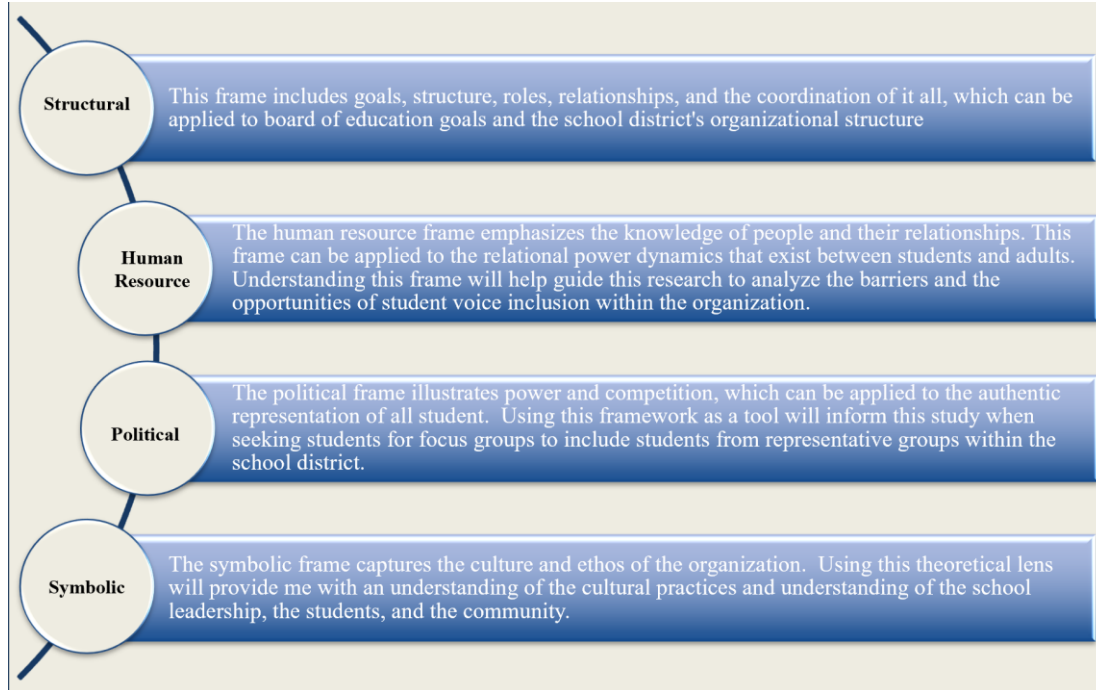
holding onto perceptions regarding the efficacy of young people's potential to be effective agents of change (Costello, Spielberger, & Wynn, 2001). As a result, collaboration in schools promoting youth-adult governance are relatively rare. Creating space for students to have authentic participation in the decision-making process requires fundamental organizational change beginning with the school district's organizational leader (Mitra, 2009). Sharing responsibility for important tasks with teachers and other school stakeholders can improve change efforts as well as strengthen the skills and knowledge of school staff while enhancing community cohesion (Copeland 2003; Elmore, 2000).

Actively creating space for student voice inclusion that begins with the superintendent, the school district leader, invites the study of organizational change. Bolman and Deal (1984), popularized their model of organizational frames model, which centers on the complexity and ambiguity in organizational phenomena. The authors use four frames to view organizations, which integrate the frames to provide effective leadership practices. The Four Frame Model, often applied to the business world, can be applied to the school organization. The structural frames center on an organization's architecture. This frame includes goals, structure, roles, relationships, and the coordination of it all, which can be applied to board of education goals and the school district's organizational structure. The human resource frame emphasizes the knowledge of people and their relationships. This frame can be applied to the relational power dynamics that exist between students and adults. Understanding this frame will help guide this research to analyze the barriers and the opportunities of student voice inclusion within the organization. The political frame illustrates power and competition, which can

be applied to the authentic representation of all student. Using this framework as a tool will inform this study when seeking students for focus groups to include students from representative groups within the school district. The symbolic frame captures the culture and ethos of the organization. Using the theoretical lens will provide a deep understanding of the cultural practices and the school leadership, the students, and the community. Using only one frame cannot provide an insightful perspective to managing organizations.

Systematic change is crucial to relationships within an organization. The notion of where power is currently situated versus what is necessary to create space for student voice practice requires analysis. Currently, the educational structure and practices preclude students as participants. Understanding power relations may inform improved school processes and operations. Starhawk (2002), who has contributed significant work on power relations, distinguishes between three types of power. “Power over” refers to a hierarchal relation to domination and control, “power within” refers to one’s sense of personal ability and the “power with” which suggests influence in a group of equals. It is crucial to understand the notion of power theory when discussing organizational and institutional change. The power dynamics alongside Bolman and Deal’s (2017), organizational frames will guide this research on student voice practice and serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

Figure 2: *Reframing Organization Model*



Significance/Importance of the Study

Students represent the largest group of stakeholders in the educational landscape with the least amount of democratic participation in the decision-making process. This researcher looked at the implications and challenges the superintendent faces when students are included as active participants in the democratic process of education. According to Mansfield, Welton and Halx (2018), “the school leader is pivotal in fostering student voice and the restoration of such democratic ideals” (p. 15). As researcher, I examined the spectrum of student voice across themes that emerge from documents, interviews, interview observations, emails, Board of Education policies and focus groups. The results used in this study may guide future superintendent groups to study the benefits and challenges of including students as stakeholders in education to develop active citizenship skills and empower students. There is a need for meaningful

student participation in decision making which will lead to student empowerment, student engagement, and belonging. Schools struggle to find the recipe that will engage students and provide a sense of belonging which leads to student engagement. Research by Goldspink and Foster (2013), stated that disengaged achievers are a concern for schools because in the current practices of schools, students can achieve high marks and grades, yet are challenged by the more complex thinking they will face as workers and citizens.

Welcoming students to participate in the governance of their schools allows school leaders to learn the unique student perspectives regarding school dynamics and subsequently design and build a community around effective change strategy. Fullan (2007), in his work on educational change theory, posits the cycle of reform is about setting the framework for quality improvement to occur and overcome inevitable obstacles to reform. School reform that includes student voice helps cultivate a school environment, culture, and behaviors that facilitate positive and effective learning environments along with beneficial student and educator outcomes (Mansfield, 2014; 2015). While the idea of student voice has been around quite some time, it is often overlooked in the field of educational leadership. Since superintendents are influential adults in schools and are crucial to setting the culture and leading initiatives for school change, it is essential to engage the field of educational leadership to address socio-cultural conditions and institutional structures that place students as key partners in school reform (Brasof, 2015).

This research study fills the gap in student voice literature through an examination of the superintendent's practices, attitudes, and procedures. Research exists on the principal's role in including student voice; however, there is scant research for

organizational inclusion of student voice beginning at the superintendent's level. The results of this study will guide superintendents on how to create space for students to authentically participate in the education system to advance the voice of students and increase student agency. Much of the work done in the area of student voice has focused on underperforming schools in urban settings. Thus far, no study has focused on the role of superintendent as it pertains to inclusion of student voice to drive organizational change. Information about elevating student voice is needed to inform school leaders on the benefits of including student ideas, opinions, and thoughts as part of the decision-making process in schools.

This study investigated the current practices of a superintendent in student voice inclusion. The study expanded on extant research as to the benefits and barriers of including student voice in the decision-making process. Looking through the positional lens of a superintendent and students will provide research as to how organizational change can begin at the superintendent's level and have an enduring impact on educational outcomes and school reform. This study focused on the youth-adult partnership necessary to create a paradigm shift in the structure and organization of schools.

I evaluated perceptions of student voice through collected data within a suburban school district by conducting interviews with student focus groups, completing superintendent interviews, and gathering district documents for content analysis to analyze the perceptions and themes of student voice that emerge from data. The results provided an important reference for those seeking to understand the impact of including student voice beginning at the superintendent's level. Understanding the perceptions and

attitudes towards student voice inclusion that are shared by students and superintendent may elicit deeper conversations about how student voice may be used in organizational change and future research on the school leader. Practical applications of the findings of this study includes the creation of a knowledge base to guide superintendents' professional practice, future design of professional development for educational leaders, and design student voice forums and initiatives specifically tailored to organizational change.

Research Questions

This study included three research questions to gather research and evidence for the results. The research questions for the study included:

1. To what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures in one suburban district provide space for student voice?
2. To what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students?
3. What is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the superintendent in this suburban school district?

Definition of Terms

Active citizenship: The active citizen is one who does not readily accept the standard practices but queries them, demonstrates active participation in social and political arenas, and becomes aware of his rights and responsibilities. Active citizens have a sense of responsibility and openness, as well as a willingness to cooperate. Active citizens respect individual differences, recognize social diversity, work together for the common good, and resolve conflicts are characteristics of active citizens (Akin, Calik, & Engin-Demir, 2017).

Banking Model of Education: The concept "banking model" in education refers to the scope of action allowed for the students applies only to the collection, filing and storage of deposits (Friere, 2018)

Civic education: Civic education is a school-based experience for democratic societies that play a prominent role for individual citizens by encouraging them to learn more about the political and civic society and to become more engaged, cooperative, and trusting. Individuals work together on such issues across the society as they learn better in a participatory and inclusive way about democratic processes (Crittenden & Levine, 2018).

Participatory decision-making: The extent that leadership of an organization allows or encourages its constituents to share or participate in organizational decision-making. The degree of participation in different participatory management (PM) stages could range from zero to 100%. Participatory decision-making is one of many ways an organization can make decisions. The leader must think of the best style possible, which will allow the organization to achieve the best results. According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, constituents need to feel a sense of belonging to an organization (Probst, 2005).

School climate: School climate refers to the social atmosphere of an environment in which students have different experiences depending on how the teachers and administrators set up protocols. School climate also refers to the feelings and attitudes elicited by the environment of a school. Most scholars accept that it is a multidimensional construct spanning physical, social, and academic aspects. It is

an orderly setting in which the school family feels valued and able to carry out the school's mission free of disruption and safety concerns (Block, 2011).

Stakeholders: Stakeholders have a personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern. In education, the term stakeholder denotes constituents who are involved in the school system and are involved with the well-being of students and educational outcomes. Stakeholders in education include administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, family members, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as members of the school board, town councilors, and state representatives. The stakeholders may also be collective entities, such as local businesses, organizations, advocacy groups, committees, media outlets, and cultural institutions, as well as organizations representing specific groups, such as teachers' unions, parent-teachers' associations and associations representing superintendents, directors, school boards or teachers.

Student empowerment: Student empowerment is an attitudinal, systemic, and cultural practice, mechanism, or outcome where students of any age gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and improve their schools, to learn, and schooling. (Fletcher, 2015).

Student engagement: Student engagement in education refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion shown by students when learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they need to learn and progress in their education. In general, the principle of student engagement is the idea that learning improves when students are inquisitive,

interested, or motivated and that learning appears to decline when students are bored, disheartened, disaffected or otherwise "disengaged." Stronger student participation or better student engagement are rising educational objectives shared by educators.

Student Voice: A collection of interconnected ideas concerning positive youth development, motivation, and philosophy of involvement, based on the belief that students have insight regarding their learning needs and interests. The concept of student voice is the inclusion of student representation to represent their ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout the education system to advance schools. Students have the authority to bring about changes by having power, authenticity, and validity in the education system. Student voice is the concept of youth-adult partnership and consultation, and authentic participation with an active role in decision-making (Mitra, 2008, Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013).

Chapter 2

Review of Related Research

An integrative literature review was conducted to locate current research that has been used to examine the role of the superintendent to lead change on elevating student voice reform in schools. A search of electronic databases of education, sociology, and psychology library journals, including ProQuest and EBSCO, were accessed to gather empirical studies on this topic. Keywords were used to search for general articles that included student voice, power relationships, student stakeholders, democratic participation, civic engagement, school climate, and distributed leadership. The search was narrowed to locate studies within the last twenty years, ten years and then within the last five years.

The literature review is structured to provide an overview of the concepts that support and embody student voice to orient the reader to the context of the study. The supporting topics of background such as student voice, youth-adult partnerships and the superintendent's role as the school leader and change agent are discussed in connection to student voice. In addition, multiple approaches to categorizing student voice involvement are presented with a focus on Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) spectrum of student voice as a conceptual framework for this study. Since this research sought to examine how the role of the superintendent leads organizational change with intentional inclusion of student voice creates a more responsive schools and more responsive models of leadership, organization change is explained as the theoretical framework of the study.

Student Voice History

Student voice is not a new concept. There is empirical evidence that allows students to have voice contributes to the creation of democratic habits that are important for democracy, even at the most basic level (Fielding, 2001). Moreover, students who have agency in education leads to improvements in curriculum and strengthens the relationship between teacher and students. There was a trend in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s called student power in which students demanded the right to participate in decision-making that affected their educational future. This effort focused primarily on democratic principles and rights at the post-secondary level and resulted in some lasting changes at this level. There was subsequently a shift away from the student voice to an increasing perception of students as passive consumers of their education (Levin, 2000; Mansfield, 2018).

The United States has spent significant political and financial resources on improving education, from *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 to the *Race to the Top* Federal changes today (Birman, et. All., 2013). In response to these findings, efforts at optimizing school performance began with the introduction of high-stakes tests to evaluate the progress of schools and students (Carnoy, Elmore & Siskin, 2013). This culture has been reinforced by the increased focus on results-based accountability that has grown in education since the 1980s (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Decades later, the US has made very little progress in significantly improving its schools' education and global competitiveness (Grotsky, Warren & Felts 2008). In the early 1990s, several educational and social analysts noted the absence of student voices in learning and teaching experiences and called for a reconsideration of these exclusions (Cook-Sather, 2018). In the 1990s, the notion of student voice emerged in the United States as educators and

social critics noted the remarkable absence of student voice from school conversations and worked to address this issue (Cook-Sather, 2006). The focus of this increased interest in student involvement was on the positive impact of student voice. Student voice needed to be considered for reforms to be more successful. Considering the significant history of the student voice movement, Cook-Sather (2010) pointed out that there still “is a prevalent assumption that young people are neither able to offer nor interested in offering insights about teaching and learning” (p. 3).

The Children's Rights Movement

In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child declared that young people have the right to express their views on all matters concerning them when their opinions would be given due weight by the child's age and maturity. The Children's Rights Movement as a catalyst had an impact in some school board policies and practices as well as in aligning with the cultural portrayal of children as capable social agents (Fielding, 2001). This declaration gave legitimacy to consulting children and triggered governments to develop related policies. There are movements in most countries to provide children a say in matters that concern them (Levin, 2000). Some countries that have systems that require students to be involved in educational discussions and on school boards are Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden (Levin, 2000).

The commitment to give children a voice is consistent with studies of childhood, which visualizes children as competent agents in, rather than passive recipients of, social and cultural change. This view sees children as fully formed beings with their own ideas and interests. The notion that children cannot play an active role in shaping different experiences is being disputed as they demonstrate an understanding of issues, both moral and social (Woolfson et al., 2006). The Children's Rights Movement served as an

influence in some policies and practices of both governments and school boards, as well as aligning with the philosophical representation of children as competent social agents.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Partnering and collaborating with students provides an opportunity for institutional change which requires a shift in attitudes and relationships (Cook-Sather, 2002). Mitra (2007), collected data during a project that explored the factors that encourage and limit the creation of school-based youth adult-partnerships. In this study, the sample included 13 high schools in the San Francisco Bay area that received grant funding from a local foundation to work on building a student voice initiative in schools. The population among the 13 high schools were an ethnically diverse population composed students of Asian, Latin, African, and European descent with high concentrations of poverty. The majority of the schools were large with a population of 2,000 or more. One school was a charter school and the two others were “last chance” schools that offered students an opportunity to finish their diplomas when they had been expelled or otherwise removed from traditional district schools.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured telephone interviews at the beginning of the grant cycle with a minimum of two and a maximum of five individuals participating in each of the 13 youth-adult partnership groups, and again at the end of the grant cycle. The coding framework that directed the data analysis was developed using a grounded theoretical approach (Mitra, 2007).

The researcher analyzed how the youth–adult relationships were represented by the participants, including interviews. Data collection also included gathering media coverage group records, internal reports, and pages from community and school websites. Observations were made of mandatory meetings that brought prospective grant recipients

together to learn about the grant process and subsequent meetings after funding was awarded, which allowed schools to share various successes and difficulties with each other to promote open communication between grant recipients. Interview, observation transcripts, and written documents were read several times to identify themes that emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The next step consisted of identifying the central theme around which the categories fit. The central themes for this study centered on how the data illustrated whether administrators support or impede the success of student voice initiatives in this project. Findings from this research project indicated that as advocates for youth-adult partnerships, administrators can play many important roles. Specifically, administrators can foster youth-adult partnerships within a school-wide learning community, buffer students from school administrative bureaucracy, and build bridges with intermediary organizations beyond school walls. Some limitations of Mitra's (2007), research were that students who participated in this study were not a representative group based on the demographics of the schools' population. Part of this was because only academically qualified students participated, limiting the ability to determine generalizable patterns. "The research on youth-adult partnerships also does not contain sufficient administrative voices discussing their experiences in working with youths in their schools" (Mitra, 2007, p. 251).

Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnerships

Significant research exists that support the benefits of student voice. Listening to secondary students can be an effective strategy for classroom, school, and district improvement as stated by Defur and Korinek (2009). The purpose of the study was to explore the perspectives of adolescents on the nature of schools, teaching, and leadership that influences learning. The participants for this study were middle and high school

students, with and without disabilities, and from rural and suburban settings in a southeastern state in the United States. The researchers found that regardless of age or ability, students wanted opportunities to talk about their education.

Voight (2015), conducted research to analyze the benefits of including student voice. This study was conducted in a public middle school in an urban setting. Student teams met for one hour per week with an outside service provider and the author. Meetings used a youth organizing process modelled on Freire (1973) dialogue circles, in which students identified problems in within school environments, diagnosed causes and effects of those problems, and brainstormed viable solutions. Within each team, several weeks were devoted to the problem identification phase, during which time the adult facilitators asked students to name the most significant obstacles to their success in school and, thereafter, used an iterative Socratic questioning procedure to analyze their root causes. After eight weeks, student teams formally presented their ideas to school administrators, concluding with a series of recommendations for school climate improvement that required action from administration or that the student teams may enact. Challenges arose in making these systemic changes to policies and practices. Partnerships between youths and adults were established and improved as a by-product of program activities involving student participants and school staff collaboration. Furthermore, in this study, students who participated in the program developed citizenship skills, and their development among the student body may have promoted broader prosocial norms.

The principal noted that the culture was considerably different since the student voice initiative and that students were largely more focused in the classroom and had

better relations with their teachers. These outcomes were corroborated by staff and added further that peer connections were improved considerably where students, in general, felt a greater sense of ownership over working to improve the school. Changes were noted in the physical environment of the school as the grade seven team posted social marketing materials around the school to discourage bullying and gossip. Climate survey data showed significant reductions in student reports of bullying victimization at the school during the intervention.

Results of the study suggest that implementation of student voice initiatives have a positive impact on school climate. Findings also suggested that practitioners should ensure that a multitude of student groups are a representative of the school's student population. More to the point of the researcher's aim, these data indicated how student voice can bring about improvements in the school climate in addition to enhancing student citizenship skills.

This study underscores the difficulty with sustaining systemic change. While this study and Mitra's (2008) work highlight the benefits of including student voice, both studies begin with youth-adult partnerships where youths are stating problems within the school to be address by adults. Mitra (2008) contends that "partnering with students to identify school problems and possible solutions remind teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate. Students can raise tough issues that administrators and teachers might not highlight, including examining structural and cultural injustices within schools rather than blaming failing students for not succeeding in schools" (p. 242).

Supporting these findings, Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) examined studies on academic motivation, voice, and involvement among students, and highlighted successful practices. They concluded that cultivating voice among students was one of the most powerful tools for increasing learning. Researchers found that the advocacy for student voice was associated with greater achievement in disadvantaged students, greater participation in the classroom, better self-reflection in struggling students and decreased behavioral issues. Scholars agree there are a multitude of benefits for including students in participatory decision-making in their education.

Organizational Change

Superintendents lead an organization, including through periods of change, superintendents must resolve organizational change. Bolman and Deal (2017) recognize that leaders deal with a world of complexity, ambiguity, value dilemmas, political pressures, and multiple constituencies. The first frame includes the structural frame that looks past individuals to examine the context of work. Goals, strategies, technologies, and environments are likely determinants of structure. Second, the human resource frame examines relationships between people and organizations. It is expected that individuals who find meaningful and satisfying work will provide organizations with the talent and energy to create a competitive advantage. The third frame is the political frame. This focuses on people who get and use power best because they are more likely to be winners. Fourth is the symbolic frame, which centers on complexity and ambiguity in organizational phenomena. It acknowledges the myths that provide drama, cohesiveness, clarity, and direction in the presence of confusion. The authors use these frames to view organizations and integrate the frames to provide effective leadership practices.

Central to this research study are connections that are evident in the organizational theory of including students in the decision-making process. The organizational frames theory provides an interpretive lens to the qualitative research in this study. Using the four-frame organizational model theory of Bolman and Deal (2002) demonstrates the interconnections of the superintendent and students working together in a shared culture of practice with the objectives of an improved school environment, educational outcomes, and a sense of belonging. A theoretical perspective provides a “way of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 24).

While Bolman and Deal's (2002) four-frame model is linked to business, the frames include organizations, structure, human relationships, symbolic and political which will provide a viable application to educational settings. The concurrent factors include a defined labor division to accomplish a goal, the nature of power and authority, and the presence of a shared set of traditions and values. This theoretical framework will provide a bridge between this researcher and the participants of the study concerning their organizational roles, positional lens of power and authority, traditions of practice, and institutional value in the context of student voice. The organizational frames will serve as a guide for this researcher to construct interview questions and protocols with participants. Student voice has the potential to reframe traditional hierarchical relationships between leadership and student as well as among other stakeholders (Mitra, 2007, Cook-Sather, 2006, & Fielding, 2001). In turn, this situates the research in the organization domain while being cognizant that the theoretical framework informed both the research questions and the methodology.

Creating space for student voice practice requires a paradigm shift since it calls for adults to move from an adult-led space into one led with students as partners. School improvement that includes students as genuine stakeholders requires systemic change because students have been a predominantly absent voice in school improvement and participatory decision making. Essential to organizational change is Fullan's educational change theory which includes developing cultures for learning and developing cultures of evaluation (Fullan, 2007). Fullan's educational change theory juxtaposed with Bolman and Deal's Four Frame Model is impactful when investigating systemic change in the educational organization.

Fullan (2007) asserts developing cultures for learning draws energy from having ongoing collaboration with current information and research to guide discussions. Applying this knowledge to student voice inclusion, school leaders who have begun implementing new ideas and have experienced success can be powerful change agents within a district when time and space is intentionally created for collaboration. The impact of Fullan's educational change theory is that it encourages disciplined inquiry where ideas and learning outcomes are evaluated in a culture of trust and honesty. Fullan (2007) has spent considerable time studying and analyzing effective business models to determine if any knowledge can be applied to educational setting. Fullan qualifies his transference of business model learning to educational environments by stating that business leaders frame their work in a context of knowledge work, as do schools, rather than work based on a factory model, since many businesses have also found that the factory model of organization has significant limitations for progress. On student voice inclusion, Fullan states:

“People think of students as the potential beneficiaries of change. They think of achievement results, skills, attitudes, and the need for various improvements for the good of the children. They rarely think of the students as participants in a process of change. Consequently, there is little evidence of what students think about changes and their role regarding them. It is interesting and worthwhile to attempt to develop the theme of what the role of students and what it could be.” (2007, p.11)

In order to affect educational and societal change, students must develop civic engagement skills, relate academic expertise to social decision-making, connect with others, and learn from the perspectives of others (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). It takes educators and leaders, who are truly invested in change, to involve students in these opportunities.

Power Dynamics

Inviting space for student voice inclusion in participatory decision making requires reform and creates new challenges, not only for students but also for school leaders. School systems need to be transformed into coherent environments that value the opportunities to realize unified objectives and dedicate attention to partnering with students (Gaynor, 2011). Schools are organized in a traditional hierarchy of power. Adults make decisions for and about students and students listen, respond, and react to adult authority (Mitra, 2018). New school structures will need to be developed as the current industrial model of public education puts up barriers to promote student empowerment. The industrial model promotes hierarchical leadership and serves as an obstacle to provide space for student leadership and reevaluate hierarchical boundaries.

Educator Paulo Freire (1970), known for his “critical pedagogy” approach to improving literacy in developing countries, criticized the traditional structure of education for what he terms the “banking concept” approach. The banking concept of education places adults in a position of authority and promotes a student-adult relationship which is characterized by a superior adult and inferior student. The banking concept of education views students as “containers, receptacles to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). The banking concept bases students’ success on their ability to receive, file, and store the information provided for them by the teacher. Similarly, school leaders make decisions for and about, not with students.

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2007), students must be educated differently than the children of the past. Misconceptions surrounding student voice inclusion suggest that advocating and creating opportunities for student voice experiences means the adults in the experience will lose control (Jones & Perkins, 2006). Advocacy for student voice does not require a loss of power; it requires a re-negotiation and redesign of the traditional relationship between youth and adults. (Jones & Perkins, 2005; Mitra, 2012; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). To overcome obstacles and lack of research focused on leadership perspectives student voice experiences must be examined from the perspectives of those who have control over such experiences: the school district leader.

Active Citizenship

In order to graduate informed, civic-minded citizens, school leaders must cultivate attitudes and practices that give students the opportunities to express their voice in participatory decision making. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) emphasized the need to

engage students in our schools by giving them increased responsibilities and meaningful opportunities to blend decision-making with authentic school experiences. Student voice research suggests that providing youth a voice in the decision-making process in their education is the best way to successfully prepare them for active participation as adults (Brasof, 2017; Mitra, 2015; Rogers, 2012). Active citizenship does not occur at the time of graduation; rather, it must be included in the culture and structure of schools.

The principles of civic education, such as self-advocacy, collaboration, and democratic participation contribute to and promote authentic student voice experiences (Rogers & Terriquez, 2016). The importance of civics in the American education system can be traced back to the inception of public schooling (Dewey, 1938). Despite the long-range tradition of a democratic education, the reality is that civics education in schools has taken a back seat to an education era of accountability and testing (Brasof, 2017). Results from the National Association of Educational Progress, NAEP (2010) indicate that U.S. students made few gains when answering questions of America's constitutional democracy (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). The NAEP exam is focused on students' knowledge and skills related to civic participation and dispositions. The average score of an eighth grader on the NAEP Civics Assessment has only increased by four percent since the first test was administered in 1998 (Baumann, Millard, & Hamdorf, 2014). Only twenty-one percent of students scored in the proficient level and the same percent rate their civics classes as interesting (NAEP, 2014). The average score in 2010 was statistically significantly lower for 12th grade students than in 2006, with students in 2006 scoring 151 on average in 2010 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). On the 2010 Nation's Report Card on civics education,

only 67% of twelfth graders reported studying the U.S. Constitution, students of color made no gains, and female students scored significantly lower than male students (Bittman & Russell, 2016).

The benefits of involving young people in such their schooling are well documented through research and practice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2008). Students must understand their voice matters and how to go about making their voice heard in the democracy in which they live, whether it be their school or their larger community. Leveraging civics education to provide opportunities for student voice has the potential to create a culture of democratic practice that includes the whole school addressing issues of social justice within the school community (Beane & Apple, 1995). When schools include student voice in meaningful, civic educational experiences students report that they feel more engaged in their own learning, as well as have a strong sense of agency, and a belief that they can make a positive change in the world (Quaglia & Corso, 2016).

Summary

These studies are essential to understand the benefits of including student voice. Each research study had a perspective of schools that needed reform and a focus on issues and solutions. Lacking in the literature is research that specifically examines the role of school superintendents within student voice initiatives. The researcher looked through the prism of organizational change to make systemic changes in the school organization starting with the influence of the superintendent as a change agent.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

Several scholars have been investigating the role of student voice in participatory decision-making in classroom and school-level education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2006; Mitra, 2009). A great deal of inquiry has centered on the growth and potential of student voice, the components that influence its success, and its impact on the students. Mitra's research (2009) provided essential groundwork in the field of student voice, namely where students' engagement and motivation are positively influenced by active participation in school reform and decision-making. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), created a continuum of student voice spectrum that offered indicators on how students would engage in school reform with enhanced levels of accountability and effect. However, there is an insufficient body of research on the inclusion of student voice in district-level decision-making where superintendents are concerned. Additional research was required to fill these gaps in the literature. Accordingly, this study strives to understand how students, through student voice efforts, collectively participate in and influence the decision-making process in secondary schooling.

In this study, a target sample of high school and middle school students participating in extra-curricular activities, particularly those students that have engaged in the decision-making process were participants in the study. Using a constructivist lens to conduct a qualitative case study, data was collected through semi-structured focus group interviews with secondary school students, grades 7 through 12 and interviews with the

Superintendent of Schools. Case study research is a research approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2015). Moreover, a case study is a qualitative approach for understanding a phenomenon. According to Creswell (2013), “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system,” such as a setting or context (p. 73). The focus of this type of research is to develop a detailed depiction and analysis of a single case. Ultimately, through this approach, the researcher is striving to offer a detailed understanding of what is happening in a single case. The qualitative nature of this study was significant in order to understand how students and superintendent perceive the inclusion of student voice in decision making in this single case study, an in-depth exploration of the presence of student voice was conducted.

According to Yin (2014), a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews was relevant in this context. The qualitative nature of this study was applicable because the goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives (Patton, 1990). This research focused on obtaining a deeper insight into the inclusion of student voice in participatory decision-making among student stakeholders. A qualitative research method fit well with this focus and was, therefore, more appropriate (Yin, 2014).

Following a single theme (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), a case study of representative student groups and the superintendent as school leader was utilized to analyze the

perspectives of participants demonstrated with respect to a single issue. Stake (2005) notes the value associated with analyzing multiple perspectives for the purpose of comparison. This adds power to the study by allowing the researcher to examine similar and dissimilar results across all participants (Yin, 2014). The primary participant is the superintendent. Secondary participants include the distinct student groups. Secondary participants were selected by participation in extra- curricular activities. All participants were from the same school district and data was collected during a six-week period, at the close of an academic school year. The time frame is due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of school districts across the country. Due to the many demands on all stakeholders, providing time at the end of the academic school year was most appropriate.

By interviewing the superintendent and students who have shared experiences, the researcher was able to determine “what” the superintendent and students experienced in school and “how” different experiences were (Moustakas, 1994). This enabled a greater understanding of how the superintendent may create space for student voice in decision-making and provide context to the shared phenomenon. Through qualitative methods, I can better conceptualize how students experience participatory decision-making in their school by conducting focus groups with students.

Comparisons were drawn from the resulting interviews, collected artifacts, and researcher notes. The overarching goal for analysis will be to identify student voice as experienced within each student group and then purposefully examine the themes that commonly transcend the cases (Yin, 2014). This study examined one school district at the end of an academic year. Because participants reflected on their unique lens of student

voice. The purpose of this design was to understand key stakeholders' roles while still allowing for analysis of themes across all data. The focus of the study was middle and high school students in student voice efforts and my bounded system is the district level decision-making process.

Methods and Procedures

Research Questions

The focus of this case study was to examine how and when middle and high school students experience participatory decision-making in their school and investigate how the school superintendent attempts to collaborate with students as partners to improve student experience. This research aims to answer three discrete research questions:

1. To what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures within a suburban district provide space for student voice in secondary schools?
2. To what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students?
3. What is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the superintendent in a suburban school?

Setting

This study included a deliberately selected setting to conduct a case study analysis of secondary school student perceptions towards student voice and participatory decision-

making in a mid-size suburban school district. This case study site was chosen based on demographics, socio-economic statistics, and location within suburban New York. Deliberate sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The suburban school district selected for this case study research has a central office team that consists of one superintendent of schools, an assistant superintendent of curriculum and personnel, and one assistant superintendent of business. The district consists of three elementary schools which feed into one middle school and one high school with a combined enrollment of 2,790 students. The Superintendent of Schools took on this role in the past three years. Prior to this position, he was the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum in this district.

On the secondary level, the focus of this study, the middle school has an enrollment of 664 students consisting of 52% male and 48% female while the high school has an enrollment of 881 students (NYSED Data Site, 2018). Table 1 displays the enrollment demographics by category based on school reporting to New York State Education Department.

Table 1: *Demographics of Middle School and High School*

Factor	MS Total Sample	Middle School	HS Total Sample	High School
Gender				
n	664		881	
% Male		52		48

% Female	48	52
Race		
n	664	881
% African American	1	0
% Hispanic or Latino	8	6
% Asian or Native Hawaiian	3	3
% White	86	89
% Multiracial	3	1
Other Groups		
n	664	881
% English Language Learners	0	0
% Student with Disabilities	15	13
% Economically disadvantage	9	8

Note: 2018-2019 enrollment data as reported to data.nysed.gov

Researchers generally assume that there is some commonality in how humans perceive and interpret similar experiences, and that there are basic characteristics to a lived phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2015). The assumed essence of this study is that the superintendent and students have common expectations and concerns about involving students in the decision-making process and that the nature of collaboration is important in the engagement of the students.

Participants

This is a qualitative study and the selection of data is purposeful. The design of purposeful sampling is to intentionally sample a group of people who can best inform the research topic (Creswell 2015). For a case study, it is necessary for the participants to share common traits and to have experienced the same phenomenon (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). In this study, participants came from two distinct yet interconnected groups: secondary level students representing various student activity groups, and the superintendent. In selecting this case, the researcher employed purposeful sampling by choosing a case that demonstrated different perspectives of the issue of student voice in participatory decision-making studied. In this school district, the superintendent developed a five-year strategic plan which was developed based on collaboration with many stakeholders within the district including garnering feedback from students on their perceptions of school. Based on the superintendent's willingness and interest in student voice in participatory decision making, the district was chosen for the case study.

In selecting study participants, middle school and high school principals were provided with a background of the study. The requirements explained to the administrators were students participating in extracurricular activities being the student population desired for the study. A recruitment message was sent to all students via a school messenger app to those who are actively engaged in extracurricular activities. Twenty-four students and their parents from both middle and high school expressed interest via a Google Survey. From this sample, only sixteen students agreed to be interviewed for this study. From the middle school, three male students and eight female students were interviewed; all students participated virtually. From the high school, three female students and two male students were interviewed. All students self-reported they

are actively engaged in a variety of extracurricular activities with high academic grades. This could be because only those who considered themselves to be deeply involved were responded to be included in the study.

Students who were involved in extracurricular activities were invited to participate by the principals of each school. Each principal sent an invitation with a survey of interest attached. All students were involved in several extracurricular activities including student government. After collecting all the information from participant volunteers, I reached out via email to the eleven middle school students and five high school students who volunteered to participate. The email included all consent forms as well as details of the interview and a short survey for general demographic information. Three focus groups were created. The middle school participants were broken into two focus groups. The third focus group was made up of high school students involved in student government. I held three separate student group interviews, one for each focus group. Each interview lasted forty minutes and was held via Zoom due to COVID -19. The researcher then followed up with one student from the middle school due to her membership in a student advisory committee and enrolled in Honors by Achievement course. During the initial interview with middle school focus group one, I learned of a secondary student advisory committee and an honors by achievement course that students explained included opportunities of student voice. This middle school student was a member of both groups therefore I chose her to follow up with for a one to one interview to understand more about the discussions and student participation in school decision-making. There were no high school students that agreed to participate that also

participated in the secondary level student advisory panel. Table 2, 3, and 4 displays the demographics of the student participants.

Table 2: *Description of Middle School Focus Group 1*

Name	Gender	Grade level	Grades	Extra-curricular Activities
Angela	F	8 th	A	Sports, Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer, Gaming/Computers
Michael	M	7 th	A	Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer
Sara	F	8 th	A	Sports, Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer
Makayla	M	7 th	A	Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer
Joseph	M	7 th	B	Service/Volunteer
Tina	F	8 th	A	Gaming/Computers
				Sports, Gaming/Computers

Table 3: *Description of Middle School Focus Group 2*

Name	Gender	Grade level	Grades	Extra-curricular Activities
Linda	F	8 th	A	Sports, Theater, Arts & Music
Victoria	F	8 th	B	Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer
Rylee	F	8 th	B	Service/Volunteer
Meghan	F	8 th	A	Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer
Jake	M	7 th	B	Service/Volunteer
				Gaming/Computers

Table 4: *Description of High Focus Group 3*

Name	Gender	Grade level	Grades	Extra-curricular Activities
Ana	F	12 th	A	Sports, Student Government
Teresa	F	11 th	A	Theater, Arts & Music, Service/Volunteer/ Student Government
Gabriella	F	11 th	B	Service/Volunteer/Student Government
Scott	M	9 th	A	Student Government, Service/Volunteer
Brian	M	10 th	B	Sports, Student Government

Data Collection Procedures

The primary methods of data collection were through interviews with the superintendent, interviews with student focus groups, board of education minutes, emails from students to superintendent, observations of students during interviews, and researcher's reflective field notes. Documents were also be collected to enhance triangulation of the data. Table 5 describes examples of data that were collected over the course of the study. Prior to the collection of data for this study, approval from St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Next, a letter of permission to conduct the study (see Appendix A) was sent to the Superintendent of Schools at the Franklin School District. Once site approval was obtained, a group of potential participants were identified and invited to participate by a text message sent via a school messenger application which included a Google survey to indicate interest in participating in the study (see Appendix B), the possible benefits and risks of participating in the study, the time it would take to participate, and included informed parental and student consent information. Once the individual agreed to participate, they were asked to execute the informed consent form (see Appendix C and D). Instructions about logistics and access to the Zoom meeting was shared with each participant and their parent. The letter of invitation described in detail the purpose of the study, information about the researcher, and contact information.

Collecting data in case study research is "typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials" (Creswell, 2013, p. 75). Researchers must ensure that data is gathered on the

specific issue being studied and clearly decide the boundaries of the system being studied in the case. These boundaries may be constraints of time, events, or processes. It is essential that these boundaries are followed, otherwise the researcher may gather too much information and may be unable to adequately analyze the issue in question. In this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with middle and high school students participating in the extra-curricular activities and the Superintendent of Schools that support the efforts, observations of student and superintendent during interviews, researcher field notes, and document-analysis of materials related to the student voice effort and student participation in the decision-making process. As the decision-making process can occur over a long-time span, this study is limited to examining a specific time frame, recent past and present collaborative decisions made during the Superintendent's tenure. Data collection consisted of three student focus group discussions two middle school focus groups and one high school focus groups consisting of a total of 16 student participants. Two one-on-one interviews with the superintendent were conducted. A follow up one-on-one interview was held with one middle school student who participated in the district advisory board committee and honors by achievement course.

The interview guides were followed for each focus group and one-on-one interviews, as was customizing some questions based on information revealed during the interviews. Reflective field notes were generated after each interview. Artifacts were collected and included as a data source for emergent themes. the school district's five-year strategic plan and finally a letter to the district from the superintendent were analyzed and coded develop themes to address each research question.

Interviews took place via Zoom, a web-based communication platform due to the need for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to maintain confidentiality and security, a meeting password and waiting room was assigned to each Zoom meeting. For the Superintendent of Schools, two interviews occurred via Zoom for a duration of one hour each. For student focus groups, one interview per focus group occurred via Zoom. Superintendent interviews focused on decision-making and student involvement, such as collaboration on specific areas, student concerns, the district strategic plan, and feedback generated by student surveys. Interviews associated with student focus groups focused on their past and current interactions in the decision-making process as well as their overall school experience. All Zoom interviews were conducted in a semi-private location at a time that was convenient for the student and superintendent. Interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using the Rev application. Students completed a general interest survey prior to participation and then a brief demographic survey while in the Zoom meeting. The purpose of these surveys was to gather pertinent demographic information as well as contact information of parents and students in order to email parental and minor consent forms. Follow-up interviews were conducted with specific respondents via Zoom when more information arose based on group discussions. During the interviews, students discussed a Student Advisory Panel which two students served on as well as an Honors Academy program that focused on student voice and research. Follow-up interviews were scheduled based on students' responses during the initial interview. Research conclusions based on respondent answers were crosschecked with respondent to ensure fidelity of meanings and accurate capture of their statements (Creswell, 2013).

Table 5: *Examples of Data Collected*

Interviews	Observations	Documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Independent 1-hour virtual interviews with superintendent • Independent 40 minute virtual-based interviews with three student focus groups • Individual one to one follow up interview with middle school student • Online responses via Google Forms for demographic information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations of students during interviews • Observations of superintendent during interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of Ed Minutes • Districtwide Strategic Plan Material • Superintendent district messages on website • Note: for all the above, written permission was obtained from both parties

Focus Groups

Three student-participant focus groups, two middle school student groups and one high school groups were facilitated to student participants at a suburban public-school district. The researcher conducted the focus groups using a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the conversation (See Appendix E). To be able to identify trends in perceptions and opinions in students voice and participatory decision-making, the researcher replicated the focus group interviews with five and six participants in each of the three focus groups, middle school students and high school students, being conducted. All three focus groups were conducted at the virtually at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. The first focus group consisted of six middle school students that are involved in several extra-curricular activities including service and volunteer, the second focus group were five middle school students that were involved in extracurricular activities, and the third focus group consisted of five high school students who all participated in student government . By having the three focus groups of students based of extracurricular school participation, the researcher analyzed the trends across and between the focus groups to examine the impact that students' experience has on their perception towards student voice and participatory decision-making. The format of the focus group interviews allowed for the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues that may have been mentioned during the initial conversation (Creswell, 2013). The focus group interviews allowed the researcher to assess the students' perceptions to inclusion of student voice in secondary schools.

Interviews

As described by Creswell (2015), the core of the interview protocol is to develop interview questions that are sub-questions worded in a way that the interviewees will understand. The interview protocol were open-ended questions that addressed how students actively participate in decision making in the school. The questions were based on the Toshalis and Nakul spectrum of student voice (See Appendix E) and align with each of the three research questions. The initial invitation with each participant was conducted via electronic survey. After the initial interview round, follow-up interviews were conducted via Zoom. Further interviews took place through face-to-face conversations using Zoom, dialogues over the phone, or discussions through email. Follow-up emails were generated to other members of the school district based on student and superintendent responses. Dialogues regarding curriculum, the student advisory panel, and districtwide student feedback occurred via follow-up email or phone conversations. Observations of participants throughout the interview process paired with the interview data allowed me to not only gain valuable insight into the structure of the group being studied but also allowed me an opportunity to experience the dynamics being observed to build a deeper understanding of the naturally occurring processes (Creswell, 2013). Given that qualitative research design is emerging, questions were developed during the research. After collecting initial data based on the open-ended questions and observations, additional questions that fit within the student voice spectrum were identified.

Qualitative researchers often rely heavily on in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The primary source of data collection for this study was focus group

semi-structured interviews with students participating in extracurricular activities and one to one interview with the superintendent who is a key leader in the decision-making process. Eleven students from the middle school and five students from the high school were interviewed. The students were purposively selected students from representative demographic background with a range of participation in the student voice efforts.

The intent of these interviews was to understand how students participate in decision-making efforts and how students collectively participate in and influence the school and district policy process through these efforts. Interview protocols were semi-structured and responsive (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), responsive interviewing is a form of qualitative interviewing that outlines design flexibility and requires the interviewer to change questions in response to what is understood. Not much is known about perception in student participation in the decision-making process; therefore, responsive interviews were ideal for this study as they provided me with the ability to adjust the interview based on new information gathered and engage in more personal, natural conversations with the interviewee. Each interview exists as a self-contained story about the students' participation in the decision-making process or the superintendent's interaction with students that is interpreted within the context of the interview (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Interview questions were written to gather information and examples that provide insights into the research questions. The interview protocol for students is included in Appendix F and for the superintendent in Appendix G. The interview protocol was developed with the assistance of a superintendent, school administrators, and recent graduates in a high school from

separate district. These individuals reviewed questions for clarity, relevance, and significance to this study.

Documents

Documents are primarily used in qualitative research to support the data contained in interviews and observations, since they are representations of existing data and not new data produced by the other two data sources (Creswell, 2015). Documents and notes were used in this research to assist in the triangulation of the data, and to support the understanding and narrative of the data obtained. Since schools produce documents for stakeholders, public written information will be utilized, and evaluated in this study to further provide data. These documents include minutes from meetings, newsletters, policy documents, codes of ethics, statements of philosophy, as well as public communication documents (Bogdan & Bikle, 2007). Written approval was obtained from all parties.

As a result of interviews with the Superintendent of Schools, I obtained the results of a survey given to all secondary students which were used to develop the districts five-year strategic plan. In the survey, students were asked a set of questions related to school climate, discipline, academics, and student voice. Other documents and artifacts were obtained through a thorough search of the school district's website. Documents related to long-term plans, district goals, and mission statements were all obtained to analyze related themes using the student voice spectrum themes. Additionally, students provided emails exchanged between the superintendent and the students.

Trustworthiness of the Design

In qualitative research, rigor is established through myriad avenues (Creswell & Guetterman 2015). Trustworthiness is addressed through meeting criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, therefore, ensuring integrity and rigor. The following discourse explores how this study meets trustworthiness criteria.

Credibility. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, et. al, 2016). Peer reviews and reflexivity were combined to achieve credibility, as they sought to create consistency within the research design and agreement among participants in the research process. Throughout the interview process, participant responses were restated to confirm mutual understanding. During and after each interview, field notes were journaled and reflected on to compare with the transcription of the interviews. Triangulation of data among various sources was another vital component of ensuring credibility which aided in providing consistency among findings. Triangulation is used by employing multiple methods to corroborate evidence obtained via different means (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Triangulation, as Yin (2014) further indicates, should lead to a convergence of evidence. Having various sources of data corroborated the findings of the study and helped establish credibility. Data collected from participant interviews; observation notes from focus groups and superintendent interactions; content analysis of archival documents, district's five-year strategic plan, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes were triangulated to look for emerging themes across the data. To protect the study and establish internal validity, no inferences were made. As Yin (2014) states, "every time an event cannot be directly observed, [an inference is made]" (p. 47). Because of the

familiarity with this subject and previous experiences with the superintendent, refraining from making inferences and assumptions was key to establishing credibility.

Based on information yielded from interviews, I collected additional artifacts to support or clarify reported information made during focus group and individual interviews. In some instances, I reached out by phone or email to understand the school district from several perspectives. Rich, thick, descriptive narrative supported transferability criteria by striving to ensure audiences related to and perhaps resonated with findings presented.

Dependability. To ensure dependability, this study included multiple methods of data collection. Individual interviews, focus groups, reflective field notes, observations, and available documentation in making meaning of participants' experiences which strengthened dependability. Researcher reliability was preserved with meticulous data collection, storage, and triangulation of data.

Confirmability. To promote confirmability, researcher journaling provided an opportunity to identify and explain motivations regarding research decisions and emerging changes within the study.

Transferability. Transferability is the generalizability of qualitative research to other similar groups (Merriam, 2009). The researcher provided details of the study's processes and procedures to assure that the study can be replicated (Merriam, 2009). Documents, transcriptions of focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and reflective field notes were appropriately annotated and maintained "to enable the reader to assess the findings' capability of being fit or transferable" (Cope, 2014, p. 89). When other researchers can adequately apply the study protocols elsewhere, the standards of dependability have been

met (Cope, 2014). Patton (1990), validated this process with this statement: “Within a particular framework, expert reviews can increase credibility to distinguish high-quality work. That, of course, is the role of the doctoral committee for graduate students and peer reviewers for scholarly journals” (p. 562).

Trustworthiness was achieved through relationship building between participants and interview sites. Relationships were formed by conducting virtual interviews at a time that was both comfortable and convenient for participants. Participants were given the option of discontinuing the interview at any time if they became uncomfortable with any interview questions.

Research Ethics

The researcher maintained ethical standards and IRB guidelines for human research. No ethical issues existed. Twenty students returned the parental consent and student assent forms and sixty students received an invitation to participate in the focus group. Sixteen students attended the focus groups. Students involved in the focus group were students in a middle-sized school district, grades seven through twelve. Students’ ages were between thirteen and seventeen years old. Students maintained the right to refuse to take part in the focus group even if they previously consented to participate with several choosing not to participate after returning the parent consent and student assent forms; students also had the option to withdraw at any time without any repercussion, but no students chose to do so once the interviewing began.

Researcher bias did not present any conflict of interest. The students participating were not students associated with the researcher in any way. The Superintendent of Schools gave appropriate site approval (See Appendix A). The Superintendent of Schools

signed a site authorization letter (See Appendix B). The researcher is the only person who knows the identity of the students. An explanation of the process of the study occurred via email with students, parents, and superintendent. The parents and students received the consent form via email; all consent forms were electronically signed and returned to the researcher via email. Apart from the consent form, no documents had the superintendent's, or any student names attached. If the parents or guardians wished for their student to take part in the focus group, they signed and returned the parent consent forms via email. The forms included an explanation of the research to parents and guardians. All students who returned the parent consent and student assent forms received an invitation to participate in the focus group; 16 students attended the focus groups. Contact with parents and guardians to discuss the students' participation in the study occurred prior to discussing participation with the students. A pseudonym protected the identities of the students participating in the focus group. A password protected file on an external hard drive served as the location to protect all data. Students did not use their names during the recorded focus group process to protect their identities; a pseudonym assisted in protecting students' identities. All data will remain in a password protected digital folder for a period of three years and then erased.

Data Analysis Approach

During initial draft coding, I kept the research questions visible to stay focused on the specific questions. I referred to subjectivity to remind myself of potential biases and to maintain a neutral mindset (Creswell & Guetterman, 2015). I utilized Nvivo coding to maintain the authenticity of the participants' voices (Saldana, 2016). Nvivo coding refers to "a word or a short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldana, 2016, p. 105). Rather than reclassify or rename the participants' experiences,

Nvivo coding helped ensure that my interpretation is authentic. I used Nvivo coding as the sole coding method for first draft coding. When the data was organized by themes that emerged as they related back to the study's research questions first draft coding was complete (Saldana, 2016). The different segments of coded data were compared and connected to each of the participant's reflections as the data analysis process continues. Codes transformed into themes provided further insight by capturing more of the essence of the data (Saldana, 2016). Themes helped transform single words or short phrases into more meaningful descriptions that informed conclusions of the study (Saldana, 2016). As themes developed, I identified instances of triangulation by involving multiple data sources to answer the research questions (Saldana, 2016). This process is called analytical data triangulation, and it requires a researcher to "juxtapose and look across the data sources for tensions and ways the various data challenge and support emerging theories" (Saldana, 2016, p. 226). When conclusions were linked to the study's research questions and triangulation emerged, the data analysis process was complete.

The process of data analysis involves "making sense out of text and data...and preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). The researcher searched for patterns, themes, and dimensions in the data through analysis of the data, coding of the data, and further analysis as themes and patterns emerged. The researcher's goal was to describe the subjective experiences and views as reflected in the data.

The first level of identification occurred during the initial review of each the interviews, focus groups, documents, and field notes. Upon receiving the data, the

researcher read the documents and interview transcripts, analyzed the data for each document and interview, and then conducted open coding utilizing NVivo software, which is an analytic tool to facilitate the coding process.

The researcher used open coding, which utilizes a brainstorming technique described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), to “open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (p. 160). In open coding, the researcher thoroughly reviews the data contained within the data set before beginning to group and label concepts. The process of coding is taking the raw data and pulling out concepts and then further developing them in terms of their properties and dimensions and grouping them into themes. The data analysis process included the following steps:

1. Review all data (documents, field notes, interviews)
2. Import the data into NVIVO
3. Code the data in NVIVO using open coding
4. Define the properties of the codes to identify themes
5. Further categorize themes into subthemes as needed.

Researcher Role

The researcher of this study was a former teacher in the school district prior to the district’s redesign efforts. The researcher did not know nor teach any students who participated in the focus groups. While conducting qualitative research, it was important for the researcher to identify possible researcher and participant biases that could impact the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2013). To avoid potential confirmation bias, where the researcher interprets the data to support their hypothesis, the researcher considered all the data obtained and analyzed it with a clear and unbiased mind and continually re-evaluated the impressions and responses, and ensured that pre-existing

assumptions did not influence the data collected (Creswell, 2013). To avoid potential leading questions and wording bias, where questions lead or prompt the participants in the direction of probable outcomes that may result in biased answers, the researcher kept the questions simple and was careful to avoid words that could introduce bias (Creswell, 2013). To avoid potential acquiescence bias, where the participant chooses to agree with the moderator or researcher, the researcher framed questions that were open-ended to prevent the participant from simply agreeing or disagreeing and guide them to provide a truthful and honest answer (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology that was used to conduct this study. The topics this chapter included research design, purpose, research questions, site selection, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, and a discussion regarding credibility, reliability, trustworthiness, and ethics. Through this research study, my goal was to contribute to the field of school leadership by providing recommendations for improving the collaboration between the superintendent and students in school decision making by serving as an advocate for student voice in this process. The next chapter will give a detailed account of the results of this qualitative case study by referencing each case and providing a cross-case analysis among artifacts, student interviews, superintendent interviews, and reflective field notes.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore middle and high school students' and superintendent's perceptions of student voice, specifically in the areas of expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. Chapter four reviews the analysis of data organized by major research questions. Research question one discusses attitudes, policies, and structures in one suburban district's providing space for student voice revealed by the student focus groups and the superintendent interviews. Research question two reveals major themes indicating the significance of developing active citizenship skills have on student motivation, as well as some considerations provided by the research participants regarding opportunities for student voice in the secondary school setting. Research question three reviews major themes that emerged as barriers reported by the research participants regarding opportunities for student voice.

Themes from Data

The researcher's objective was to identify themes relevant to three research questions as reflected in twelve interviews. Each interview was viewed as a single incident. That is, each interview was considered individually in the analysis. Common themes were identified across the data about addressing the research questions. The fourteen data sources that were analyzed and are listed in Table 8 which includes three interviews, three focus groups, five field notes, and three district documents. Table 8 shows the frequency with which the theme appeared across the data. Appendix J charts each theme and data source by research question.

Table 6: *Frequency of Themes for Each Document*

Document Name	# of themes associated with the interviews, field notes, & documents	Total references across all themes
Interview Follow up with MS student advisory board	6	18
Superintendent Interview 2 July 31 st	11	35
Superintendent Interview July 16 First of Two	8	45
Focus Group - High School Students	15	54
Focus Group 1 Jul 20 th MS	10	34
Focus Group 2 July 22 nd MS students	9	25
Field Notes July 16 th with Sup	6	10
Field Notes July 20 th with MS Focus Group 1	2	4
Field Notes July 22 nd with MS Focus Group 2	6	7
Field Notes July 24 th Follow up with MS student	5	6
Field Notes July 31 st with Sup	4	5
8th Grade Elective Course Descriptions for 2020-2021	2	4
School District Strategic Plan 2019-24 Community Brochure 2	3	5
Superintendent letter	2	2

The resulting themes are described in the summary of the research findings.

Research Question 1

The first research question was to measure what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures within a suburban district provide space for student voice in secondary schools? An overarching theme that emerged during the analysis of collected data was student consultation, supporting student feedback, and student active participation. Each of the participants shared their views on participatory decision making and the impact student voice has on their motivation, sense of belonging, and engagement. Within the theme of student voice opportunities, six sub-themes emerged from the collected data. The six primary themes related to this research question are summarized in this section. As reflected in Table 3, the primary themes were (a) students have opportunities to share

their voice, (b) students feel supported in sharing their ideas with adults, (c) students are active members of committees and advisory boards, (d) students feel that partnerships with adults are useful and valuable for decisions or changes, (e) formal plans include student voices and input, and (f) there are opportunities for improvement in space for student voice in secondary schools. Table 9 shows the frequency with which the themes appeared across the data.

Table 7: *Themes, Subthemes, and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 1*

Theme/Subtheme	# of interviews, field notes, & documents mentioning the theme	# of times the theme appeared across the data
Consultation	7	21
Partnership	6	21
Active Participation	8	19
Culture of Student Voice	2	3
Areas for improvement	3	5

Consultation

Across the data, my findings show the most frequently occurring theme for research question 1 was students have opportunities to share their voice. Students in all three focus groups provided examples of how they have opportunities to share their voice in a variety of ways. For example, in the focus group with high school students, Anna indicated:

I was in student government this year and that was kind of the perfect opportunity for me to do that as president, so I got to say a lot to Mr. Smith, the advisor, also to the assistant principal. I got to communicate to a little bit to the higher powers, so to speak, in the school, which I was able to communicate ideas. So definitely extracurriculars.

In a focus group with middle school students, Tina stated, “I like when they ask our opinion. I have a teacher in English who gives us choice boards for homework.” A final example of this theme can be seen in the second focus group with middle school students, Linda detailed how she shared student concerns and facilitated change in an issue that was important to the students:

Oh, I remember that I went to guidance one time because I have friends at a lunch table that I met last year because we all play the same video games because I'm a big fan of video games. And I remember that one day they just were banned out of nowhere and we were a little bit shocked about it and we didn't really know why. So, we went down to guidance in sixth grade, but it wasn't allowed then, but Mr. Carlton came in this year so me and my friend decided to go to him and ask because it was a different principal. Maybe he had different views on it. So, we wrote a nice letter. We waited two or three weeks and then it came back to us that we could play the games now. And it's nice because every day we play a couple of rounds of the games with each other. It's fun.

There was consensus among all three focus groups and the superintendent that there are informal opportunities to student voice inclusion. Students' partnerships with teachers, counselors, and administration allowed students to confer on ways to improve on school rules and practices. The superintendent frequently referred to instances when administrators would report to him about students need for involvement in decision-making as a result of the information students reported to the building administrators. In the middle school and high school focus groups, the participants reported they have opportunities to provide input and feedback on matters that are important to them.

Participants explained that they feel they have an adult to speak to when there is a decision that the students may not agree with. In the situation in the middle school regarding gaming in the cafeteria, the students felt empowered that they were able to reverse a decision made by the previous principal. In follow up interviews with the superintendent, he indicated his awareness of this event and frequently refers to his team of administrators who report to the superintendent issues and concerns that are related to students' interest.

Partnership

The theme of partnership emerged for Research Question 1 and students felt supported in sharing their ideas with adults. Evidence of how students feel supported by adults was found in students focus group interviews, the superintendent interviews, and the reflective field notes. In an example of this theme, Gabriella, one of the high school student focus group members mentioned feeling supported by a staff member when sharing her ideas:

So, one of my big things for this year, I was setting up a fundraiser for a skin cancer awareness, that didn't get to happen because it was supposed to be in the spring and we were in the pandemic so school closed, but I worked on it for a year, a whole thing. We were going to have an assembly. I was basically just bringing a foundation that was close to home, to the school and community, and when I was able to talk to Mr. Smith about it, who wasn't on the student government, he was very supportive, he was on board with my idea and was helpful in linking me to the administration to try to get their approval. So that definitely helped.

Another example of how students feel supported in sharing their ideas with adults, when asked who they would speak to if they thought that there was something that needed to change, a student in the middle school focus group said, “Depending on the situation, I think our principal is new and he is nice so we could talk to him.” Another student in the same focus group offered, “I think I would start with my guidance counselor because I talk to her about things in my classes, so I feel comfortable talking to her.”

Supporting the theme of partnership, students indicated that partnering with adults is useful and valuable for decisions or changes. For example, in the focus group with high school students, Brian noted the important role of adults in providing guidance when student have issues or want to inform change:

I think, with guidance you get to... in class and in school I don't think you can really express yourself with the selection of your courses, but seeing the guidance and with the principal, vice principal, you can express yourself more with introducing what you like into your schedule every day.

Anna shared similar sentiments about the value of guidance from adults:

Just Mr. Jansen because he knows that I can be a nervous person, so I had reached out to him to kind of talk to me about it, and then he talked to me about the expectation and that made me feel better. I think that mostly happened because I have a close relationship with him.

Linda mentioned the important role adults play:

It can be good, if good information is given. But I think that it's good if students are given power, but I feel like it's also important to have adults to say... I don't

know the word, but to say, yes, we are going to go through with this or no we are... Approve it.

While students in this group were able to articulate clearly their role in school decision making and that they have a keen interest in being included, they also felt a general acceptance that the adults in the school make decisions that are in the best interest of the students. Students were concerned about COVID and feel left out of the knowing what will happen. It appears that the traditional role of adult as the authority and the child as the one cared for is accepted as the way for a school system to work. Although they would like to have a say in certain things or at least be consulted with, students are accepting of the way things are.

Overall, this theme occurred throughout the focus group discussions and the superintendent indicated that while creating the five year strategic plan, a survey was conducted and the results of the survey indicated that students feel safe and generally are supported by the adults around them. Students indicated that they know there is always an adult they can go to discuss concerns. Most students reported that they would seek out a guidance counselor or principal. Most of their concerns are personal to them. Developmentally, students at this age are willing to share their thoughts and ideas if it impacts them individually rather than see how they may participate in a greater scale. After probing students, a bit, they would be interested in providing feedback on teachers. Students in all focus groups reported that they are happy and feel cared for in school. As a result of a districtwide survey, the superintendent who intended on putting forth efforts and resources towards school climate discovered that school climate was high, and students reported a need to improve facilities.

Active Participation

The next most frequently occurring theme for Research Question 1 was active participation. Students are active members of committees and advisory boards. During an interview with the superintendent, “With regards to hiring practices, I invited students to join the hiring committee of the new HS principal. I believe this was helpful and beneficial.” In the high school student focus group, a student indicated having been involved in the hiring of the principal, “This year I was a part of the principal hiring committee. It was on Zoom so it was really interesting. Scott did it with me.” In another example of this theme, a Linda from the middle school focus group described serving on an advisory board:

The Advisory Board is something that two students from the middle school and two students in the high school are chosen to do. And what we do is that we talk about students and how we like the education and things that we would like to change or things that we like about it and how to engage students. It's just talking about how our school works and what we like about it and what we can try to change.

In his interview, the superintendent also detailed students serving in the advisory board. He discussed the importance of having an advisory board which in this district is led by the chairperson of guidance. Teachers and administrators from elementary through secondary also participated in this advisory board. The student reported that she felt valued and had a unique perspective which she was willing to share. The committee was new during the 2019-2020 school year and only met once due to the closing of schools. The student is hopeful that they will meet again and discuss topics that are related to COVID. I reached out to the advisor and he indicated the reason for creating this

committee was to complete the Mental Health social emotional learning mandate from the state. The advisor indicated that one goal the group decided on was to infuse more career choices throughout the students schooling. Students and the superintendent alike revealed the importance of advocacy and belief in student capacity to share their voice and be empowered through an advisory committee.

Culture of Student Voice

Throughout the data that includes district plans, documents, interviews, and reflective field notes all, there is a district culture that supports student voice. The emergent theme is referenced in the School District Strategic Plan 2019-24 Community Brochure as a core value of the Franklin School District: (a) a collaborative approach that encourages teamwork and (b) development of strong character to foster engaged citizenship. The strategic plan also referenced the following goal:

Goal #1: The Franklin School District faculty and administration will collaboratively develop and implement a cohesive K-12 digital curriculum map for all grade levels and subject areas that embeds the identified critical skills of collaboration, critical thinking, research and presentation. This curriculum map will be available to all stakeholders, so that everyone in the community is aware of the expectations for students at each grade level and in every discipline.

In a final example of how student voice is included in formal plan and builds the district culture of supporting student voice is evident in the superintendent's letter where he stated the following:

Building Our Future Together focuses on four key pillars to build our long-term planning around: Outstanding Student Achievement, Exceptional Learning

Environments, Successful Resource Management, and Strong Connections. Each of these pillars looks at our long-term planning through a critical lens and broad goals have been created with specific strategies and measurable action plans to accomplish these goals. Our District Research Committee compiled thousands of surveys and data from focus groups to provide our Board of Education and district leadership team with a better understanding of the values of our Franklin School District Community. These four pillars, along with our vision statement, mission statement and values, were all identified based upon the feedback of the entire community. This work reflects the voice of all the members of our community that participated in this planning process.

In the development stages of the strategic plan, the superintendent conducted a districtwide survey which included questions for students regarding their school experience. He stated several times in the course of the interviews how valuable the student feedback an input was to inform his decisions going forward. In the presentation of the strategic plan it is evident that student input and feedback was essential to creating a vision for the school district. In Bolman and Deal's theoretical framework, structure is a frame that is essential to organization change. Mr. Santos utilized the student feedback to create a structure to the school organization.

Areas of Improvement

While there are formal plans in place that support student voice, there are opportunities for improvement in space for student voice in secondary schools. This theme was further classified into four subthemes. The first subtheme of improved

communication between students and adults around their concerns to improve emerged from the data.

In the focus group with high school students, Anna described a situation where the senior class raised concerns about the yearbook with the principals and administration “to try to get senior quotes back in the yearbook.” Anna indicated that the decision around the yearbook was not effectively communicated to the students:

There was a little bit, it was not communicated in the best way, but from what most of us gathered was that there was some previous issues in the past, and they didn't want to deal with the issues of quotes again, and going through that process, so they just cut it all together. For baby pictures, they said that they figured that no one looks at them, and no one wants them in the yearbook, but that wasn't the case for us, but they kind of assumed it though.

In the same focus group, Gabriella indicated that the superintendent’s communication with the students should improve as well:

I think that it would definitely be beneficial just to have it a little more open, and not just looming over like a higher power, not really know who this person is. I just know their name. I'm trying to think back before all this online stuff, issues that would happen, and I can't really come to think of any, but I just know throughout this whole online experience, issues needed to be addressed to the superintendent, and people were more likely just to email because it's not a face to face kind of thing.

Anna added, “But especially after when schools back in session, I think just having some way to easily reach out to them would definitely help.” In the interview follow up with

the middle school student advisory board, Linda indicated that teachers' communication with students could improve:

It honestly depends because there have been some situations where I've asked the question and they don't necessarily think it's a big deal, what happened. Or if I ask the question, like, "How could I do better at this?" One time I think I got a response, or they said, "Just do better," where I didn't necessarily get the information that I needed, to be a better student.

The superintendent also referenced a need for improved communication between the adults and the students, "I thought there was a greater level of communication taking place than there really was. And the kids really highlighted that they really weren't in the know as much as I thought they were. So that clearly came up." While the superintendent is generally open to include students in the decision-making process, some examples students provided appear to be a token participation for students. Mr. Santos mentioned graduation and that he invited students to meet with the committee. From his perspective, having the students' part of the committee was his way of including student voice in decision making. Students reported that they were invited to meeting regarding end of year activities, but the decisions were already made by the superintendent. Students indicated that they want to be included in the decisions that affect them and that the lines of communication should always include students throughout the process. Mr. Santos acknowledged in his interviews that there is room for improvement because he was reliant on building administration to report changes and decisions which have a direct impact on students but there is a need for the superintendent to report and communicate directly with students.

Supporting the theme of improved communication, across the data, students indicated that they would like to provide feedback on how the school system operates. A student in the high school student focus group said, “I think it would take a little time for someone to really voice their true opinion, but in the end I think it would help the school in general if they asked us.” Anna shared, “There are definitely some aspects where I think students could have a little more power in things that happen in school right now.” Teresa stated:

I think it would be better if we were asked our thoughts more. During COVID we weren’t getting a lot of information about what is happening. So, it would be nice if someone asked us or there was a way of communicating better.

A student in the middle school focus group indicated, “I guess. It would be nice to choose what we read. We read everything as a class. But sometimes it would be nice to have a choice.” Michael added, “I guess sometimes it would be nice if we were asked our thoughts and know what is going on. Like I don’t know if we are going back to school yet.” Finally, when students in the second focus group with middle school students were asked, “Do you think that you should have a say in who’s working in the school,”

Meghan said:

I guess it would. Yeah. I think it would be fair. I love my principal. I think he’s super nice, and I think he’s great, but I would want to have a say in choosing the principal because he is going to be running our specific school. So, I want to be able to agree with what he or she believes in so that I know that this principal is going to be the best one for us.

The superintendent indicated more outlets for students to express their voice and perspectives would be beneficial. Oftentimes in interviews, Mr. Santos speaks in

generalities and is quick to indicate that he would like to provide more opportunities for students to be included in the decision-making process. During one interview, Mr. Santos provides clearer examples. He has more examples of student voice in decision making and believes he could do more to include it more often. The high school student focus group also indicated that students needed more outlets to express their opinions and perspectives to the superintendent. In reference to the superintendent, Gabriella indicated:

I think that it would definitely be beneficial just to have it a little more open, and not just looming over like a higher power, not really know who this person is. I just know their name. I'm trying to think back before all this online stuff, issues that would happen, and I can't really come to think of any, but I just know throughout this whole online experience, issues needed to be addressed to the superintendent, and people were more likely just to email because it's not a face to face kind of thing.

In a final example, the superintendent described needing more outlets for student voice and that including more student voices would be beneficial:

I think the challenge is expanding it beyond that so that there's more voice. And really, I think doing that through survey work is super helpful. When there is discussion, I think we oftentimes meet with our student leaders. We get their perspective and we think that represents the perspective of the students as a whole, but oftentimes it doesn't. It's a portion or a segment of the student population, but there's varying student populations that don't have a voice at that table. So I think you can kind of capture that through survey work, and then you can see where the pockets of those students are and then create some vehicles for

leadership for those particular groups. I think that would be great work that we can do. I think the survey work could help and then brainstorming ways to look at the disengaged student. Try to see where they could have opportunities to be represented by their peers.

Mr. Santos provides examples of student voice inclusion, but the examples are generally from when he was a school building leader. He relies on his current administrative team to provide the student perspective to him. While he is open to providing opportunities to include students, he sees the value in it, he does not articulate what he plans to do in the future. Oftentimes, the superintendent refers to the informal process that exists currently for student voice. Students will seek out a trusted adult at the building level. If necessary, the building level administrator will bring it to the superintendent's attention. There is no organizational structure to include students in the decision-making process. Typically, issues that arise are relevant at the time such as graduation, vaping, and the Parkland walkout. The superintendent fully supports student voice when the issue arises, but he states he is inconsistent due to the lack of a formal structure to include student voice.

The superintendent does not include students as part of the collaboration as part of his ongoing decision-making although he acknowledges the benefits and prefers informed decisions that include student feedback. The superintendent also noted communication as an area of improvement:

Yeah, it was the communication from the building. I thought there was a greater level of communication taking place than there really was. And the kids really

highlighted that they really weren't in the know as much as I thought they were.

So that clearly came up.

Communication pathways was a central focus to area for improvement and barriers to student voice inclusion. Mr. Santos indicate there is a need for a formalized structure to have a more direct line of communication with students. He emphasized the need to reach more students. Typically, he hears from students who are already involved in school, but he would like to involve students who may feel marginalized or disconnected from the school community.

Hiring Practices

One intriguing sub-theme was that students want to provide feedback on teachers and teachers hiring. The researcher exemplified this subtheme by writing the following in her field notes for the middle school focus group, “After probing students, a bit, they would be interested in providing feedback on teachers.” When asked, how do you feel about... do you think it's important that people listen to how students feel about teachers, Scott from the high school focus group indicated:

I think that's one of the most important things because at the end of the day, it's the students experience that should be one of the most important. I feel like that's not really asked, but I feel like that's one of the expectations when hiring or looking into observation, is the teacher's interactions with the student. I just wish... well, I don't wish, but it really doesn't seem to be a priority about how the students feel.

Sara from the middle school focus group expressed wanting to provide feedback on teacher observation:

I think that we should get to know what the principal wrote or whoever was observing because sometimes the teachers don't share what they wrote or they'll just share a little bit. But I think we should know what they said, so that we could like fix it if it was bad or something.

Jake from the second focus group with middle school students mentioned wanting a say in the teachers that are hired:

I think that we should have a say. I know that some kids will choose the one that does less work, people that just want to do less work. But I think the majority of students in school are pretty good kids and I think that they would want to get the most out of their education.

Students emphasized the importance of their feedback when hiring staff. Students trust the adults to make good decisions for them, but they also report that it is important to be included in the hiring of staff which has an impact on students.

A final area of student consultation emerged as students stated that they would like to have more input into rules and discipline. When asked about decision pertaining to discipline, Teresa from the high school focus group said:

I think that power is very hard to define so to speak, I think in certain aspects students should have more power, and in certain aspects it's fine where it is.

Regarding classes and feedback, I think that students should have more of a say. But then again, if they have too much say in that it can just be a free for all, and there needs to be just a single authority point for that.

Brian added:

I agree. The middle school and the high school both got new principals recently. Yeah, it also almost feels like nothing's changed even with that big transition. I think that we should have more to say in some disciplinary rules and stuff like that.

Student Discipline

In a final example of the subtheme for improvement, Linda, in the follow up interview with the middle school student advisory board, expressed her ideas about student discipline procedures:

Personally, I don't think it should be too harsh, but I also think it should be something that sticks with someone. Or maybe like a talk with a principal because I think if you disrespect a teacher too much, I definitely think that a principal's office should be where you should go, and you get a talk. I think students should have discipline that kind of sticks with them and says, "Okay, I'm not going to do this again because I know the outcome and now, I know how hard teachers work." So, I think a principal office would honestly be... If teachers are truly being disrespected by a child, they should have that type of discipline.

Students in the high school discussed an issue of vaping in their school. The students reported that vaping is a big issue in schools and occurs in the bathrooms. The principal had made a rule to stem the vaping issue by closing most bathrooms. All students had to use one particular bathroom which was monitored, and students had to sign in and out to document the use of the bathroom. Students were upset that they had no say in this policy and felt that since they were not vaping, the strict rule should not apply to them. When asked what a better solution is, students could not think of one that would stop the

vaping and be fair to others who do not vape. Although students did not feel they could solve this issue, being asked for their opinion, providing feedback, serving on a focus group, or completing a survey. The student voice spectrum provided by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) describe this form of student voice as consultation.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was to what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students? The four primary themes related to this research question are summarized in this section. As reflected in Table 4, the four primary themes were (a) students have opportunities to share their opinions and ideas in the classroom, (b) there are formal civic engagement experiences for students, (c) students develop voice and citizenship skills via elective extracurriculars and activities, and (d) the curriculum reflects opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills. Table 10 shows the frequency with which the themes appeared across the data.

Table 8: *Themes and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 2*

Theme	# of interviews, field notes, & documents mentioning the theme	# of times the theme appeared across the data
Student voice in the classroom	4	20
Civic engagement	8	19
Developing voice and citizenship skills	6	15
Student voice embedded in curriculum	4	8

Student Voice in the Classroom

The most frequently occurring theme, from the collected data, for research question 2 was the presence of student voice in the classroom. Students have opportunities to share their opinions and ideas in the classroom as seen across collected data. For example, regarding having opportunities to share ideas and opinions in the

classroom, Scott from the high school student focus group said, “I have some classes where teachers ask our opinions. Sometimes we get to discuss topics about current issues in like Social Studies. We sometimes break up into discussion groups.” Sara from the middle school focus group mentioned:

A lot of times the teachers will give options on what the choices are and then vote or a Google survey or something. Or if they just want to do something, they ask the students first before they do the one thing to make sure that it's okay.

Rylee from the second focus group with middle school students described being asked to share an opinion in drama:

I know that the most involved club that I had was drama this year. So we would practice for our play, which was Frozen. They would do practices at least three to four times a week...We got to choose if we auditioned or not. For some parts, we could say if it was hard or not. We could say, "Hey, can we change this?" And they would sometimes try to change it if it was hard.

Civic Engagement

Another theme that emerged across the data for research question 2 was there are formal civic engagement experiences for students. Opportunities for middle school students' civic engagement include the student advisory board, as reflected in the researcher's field notes for the middle school focus group, “I learned that there is a student advisory panel that consists of middle schoolers and high school students. It is led by the chairperson of Guidance.” Students were also part of a formal COVID committee as reflected in the researcher's field notes for the follow up focus group with middle school students:

In this follow up, it was evident that the MS students were consulted for her opinion. Due to COVID, the committee only met once and was unable to connect during COVID. The student is hopeful that they will meet again and discuss topics that are related to COVID. I reached out to the advisor and he indicated the reason for creating this committee was to complete the Mental Health SEL [Social-Emotional Learning] mandate from the state. The Advisor indicated that one goal the group decided on was to infuse more career choices throughout the students schooling.

In the high school focus group, Gabrielle described attending school board meetings:

Yeah, I was at every board meeting this year of the month, I went to speak about the students' perspective, just what was going on in students' lives for the past month. It was really interesting, I'm really glad I had the experience, I've sat with the Board of Ed, so I had my own little name tag, I had my own microphone so I was able to speak to them and the audience which is really cool. This year it was definitely interesting because there was a lot of issues in the community regarding a teacher being fired...The community was very upset, but it was really good to be able to talk to the superintendent. directly, which is really cool.

In a final example of civic engagement, the superintendent also referenced formal the experiences for students:

We continue to build on some of the foundations that we have and having those students as part of the decision-making teams, whether it be the site-based meetings, whether it be the student advisory board, whether it be the GO [Government Organization].

Developing Citizenship Skills

The next theme for research question 2 was students develop voice and citizenship skills via elective courses and extracurricular activities. The opportunities for students to develop voice and citizenship skills was evident in the following 8th grade elective course descriptions for 2020-2021:

English Intro to Drama: This elective focuses on introducing students to a study of the theatre arts, covering the techniques and knowledge necessary for students to exhibit self-confidence, ensemble, and good public speaking skills as well as beginning to understand acting as an art form.

In the spectrum of student voice, this elective provides the student with the strategies to use their voice when advocating for themselves. Opportunities to practice public speaking skills and becoming confident will enhance students' ability to partner with adults who they categorize as an authority figure.

Take a Social Stand! You and Social Media Save the World: In this course, students will use Twitter, blogs, podcasts, and YouTube to prove that one person can change the world. As they embark on their mission, students will demonstrate their tenacity, courage, empathy, and credibility as a content creator and curator.

The Great Debate: This course will focus on students learning debate skills and how to formulate concise, research-based standpoints while clearly articulating their points in a debate setting. Students will work collaboratively with their peers as well as independently.

Partnering with adults to leverage social media to advocate for change provides opportunities for students to use their voice on social issues. This course helps prepare

students to actively participate collaboration and critical thinking while adults guide students to research and find their voice. Ultimately this course provides active citizenship skills that students require to navigate in a democracy.

When asked about the opportunities to express ideas and opinions that the adults in school listen to, a student in the high school focus group (Anna) said, “I think in extracurriculars, that's where I can do that.” Gabriella added, “In extracurricular activities, I get to give ideas and opinions. I am in the future business leaders club and we make plans to do fundraisers and we make the decisions there.” In a final example of this theme, Brian added:

Yeah, I agree that extracurricular really helps with that. I am a part of the class of 2020 too. I'm the president for that, and the last year we were working on fundraisers that eventually didn't get to happen. I think extracurricular really helps with students being able to express themselves in school.

Student Voice Embedded in Curriculum

The final theme for research question 2 was the curriculum reflects opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills. The curriculum reflects opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills was mentioned eight times in four pieces of data. Opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills was reflected in the following 2020-2021 course description document:

Social Studies Civics and Leadership in the 21st Century: Students will develop the knowledge, skills and values to address the problems of the 21st century and to lead in a variety of environments. Additionally, students will cultivate social responsibility and active citizenship through study of the US Constitution, current

events and leadership styles. Students will learn to collaborate with different stakeholders in the community to take informed action. Further, students will learn proper values to effect positive change. Students will become self-regulated learners who know if a source of information can be trusted. Students will know how to detect bias. Students will learn how to craft an argument based on evidence. Students will increase their awareness of the different avenues of participation for citizens in our democracy. In our Model Congress Unit, students will solve a simulated challenge while following parliamentary procedure. Students will assume the role of modern-day muckraker and try to solve a problem that plagues society today.

In the high school focus group, Gabriella shared:

This year I took AP government, and that's a half year course, and for me that happened to be mostly online, so it was really tricky to learn about that stuff. That was the course we were supposed to be mostly focused on how to vote, how to register, but it was kind of swept under the rug a bit this year because we were focusing on the main material for the AP exams since we had a shortened time to learn. That would have been the class where I learned the most about that.

When asked what programs or courses in the middle school are courses that focus on active citizenship skills, the superintendent indicated:

So, our social studies courses, I think they do good job at that. We've added our research courses, AP capstone at the secondary level. I really think staff do a great job of incorporating those pieces into those courses. We added our honors academy last year at the middle school, which really focused on research and

debate. So I think that is a course where students really pick up those skills to advocate for themselves and be good global citizens. I'm trying to think what other courses would do that.

Later in the interview, the superintendent added:

We started AP capstone seminar and research about two or three years ago.

Students have the opportunity to learn how to look at information from many perspectives, students investigate real-world topics of their choosing from multiple perspectives. The skills students develop help them for college and really life.

All participants discussed the importance of research in the curriculum. Students stated that the courses provided them with opportunities to express themselves while being leaders in their education. All the research courses are student driven because students freely choose their topic. The adult-youth partnership is evident in these courses as students work independently with the consultation and partnership of the teacher.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, “What is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the Superintendent in a suburban school?” The six themes related to this research question are summarized in this section. As reflected in Table 5, the primary themes were (a) Superintendent’s value student voices and provide students with opportunities to share their ideas and perspectives, (b) student voice and perspective inform superintendent decisions, (c) Superintendents indicate more outlets for students to express their voice and perspectives would be beneficial, (d) Superintendents indicate there can be barriers to including or accessing student voices, (e) students are motivated by hearing other students share their ideas and voices, and (f) there is room for improvement in the

superintendents inclusion of student voice. Table 11 shows the frequency with which the themes appeared across the data.

Table 9: *Themes and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 3*

Theme	# of interviews, field notes, & documents mentioning the theme	# of times the theme appeared across the data
Superintendent values student voice	7	30
Student voice enhances superintendent decisions	5	19
Barriers exist to accessing student voice	3	9
Increased Motivation	2	3

Superintendent Values Student Voice

A theme for research question 3 emerged from the collected data which indicates how the superintendent values student voice and provides students with opportunities to share their ideas and perspectives. This theme was mentioned thirty times in seven pieces of data. In both interviews with the superintendent, he indicated that including space for student voice is essential and decisions he makes that are informed by student voice yield better results. As previously noted, in the focus group with high school students, Gabrielle and Anna indicated being a part of the board of education meeting and being “able to talk to the superintendent directly.” Students in the middle school focus group also indicated believing that their “opinion matters to the Superintendent” and that “he seems nice.” In another example of this theme, the School District Strategic Plan 2019-24 community brochure indicated including student perspectives:

Our District Research Committee compiled thousands of surveys and data from focus groups to provide our Board of Education and district leadership team with a better understanding of the values of our Franklin Community. These four

pillars, along with our vision statement, mission statement and values, were all identified based upon the feedback of the entire community. This work reflects the voice of all the members of our community that participated in this planning process.

In a final example of how the superintendent values student voice he expressed giving students an opportunity to share ideas and have an interest in student perspectives and opinions:

It's interesting because it's always great to hear some firsthand accounts from the students. I feel like I'm often in a position where people are reporting back to me what the students are thinking or what the students are. The class reps are sharing out. Like our first, I'll give you an example, I'll go back to the graduation meeting. First time we met, the students weren't there, and it was class advisor reporting out and the building principal reporting out. But then as we got deeper into it and we brought the students in, some other things started to come out that they were concerned about that weren't being represented at the time. So, and it was just, I think it was great for them to hear the conversation and the passion that people had around it. And I think that the students felt much more supported as well, being a part of the conversation at that level. So, I think it definitely helps from a leadership perspective to make decisions when you have some of that direct feedback.

Student Voice Enhances to Superintendent Decision-making

Across the data, a theme emerged for research question 3 regarding indicating how student voice enhances the decisions of the superintendent. One recurring topic for

students and the superintendent was graduation and end of year celebrations under the new COVID restrictions. Mr. Santos mentioned graduation and that he invited students to meet with the committee. From his perspective, having the students a part of the committee was his way of including student voice in decision making. Students in the high school felt that the superintendent was not communicating the plans with them. Students reached out by email to the superintendent and asked to be invited to the meetings about graduation. The superintendent included them. While the superintendent indicated that he wanted the students there to help make the decision, the students reported that the decision of how the graduation would happen was already made without their input.

In the middle school focus group Sara mentioned student perceptions informing the superintendent's decisions:

I just think that depending, on what we get asked, just even in our school that, like if it's a big decision, it always goes up. And if we approach an idea and they say like, "Well, ask him." I think some students can sometimes talk to him about an idea they have.

In a final example of student voice and feedback to inform superintendent decisions, the superintendent also described student perspectives influencing his decisions:

Yeah. What it allowed us to do was just as important as knowing what to focus on. It really allowed us to know what not to focus on and not to spend resources on. So that was just as important. We knew from a school climate perspective; we were in a really strong place. So, one of the areas of that I personally wanted to focus on was school climate. I had ideas about doing broader school climate

surveys and doing some initiatives around that. When we got the survey data back, I quickly backed off that because I knew that we needed to not. We were pretty strong there. But it was apparent that there were other areas that we needed to focus on. Just facilities, it was something that came out across the board, especially at the secondary level of an area of concern. Things like that, that contributes to school climate. Things like bathrooms, things like... It contributes to climate because it contributes to the way people feel about the environment they go to school and work every day. And so, we shifted priorities around a little bit, based on that feedback. That's just one example.

Barriers to Including Student Voice

The next theme for research question 3 was the Superintendent indicated there can be barriers to including or accessing student voices. For example, the superintendent indicated that time is a barrier to including student voice. He also said:

I think it would be helpful to speak with students more often. In my role, it is difficult with all the decisions that are long term and short term, so I depend on the leadership team to provide student feedback. So yeah, I think it happens in an informal way.

The superintendent also expressed that the power dynamic between students and adult staff can be a barrier:

I think that's an intrinsic and how we're structured. We're the sage on the stage and they listen to us and these are the rules and they follow them. They haven't been a part of that. So, and I think sometimes even when it is done, it's done as an afterthought. So, it's not... And kids are so..they pick up on that stuff right away.

They're so perceptive about that. So yeah, that's probably a big part of it. That we hold the power over decisions, and we are the authorities.

In a second interview, the superintendent also indicated:

I like to collaborate and understand student perspective. I do not do it often enough and it generally happens as a result of something. I would like it to be part of our organizational structure. But there are so many things happening and sometimes we need time.

The lack of time due to the many challenges the superintendent faces is a barrier that consistently came up. Mr. Santos is conflicted on this aspect of student voice inclusion since he embraces the theoretical underpinnings and the value of student voice but is challenged to find space to create the time for student voice inclusion in a formalized structure.

Motivation Increases

The next theme for research question 3 was students are motivated by hearing other students share their ideas and voices. Students are motivated by hearing other students share their ideas and voice was mentioned three times in two data sources. For example, a student in the high school focus group described how students can motivate other students to use their voice:

I think that there hasn't really been the person there, or it just hasn't been routine yet where students go through higher powers to express issues, or anything that they want to do. It's usually just you go to a teacher you really like, or a guidance counselor that you're comfortable with, and then maybe it'll happen, maybe it won't. But there just never really was... it just never really was that you went to

the higher power. I think that if you were to see someone else do that, there has to be that person who's willing to do it first, then I think some students would follow.

The superintendent also provided an example of students are motivated by hearing other students share their ideas and voices when describing a situation where students on the leadership advisory board motivated other students:

I think that's where I was going with it. I think when they saw that and they got involved in it, it just... And I think for our students that even weren't a part of it, when the ideas were coming from the students that were doing in advisory, and when they were the ones that were then going out to the advisory groups to explain them, and there was that motivation that if it was coming just from the advisor, probably wouldn't be there. But it was ideas from students, and they were promoting them, and it was just, they were just more well received.

Summary

Research question 1 was, to what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures within a suburban district provide space for student voice in secondary schools? The primary themes related to this research question were (a) students provide feedback and are consulted with, (b) students partner with adults and feel supported in sharing their ideas, (c) students are active participants of committees and advisory boards, (d) the district culture supports student voice inclusion, and (e) there are opportunities for improvement in space for student voice in secondary schools. Research question 2 was, To what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students? The four primary themes related to this research question were (a) student voice is present in the classroom, (b) there are formal civic engagement experiences for students,

(c) students develop voice and citizenship skills via elective extracurriculars and activities, and (d) the curriculum reflects opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills. Research question 3 was, what is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the superintendent in a suburban school? The themes related to this research question were (a) the superintendent values student voices and provides students with opportunities to share their ideas and perspectives, (b) student voice and perspective inform and enhance the superintendent's decisions, , (c) superintendent indicated there can be barriers to including or accessing student voice, and (d) students are motivated by hearing other students share their ideas and voices.

The superintendent and students believe in listening to students and getting input and feedback to improve the decision-making process is essential to school reform. The superintendent wants to continue to develop those skills and create opportunities for student voice inclusion for the benefit of students and his leadership practice. All participants expressed an interest in this study but had no background knowledge or understanding of the concepts revealed through the questions. The belief and the advocacy they demonstrate in openness to feedback is a great launch point for future work in their district. Students felt that they benefitted because they would like to participate in decisions that have an impact on their education. The superintendent acknowledges the importance of student voice and how schools can become a more engaging place of learning when students are granted an active role in school decision-making. Without the voices and support of students, a key component of school reform effort is missing (Smyth, 2006).

This chapter presented the information and data as gathered, analyzed and reported by the researcher. The information was procured by research questions and responses were bracketed by reoccurring themes within the data collected. Tables summarized the identified themes and subthemes, the frequency of occurrence for the themes and subthemes were provided. Chapter five provides a brief summary of the study, conclusions gleaned from the research, implications for current practices and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Findings from the current study support the belief that the creating formalized structure for student voice opportunity to participate in the decision-making structures within the school system positively affects a student's motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging. Student voice used to inform the superintendent's decisions adds value to school systems. The study provided valuable insight into how the educational organization should be redesigned to include students in the decision-making process based on the feedback and ideas of the participants in this school setting, including the students and the superintendent.

The research questions for this study were:

1. To what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures in one suburban district provide space for student voice?
2. To what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students?
3. What is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the superintendent in this suburban school district?

Implications of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore a suburban school district's students' and Superintendent's perception of student voice, specifically in the areas of expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. Findings from the study support the perceptions that student voice inclusion in participatory decision-making do have an impact on student motivation. When opportunities were

provided for student voice, namely expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership, students felt more ownership, motivation and a stronger connection to the school organization. The school superintendent and students expressed the importance of incorporating student voice on a more consistent basis, however it was stated that structure and expectations precede opportunities for voice.

Interpretation of the Major Findings

The study provided valuable insight into how the educational organization should be cultivated based on feedback and ideas of the constituents in a school setting, including the students, the educators as well as the school Superintendent. Additionally, the study provided valuable insight into the spectrum of student voice framework created by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), which revealed what opportunities exist for expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership within a suburban middle and high school setting. The study revealed barriers that exist which hinder opportunities for student voice, as well as the Superintendent's beliefs and the conditions he creates districtwide that facilitate opportunities for student voice. Student responses also revealed an increased level of motivation when they felt that their participation in the school organization as it pertained to decision making provided freedom of expression, opportunities for leadership and the support to speak their voice.

Key data was extracted from the interviews and was aligned to the research in the summary of major findings. The findings were broken down by research question. Within each research question the following themes and concepts emerged:

Research Question 1: To what extent do attitudes, policies, and structures in one suburban district provide space for student voice?

Student focus groups and the superintendent noted that there are opportunities for improvement in space for student voice in secondary schools. All participants discussed the importance of direct communication. Oftentimes the students discussed their concerns with counselors, teachers, and building administrators. It is assumed by students that the information is shared with the superintendent. However, in more than one example, the information had not reached the superintendent. He indicated that he relies on the administrative team to communicate students concerns. The superintendent believes that his decisions are better when he receives direct feedback from students. Mr. Santos indicated several areas where he can improve and include students in decisions. Two examples are in textbooks and hiring practices. When hiring for a new high school principal this year, he felt student participation was invaluable in the selection of the principal. He further indicated that including students to adopt new textbooks would yield a better result in the use of the textbook and would provide students with a clear perspective of the results in their decisions.

While the district's formal plans include language about student voice inclusion, in practice it is not part of the structure of the school organization. Students are consulted with when issues or concerns arise, but it is informal in practice. The Superintendent and student participants agreed that there is a need to formalize a system that views students as contributing stakeholders in education. Students felt that partnerships with adults are useful and valuable for decisions or changes as such, students are included in several districtwide committees and the superintendent recently added a student advisory panel which met infrequently due to the issues surrounding schools and COVID. It is through

the advisory panel that the superintendent can formally build a structure for students to provide feedback on how the school system operates.

2. To what extent does this suburban district develop active citizenship skills for students?

All study participants agreed that the curriculum reflected opportunities for students to develop citizenship skills. Several course electives are focused on promoting and understanding of active citizenship skills. Research is a level of student voice and with the adoption of the AP Capstone program, the superintendent has worked with his administrative team to begin foundational research skills in the middle school to be carried through to the high school. Research allows space for student voice by creating opportunities for self-direction and hands-on learning. Important student engagement recognizes and authorizes the diverse viewpoints, opinions and needs of all the school students and helps them in defining their own educational experiences (Cook-Sather, 2007; Fletcher, 2015). Student participants discussed these available opportunities in school to increase their citizenship skills. Students are self-directed and can select the topic of their choice for it to be a meaningful activity. Additionally, students develop voice and citizenship skills via elective extracurriculars and activities. Many participants highlighted their ability to participate in decision-making in their extra-curricular activities.

Another theme that emerged from the data was that there are formal civic engagement experiences for students. Since the research was conducted during the pandemic and the closing of schools as well as remote learning was fresh on the mind of students, participants frequently indicated that they were consulted with about decisions

related to the virtual learning environment. Students were invited to attend virtual board of education meetings that focused on the reopening of schools. In this capacity, students felt informed and valued that their opinion mattered.

Students have opportunities to share their opinions and ideas in the classroom. The superintendent also noted that through formal site-based management teams and student council boards are essential for student voice inclusion.

3. What is the perceived value and benefits of student voice to the superintendent in this suburban school district?

This lack of agency for students demonstrates a missed chance to enhance learning and develop students for a world in which new skills are increasingly essential to success such as taking initiative (Beaudoin, 2013). Accordingly, there is room for improvement in the superintendent's inclusion of student voice. He indicated the need for creating space and the value to his leadership decision-making when actively seeking student feedback. Students agreed that motivation is increased through hearing other students share their ideas and voices. Student focus groups at both the middle school and high school level indicated that level of inspiration is high when a student promotes change through petitions and letters to the administration or other staff. At the middle school level, it could simply be a new policy to allow video games in the cafeteria. At the high school, students petitioned to include the traditional student quotes in their yearbook.

The superintendent indicated there can be barriers to including or accessing student voices due to time constraints. However, during the COVID crisis, he did feel that the use of virtually held meeting could be a place to improve the time constraints as

he mentioned that he can hold several more meetings virtually since he and the participants do not have to travel or locate meeting spaces. The superintendent indicated more outlets for students to express their voice and perspectives would be beneficial.

Relationship to Prior Research

The education system endeavors to prepare students to participate in society but often neglect to ask students how policy decisions affect their learning (Goodlad & McMannon, 1997). Students have been passive recipients of education and their voices have often been absent from education decision making (Levin, 2000). High stakes testing and accountability measures have often disregarded the student as stakeholder in education. Educators have started to integrate student voice into decision-making in the classroom, community, and district to help address a sense of belonging, engagement, and motivation in students which in turn improves academic performance (Osterman, 2000). Students are, however, a relatively untapped force for schoolwide decision-making.

Historically, policymakers and practitioners have not fully viewed students as agents of change, and their voices are infrequently present (Ginwright & James, 2002). One reason for student absence in district-level decision making may be that there is a limited understanding of how students may organize for and participate in decision making. Therefore, the motivation for this study was to develop an understanding of how students and the school Superintendent, through student voice efforts, collectively participate in and influence the decision-making process for a suburban school district at the middle and high school level. Based on the literature outlined in Chapter Two, Tosahlis and Nakkula's student voice spectrum was utilized as a conceptual framework consisting of varying degrees of student voice in school. This study provided me with an

opportunity to investigate the ideas referenced around student voice research, and if providing students opportunities for expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership had any significance for their levels of engagement, sense of belonging, and engagement. The researcher identified expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership within the student voice spectrum as they yield the greatest results for student motivation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Every student involved in the study expressed a need to be heard, listened to, and provided opportunities to take on participatory decision-making in their school. They also expressed a need for their superintendent to include students and communicate directly with them. These critical ideas also served as motivating factors for the student focus groups. The superintendent agreed that students need to be included in decisions and when he creates space for student voice, his decisions are better informed, and his leadership practice is improved. The superintendent also stated he could do a better job of providing students more opportunities for voice, specifically within expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. The resounding theme among students was the need to be listened to and heard.

Creating space for students to have authentic participation in the decision-making process requires fundamental organizational change beginning at the school district's organizational leader (Mitra, 2009). Student voice flourishes when consciously establishing space for the inclusion of student voices beginning with the superintendent who, as CEO of the school organization, promotes organizational reform. As outlined in chapter two, Bolman and Deal's Four Frame Organizational Model was utilized as a theoretical framework to provide a lens to the need for organizational redesign in order to include student voice in participatory decision-making. A recurrent theme the

superintendent referred to is lack of time as a barrier to student voice as well as the structure dynamic of a school district. Although he felt that he was communicating with students, he learned that the lack of direct communication with students was another barrier. Students felt the need to be included in decisions around graduation as it related to the COVID pandemic.

Both frameworks were necessary in order to provide a more complete picture for how students may use their voice in secondary education decision-making. I endeavored to build my understanding of how students collectively participated in and influenced the secondary level decision-making process by conducting a qualitative collective case study. As discussed in chapter three, I utilized document analysis, field notes, and interviews with students and the school superintendent to establish an interest in student voice inclusion. Findings provided insights into the research questions guiding my study.

Limitations of the Study

Although the research has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations. First and foremost, due to the COVID pandemic, schools were abruptly closed. The research was conducted after the school year ended so it was a challenge to elicit participation since students had spent so much time on computers in virtual learning environments, they needed a break from computer time. Additionally, the superintendent who was generous with his time but at times focused on the decisions facing him as to the reopening of schools. This study was conducted in a mid-sized suburban school district with a generally monocultural population and therefore the results may include a bias and not generalizable. Finally, since the participants are currently active participants in their

school community, based on the sample, the results may not be a true representation of the school population.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on the results of this study indicating the perceptions, values, and barriers to student voice inclusion, these are the recommendations for practice. Research has shown that the more educators give their students choice, control, challenges and opportunities for collaboration and partnership, the more their motivation and engagement are likely to rise (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students have voice, and an opportunity to truly collaborate, they become active partners with adults in decision-making allowing students to be advocates for change, they learn to oversee their own growth and future learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This study provided this investigator an opportunity to investigate the ideas referenced around student voice research, and if providing students authentic opportunities for expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership had any significance for their levels of engagement, sense of belonging, and motivation. Every student involved in the study in expressed a need to be heard, listened to, and provided opportunities to participate in decision-making within the school organization.

The findings in this study reveal that a student is energized by having a voice and are drawn to spaces where they feel they have a school district leader who allows them to use their voice, and empowers them to participate in decision-making, and affect change. The site for this study revealed an approximation of examples of expressing, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership, and would benefit from continued work to support both students and superintendent on how to strengthen what already exists and continue to add new dimensions to student voice.

Recommendations for Future Research

Student voice is a complex field with many subtle nuances. It is still a relatively new concept in the field of research and there is limited amount of studies that demonstrate traction regarding student voice having a meaningful impact on school reform. As interviews were conducted, I explained the frameworks I utilized and, although it was unfamiliar to the participants, it did help participants identify existing practices and experiences that informally support student voice

Based on the current study limitations and results the following recommendations for future research are offered. The first recommendation is based on the study limitations of generalizing the findings to other school districts with a diverse population of students. Although this school district is representative of many suburban school districts, school populations from different regions could have dissimilar intrinsic and extrinsic needs and so sampling other student groups from other types of other settings could expand on future findings. As the superintendent indicated, he is continually challenged to include students who generally do not participate in extracurricular activities including students who feel marginalized. A broader, more representative group would provide more insight.

Another recommendation to use for future researchers using quantitative inquiry to expand the findings from this qualitative study which had a small sample of 17 participants. Researchers could collect self-reported data from a larger sample of students, which could provide insight about variable correlations or factors in trust, a feeling of being cared for, and supported in order to expand on the literature about student voice inclusion in participatory decision-making. I utilized loose measures for student sense of belonging, engagement, and motivation such as asking about attendance

and grades. A more formal measure through a mixed methods study analyzing student voice and the impact on specific performance metrics may strengthen the study. A longitudinal study would increase the connection of elevating student voice inclusion with student performance.

Contribution to the Field of Student Voice

Three key themes emerged from this study in terms of significance in maximizing student voice in participatory decision-making. Three significant ideas emerged from both the student focus groups as well as the superintendent's interviews regarding the significance of expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership were; (1) Formalizing adult-youth partnerships to create space for purposeful student voice inclusion; (2) Established communication systems to allow for direct feedback from students to the superintendent; (3) Believing that students are stakeholders and can affect change. These three ideas created the best conditions for students and the superintendent alike to optimize student voice and, in turn, provide the superintendent with invaluable insight to lead a district.

All participants involved in this study referenced the need to create space and provide more opportunities for student expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. However, constraints were mentioned within current educational systems, specifically addressing the challenges associated with not having enough time, reaching the students who typically do not feel a sense of community in their school, and not providing space for marginalized students. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) discussed research in which schools found that when student voice was an integral part of the school organization, students developed a clear sense of belonging and positive regard for the school setting, gained greater self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as increased

their self-esteem as a learner and felt that a larger significance in part of things that mattered. Given that meaningful change typically involves commitment and buy-in from all stakeholders, scholars have found significant evidence that developing more formalized roles for students in school improvement leads to stronger, more sustainable results (Fielding 2007; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2003; Smyth, 2006).

Summary

This chapter included a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations regarding the research project investigating the perceptions of students and the school superintendent in a suburban middle and high school setting around opportunities for expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. The research study utilized the spectrum of student voice framework created by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012). The findings from the student focus groups yielded some discrepancy in terms of access to expression, consultation, partnership, activism and leadership. Students in extracurricular activities and advanced classes ultimately appeared to have more access to the higher end of the student voice spectrum. The majority of students expressed a need to be heard and the importance of the school organization creating spaces where their voice is heard and listened to in a manner that is supportive and challenging. The school superintendent acknowledged that he could improve his practice and leadership by receiving input from his students. He also acknowledged that student voice is essential and something he needs to continue to develop his awareness around. Both students and superintendent perceptions alike demonstrate the need for shared meanings and communication around student voice with more opportunities to continue to learn and develop the necessary skills for authentic and meaningful student voice. The inconsistency between what educators believe and what educators' practice, between the

objective of fostering student learning and the reality of not including students as stakeholder in decision-making, points to a gap between the school organization, structures, and policies.

Educating students of today poses a challenge for educators, students, and school district leaders. This study explored the need for school district leaders to examine how and why students are successful and if the perception of having an opportunity for increased participation in school decision-making has an impact on the very structure of the school system, leads to improved academic performance. When students collaborated, became partners in their own education, and had the chance to be true advocates for change, they learned to be responsible for their own development and future learning that would lead to more prosperous futures (Toshalis & Nakkula 2012). It is essential for today's learners to be included in the organization of school systems as true stakeholders by school boards, superintendents and other central office staff to ensure space is created for student voice inclusion to transform the conventional learning environment into an innovative and collaborative learning environment (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The voice of students must be heard to best meet the needs of the diverse learners of today.

APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT CONSENT FORM



Department of Administrative and
Educational Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway

Consent Form

Dear Superintendent of Schools:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the opportunities of student voice in school decision making in [REDACTED]. This study will be conducted by Lisa Dunn, doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation. The faculty sponsor is Dr. Stephen Kotok, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in two interviews concerning your work as a superintendent of schools in your district. Your interviews will be audio recorded. You may review these audio files and request that any or all portion of the audio files be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve up to two hours of your time. If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to electronically sign this consent form granting me permission to interview you to gather information about your perceptions and experience with student voice in school decision making. If you decide to participate, return this consent form via email.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help understand the extent to which local practice aligns with current educational research on the attitudes, perceptions and barriers to student voice in school decision making and may inform future practice. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by using codes and keeping consent forms separate from data so that your identity will not become known or linked with any information you provide. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews or questionnaires, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact Lisa Dunn at 516-729-4567, lisa.dunn17@my.stjohns.edu, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Stephen Kotok, Professor, Queens Graduate Center, 718-990-2654. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Cha

ir digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator,
nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Electronic Signature (Please type your name for signature.)

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

APPENDIX B: PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM



Department of Administrative and
Educational Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway

Dear Parent,

Parental Permission Form

Parental Permission Form for Minors 12-17 Years of Age

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the presence of student voice in school decision making in [REDACTED]. This study will be conducted by Lisa Dunn, doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation. The faculty sponsor is Dr. Stephen Kotok, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.

If you agree to have your child in this study, I will be interviewing your child. This study will provide more detail about how students experience student voice in school decision making in their school. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before you agree to take part.

If you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, I will ask you to sign a consent form granting me permission to interview your child to gather information about his/her perceptions and experience with student voice in school decision making. If you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, please return the electronically signed consent form to lisa.dunn17@my.stjohns.edu. Your child will be asked to take part in one interview concerning his/her experience with student voice in school decision making. His/her interviews will be audio recorded. You may review these audio files and request that any or all portion of the audio files be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve up to one hour of his/her time.

There are no known risks associated with your child's participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although your child will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us understand better, the attitudes, perceptions and barriers to student voice in school decision making and may inform future practice. Confidentiality of your child's research records will be strictly maintained by using codes and keeping consent forms separate from data so that your child's identity will not become known or linked

with any information he/she provides. Your child's responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your child's responses will be kept confidential by the researcher, but the researcher cannot guarantee that others in the group will do the same. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews or questionnaires, your child also has the right to skip or not answer any questions he/she prefers not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact Lisa Dunn at 516-729-4567, lisa.dunn17@my.stjohns.edu, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Stephen Kotok, Professor, Queens Graduate Center, 718-990-2654. For questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440. You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Permission to Participate

« Child's Name Click or tap here to enter text. Child's Name »

Parent's: Electronic Signature Click or tap here to enter text.)

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FOR MINORS



Department of Administrative and
Educational Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway

Consent Form for Minors 12-17 Years of Age

Dear Student:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the presence of student voice in school decision making in a public school in [REDACTED]. This study will be conducted by Lisa Dunn, doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation. The faculty sponsor is Dr. Stephen Kotok, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. take part in one interview concerning presence of student voice in school decision making and
2. the interview will be held via Zoom and will be a focus group of students based on the extracurricular clubs and activities you participate in.

This study will provide more detail about how students experience student voice in school decision making in their school. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before you agree to take part.

If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to electronically sign this consent form granting me permission to interview you to gather information about your perceptions and experience with student voice in school decision making. If you decide to participate, return this consent form via email to lisa.dunn17@my.stjohns.edu. You will be asked to take part in one interview concerning your experience with student voice in school decision making. Your interviews will be audio recorded. You may review

these audio files and request that any or all portions that includes your participation on the audio files be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve up to one hour of your time.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us understand better, the attitudes, perceptions and barriers to student voice in school decision making and may inform future practice. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by using codes and keeping consent forms separate from data so that your identity will not become known or linked with any information you provide. Your responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher, but the researcher cannot guarantee that others in the group will do the same. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews or questionnaires, you also have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact Lisa Dunn at 516-729-4567, lisa.dunn17@my.stjohns.edu, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Stephen Kotok, Professor, Queens Graduate Center, 718-990-2654. For questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440. You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Subject's Electronic Signature: Click or tap here to enter text.

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.



ST. JOHN'S
UNIVERSITY

STUDENT RESEARCH REMINDER

THANK YOU, WMS STUDENTS, FOR
PARTICIPATING IN A
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

MONDAY, JULY 20TH

At 12 pm

ZOOM link:

<https://e2ccb-gst.zoom.us/j/95144235700?pwd=T2VGUWVlY3dJRUSNYTFVFnE1b2JUUT09>

Password to meeting: 07202020

If you are unable to attend, a second meeting will be held on
Wednesday, July 22nd.

Zoom Link For July 22nd: <https://e2ccb-gst.zoom.us/j/93629831374?pwd=eWNVNGVFVFNrU3hFU0dMV2drbWZUZz09>

Password to meeting: 07222020

APPENDIX E: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide Question for student focus groups

Hi, my name is Lisa Dunn. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I am interested in understanding your thoughts and opinions about student voice in school decision making. I will be asking you some questions which you are free to answer in any way you wish. Please feel free to elaborate any of your points. If a question is unclear to you, please feel free to ask me to explain it. I would like to record the interview so I do not miss anything that you say, but I will not include your name on any documents or in the audio recording. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Introduction: I am interested in your life as a student. What is school like for you? What types of activities do you participate in? What types of decisions has your club discussed?

Please tell me more about your participation in school. For example, what is something you have participated in that involved school administration?

How do you feel about your school experience when thinking about being involved with decisions that matter to you?

Do you feel the school allows space for students to speak your mind?
(probe: teachers, principal, superintendent)

What do you think about your ability as a student to be included in the decisions making process of schools?

What opportunities exist for students to participate in decision making in school?

What rights do you believe you have in making decisions on your schooling?

In what courses or club activities have you experienced or discussed what active citizenship is?

When have you sent an email to a teacher, principal, or superintendent regarding your opinion about school?

Have you been invited to a BOE meeting to express your opinion or ideas?

How have you been part of hiring new staff?

How have you been part of in curriculum planning?

How have you been part of in creating or discussing school discipline policies?

How have you been part of in creating or discussing district discipline policies?

How have you been part in professional development or new school initiatives?

On what topics have you been asked to participate in districtwide surveys?

When are you invited to district level meetings where decisions are made?

When are you invited to building level meetings where decisions are made?

How are you able to participate in districtwide initiative committees?

How are you able to be part of the hiring process of new teachers and administrators?

When have you organized a student group to protest or initiate change?

When have you created or circulated a petition when controversy in the district arises?

When have you been part of a student group that makes decisions for the whole student body?

When have you organized students to make decisions that would influence the school system, teachers, or administration?

When have you been permitted to actively protest through petition or student demonstration in your school?

Do you believe your opinion matters to the superintendent? How do you know?

How have you been consulted on decisions with your school?

APPENDIX F: SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide Questions for Superintendent

Hi, my name is Lisa Dunn. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I am interested in understanding your thoughts and opinions about student voice in school decision making. I will be asking you some questions which you are free to answer in any way you wish. Please feel free to elaborate any of your points. If a question is unclear to you, please feel free to ask me to explain it. I would like to record the interview so I do not miss anything that you say, but I will not include your name on any documents or in the audio recording. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Introduction: I am interested in your experience as a superintendent. What is school like for you as a superintendent? How would you describe your leadership style?

Please tell me more about student participation in school. For example, what is something you have included students in that involve decision making?

How do you communicate directly to students?

What courses in the MS focus on active citizenship skills?

What are the course requirements?

What courses in the HS focus on active citizenship skills?

What are the course requirements?

How do you include students for hiring new staff?

How do you include students in curriculum planning?

How do you include students in discipline issues?

How do you include students in professional development or new school initiatives?

When have you used student surveys to solicit student feedback?

When are students invited to district level meetings where decisions are made?

When are students invited to building level meetings where decisions are made?

How are students able to participate in districtwide initiative committees?

How are students' able part of the hiring process of new teachers and administrators?

When have students organized committees or protests in response to initiating change?

What have students done to demonstrate disagreement with school policy?

When have students created and circulated petitions when controversy in district arises?

Have students made decisions as a group that would affect the whole student body?

Have they demonstrated ownership in the resulting decisions?

Have students organized a student led activity?

What is your perspective about students' abilities to participate deliberately addressed by students and/or adults?

Where in your district planning do you provide time and opportunity for students to be included in the decision-making process?

What may be some barriers to including students on the decision-making process?

Have you facilitated student voice in committee meetings?

Does board policy or goals include information about including students in the decision-making process?

How important is student voice in your role as the chief decision maker in the school district?

When do you consult with students when making decision?

What value or insight have you gained when consulting student perspective?

APPENDIX G: INITIAL CODES

Initial Codes

Code	Files	References	Research Question
School	13	49	1, 2
18 school year	2	2	1
affecting school policy	1	1	1
big school budget decisions	1	1	1
elementary schools	1	1	1
huge school	1	1	1
middle school	4	7	3
middle school team	1	1	3
school administration	1	1	3
school building leader	1	1	3
school climate	1	1	3
school community	1	1	3
school day	1	1	2
school decision	4	4	1, 3
school district	4	7	1, 3
school leaders	1	1	3
school principal	1	1	1
school store	1	1	1
school students	3	3	3
school system	2	2	1, 3
school things	1	1	1
school violence	1	1	1
school walkouts	1	1	1
school year	4	4	1, 2, 3
suburban school	2	3	3
urban schools	1	1	3
Student	13	29	1, 2, 3
student voice	3	5	1, 3
outstanding student achievement	2	3	2, 3
school students	3	3	1, 3
including student voice	1	2	3
introducing students	1	2	3
ms students	2	2	2, 3
student body	2	2	2, 3
student government	2	2	1, 3
student government president	1	2	1, 3
student perspective	2	2	3
student voice initiatives	1	2	3
varying student populations	1	2	2, 3

Decision	7	10	1, 3
school decision	4	4	1, 3
decision making	3	3	1, 3
chief decision maker	1	2	3
shared decision	1	1	1, 2
Student voice	5	9	1, 2, 3
student voice	3	5	1, 2, 3
including student voice	1	2	2, 3
student voice initiatives	1	2	2, 3
Plan	3	9	1, 3, 3
strategic plan	3	5	1, 2, 3
long-term planning	2	2	1, 3
planning process	1	2	1, 3
Policies	3	7	1, 2, 3
discipline policies	2	3	1, 2, 3
dress code policy	2	3	1
affecting school policy	1	1	1

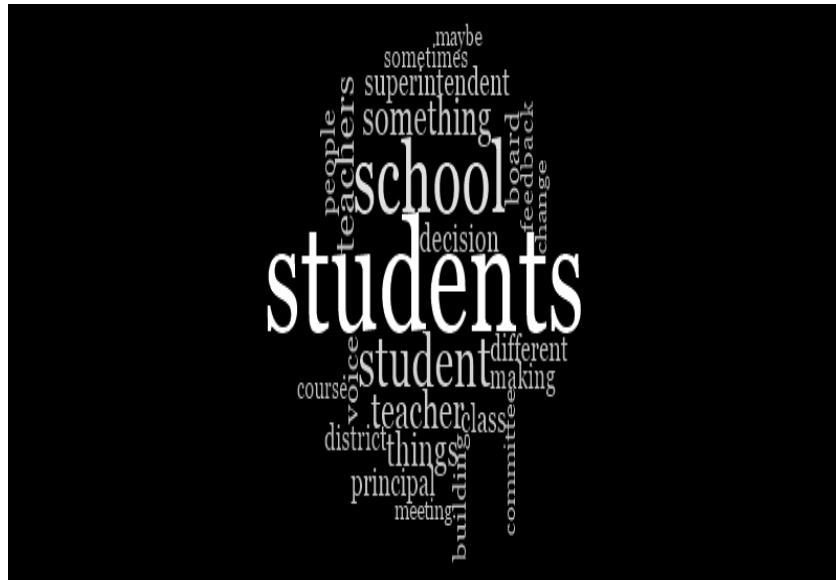
APPENDIX H: WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Word Frequency Analysis (25 Words)

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Students	8	393	2.43
School	6	237	1.47
Student	7	163	1.01
Teacher	7	106	0.66
Something	9	101	0.63
Things	6	94	0.58
Teachers	8	90	0.56
Decision	8	72	0.45
Class	5	70	0.43
Superintendent	14	69	0.43
Principal	9	68	0.42
Voice	5	66	0.41
Different	9	63	0.39
District	8	61	0.38
Making	6	61	0.38
Board	5	59	0.37
People	6	58	0.36
Building	8	54	0.33
Feedback	8	50	0.31
Sometimes	9	50	0.31
Course	6	49	0.30
Committee	9	44	0.27
Change	6	41	0.25
Meeting	7	41	0.25
Maybe	5	40	0.25

APPENDIX I: WORD CLOUD

Word Cloud



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