

# Listening to Student Voice

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# The *Speak Out, Listen Up!* Toolkit

- ❑ Learn about how listening to student voice may strengthen school improvement efforts



- ❑ Hear firsthand how educators are using the tools
- ❑ See an example of student voice in action

# What is Student Voice?



Listening to student voice is the practice of educators intentionally and systematically eliciting student viewpoints on a specific topic for improvement purposes

Students:

- Are asked what they think, feel, experience
- Take on new roles
- Are involved in decisions and actions
- Are viewed as partners

# Why Listen to Student Voices?

## Listening can benefit **educators**...

- Engage students in taking some responsibility for change
- Bring fresh perspectives to issues and priorities
- Create a synergy of ideas
- Raise issues of equity and other difficult topics

## Listening can benefit **students**...

- Provide developmental supports
- Develop skills



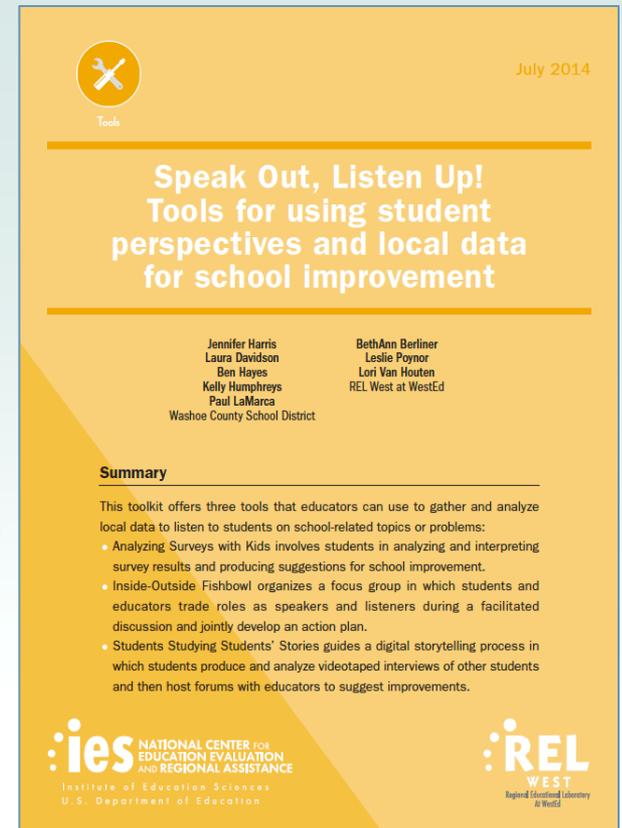
# What does Student Voice Look Like?



- One-time, one-way flow of information
- Students and educators working together over time to understand problems, rethink solutions, and take action

# The *Speak Out, Listen Up!* Toolkit

1. **ASK** (Analyzing Surveys with Kids)
2. **Inside-Outside Fishbowl**
3. **S4** (Students Studying Students' Stories)
4. **Customize** your own tool



# Student Voice in WCSD



- Formed a district committee to build the capacity for listening to student voice
- Teamed with the district's social and emotional learning initiative to introduce student voice to school teams

# Students Studying Students' Stories (S4)



## Students as storytellers

- Stories of persistence in WCSD

## Purpose

- Increase awareness of obstacles some students face
- Explore what might lead to persistence
- Provide suggestions about how to prevent disengagement and support persistence

**We do not have permission to  
share the video on our website.**

**Please contact**

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**if you are interested in obtaining the video  
and permission to use it.**

# Watch the Video and Consider



1. What **issues** at your school or district can benefit from listening to student voice?
2. What did you **learn** from the students that you might not have learned from other adults?
3. What **actions** can a school or district take to address the issues the students described?
4. How can you **facilitate** student voices being heard at your school or district?

# The District's Takeaways...

What we learned about dropout and persistence:

- Students left school because...
- Students persisted because...



# Giving Voice – The Student Experience

- Personal stories mattered
- Adults cared about them
- Part of the solution, not part of the problem
- Gained confidence – they have something to say that others value



# What We Learned

## Using the S4 tool and the toolkit:

- Planning, planning, and more planning
- Buy-in at every level is necessary: district, school, classroom
- The tools are more geared for the secondary level and need to be modified for the elementary level
- It's rewarding for students and adults!



# What are Fishbowls?

- Students, in an inner circle, conducting a facilitated conversation with each other
- Adults listening to student conversation in an outside circle without interrupting or responding to students in the circle
- Followed by a debrief of the experience, and exploration of themes that emerged



# What is their Purpose?



- Eliciting student perspectives in a safe space, i.e., without fear of criticism or interruption
- Providing adults in the school community with an opportunity to hear students “tell it like it is”
- Creating an opportunity for students and adults to have a deep dialogue about issues concerning the school

# Why They Are Useful

In school climate work:

- Bring to the surface differences between student and adult perspectives on school experience
- Can be an eye-opening experience for adults
- Lead to improvement action steps that students and adults have developed together



# Steps for Successful Implementation...



- Development and wording of questions for students
- Student preparation time with facilitator
- Agreements for both students and adults
- Adequate time for debrief and post-session planning

# Ideas for Developing Questions

- Construct open-ended questions and avoid questions with yes-no answers
- Make sure questions center on issues important to students
- Limit the number of questions to six or fewer; all students will respond to each question



# Ideas for Preparing Students

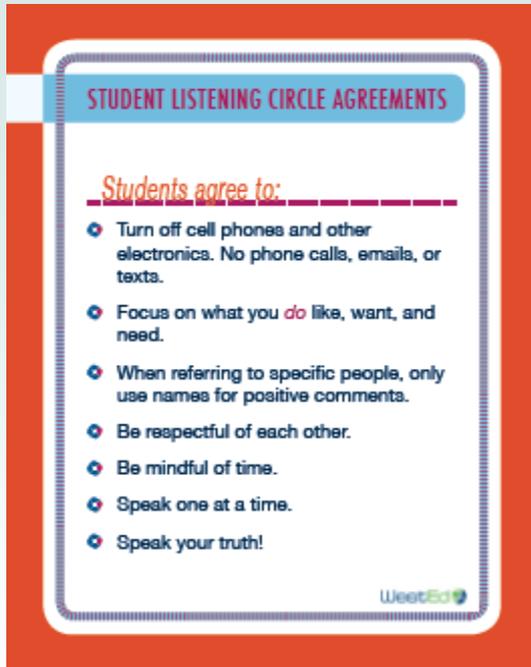


- Have each student write an answer to questions on note cards or paper, with separate card/paper for each question
- As they finish recording their answers to each question, the facilitator has them take turns reading their answers aloud
- If necessary, students are given the chance to revise their answers
- Repeat the process until all questions are addressed
- The facilitator discourages students from negative attacks on staff or administrators, and models reframing negatives as positive statements
- Facilitator and students agree on the order of the circle, and determine who will be the first person to respond to each question



# Suggested Agreements

- Students and adults have similar agreements, to listen actively, turn off all devices and so on



A poster titled "STUDENT LISTENING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS" with a red border. It lists six bullet points under the heading "Students agree to:". The WeetEd logo is at the bottom right.

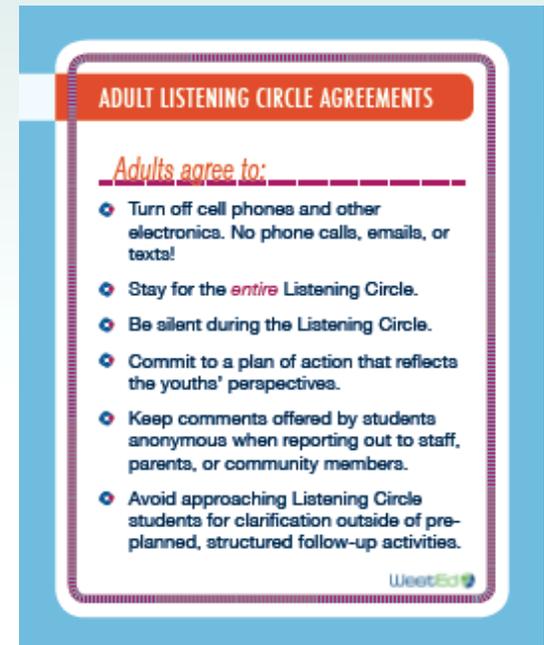
**STUDENT LISTENING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS**

*Students agree to:*

- Turn off cell phones and other electronics. No phone calls, emails, or texts.
- Focus on what you *do* like, want, and need.
- When referring to specific people, only use names for positive comments.
- Be respectful of each other.
- Be mindful of time.
- Speak one at a time.
- Speak your truth!

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- Adults have one additional agreement, which is to remain present for the entire session



A poster titled "ADULT LISTENING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS" with a blue border. It lists six bullet points under the heading "Adults agree to:". The WeetEd logo is at the bottom right.

**ADULT LISTENING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS**

*Adults agree to:*

- Turn off cell phones and other electronics. No phone calls, emails, or texts!
- Stay for the *entire* Listening Circle.
- Be silent during the Listening Circle.
- Commit to a plan of action that reflects the youths' perspectives.
- Keep comments offered by students anonymous when reporting out to staff, parents, or community members.
- Avoid approaching Listening Circle students for clarification outside of pre-planned, structured follow-up activities.

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# Debrief

- Adults describe what it felt like to listen
- Students describe what it felt like to be listened to
- Students and adults work together in small mixed groups to describe themes that came up
- Students and adults work together in small mixed groups to develop action steps that the school commits to carrying out



# We'd Love to Hear From You!

- What did you learn?
- How might you use student voice or the toolkit?
- Do you have an experience to share?
- Other questions or comments?



# Thanks, and for More Information, Contact:

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The toolkit is available at <http://relwest.wested.org/resources/31>