

# Incorporating Student Voice in Key Decisions at the School, Program, Department, and Student Levels

*How do you ensure that student voice is incorporated in key decisions at the school, program, department, and student levels?*



## SCHOOL FACT BOX



Springfield High School, located in Springfield, Oregon, serves more than 1,200 students, with 57% participating in the free and reduced-price meal program, 20% in programming for English Learners, and 15% students with disabilities. The demographic profile reflects that 55% of the students are White; 31% Hispanic/Latino; 9% multiracial; 2% Asian; 1% American Indian or Alaska Native; and 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

## What was the Need?

When Carmen Gelman—*Ms. G* to her students—arrived at Springfield High School as the new assistant principal, racial tension filled the campus and fights were at an all-time high. Although Springfield was the most diverse school in Lane County, students of color were not represented in AP/Honors courses, athletics, clubs, leadership, or other activities, which led to many of these students feeling marginalized, not accepted, and therefore disengaged. *Ms. G* needed to find a way to address these issues and she knew she could not do it herself. She needed help but, most importantly, she needed to hear other voices—and who better to share their voices about school and change than the students.

## What did they Do to Address the Need?

*Ms. G* assembled a group of students from diverse backgrounds, and together they began brainstorming ways to tackle these problems. Careful consideration went into creating this first group of students; they needed to be truly representative of the student body. The group had to include voices from Associated Student Body (ASB), leadership, theatre, band, athletics, special education, and ESL, as well as students who were traditionally not included in anything. The group needed to

span race/ethnicity, gender, academic performance, religion, reputation, and all social groups—and it did—to create an extremely diverse group of students.

Ms. G facilitated a training with the students to help them think about how they would represent all students at Springfield, including those who have been traditionally underrepresented. Thus came the *Unpacking All* exercise—Ms. G led a protocol where students analyzed which of their peers participated in events, who did the teachers represent, which students got to work in the office or as teacher assistants, who was featured in the yearbook, who participated in sports and clubs, and so on. Through this training, the students also looked at white privilege and power structures in schools. The students quickly began to realize and acknowledge that the school was not for ALL students, but predominantly for students who were white, academically successful, and popular. They were outraged by this discovery and decided to form the Student Advisory Group, focused on changing the culture at Springfield from one of exclusion to one of inclusion.

## How's it Working?

One day during an after-school meeting, Joey began telling of a situation he had faced in math class. He told the group that a student was upset and called his pencil “gay”. Joey was tired of hearing this word thrown around so loosely in class and in the hallways, so he asked the student to “use another word.” Other students in the class chimed in and said, “Yes, use another word.” The group decided to do some research around hurtful, exclusive, and offensive language that was being used in the hallways. After gathering and analyzing the data, the *Use Another Word* campaign was born, created by the students, to help change language that might lead to students feeling unwelcomed or unheard at Springfield.

The *Use Another Word* campaign was very successful. Fights at Springfield dropped from an average of 40 a year to less than 10. Students of all races, programs, and abilities were featured in the student newspaper and yearbook. More students wanted to be a part of the school, by trying out for sports and theatre, joining clubs, working in the office, and so forth. And, when students worked in the office, it provided a different experience for the adults, which created a shift in their thinking and advocacy. Springfield found that when you put people next to people, relationships form—regardless of age, social roles, or social groups. In addition, students were able to gain skills in research, analysis, and planning, all through learning how to use their voice to create change.

The *Use Another Word* campaign was so successful that district leadership chose to take it districtwide. Elementary and middle school leadership teams worked with students from their schools to create campaigns that were more age appropriate. They implemented the campaigns using videos, posters, and even buttons worn by the teachers. Joey and Ms. G were also interviewed by a Colorado radio station, where the local school district was looking to implement the Use Another Word campaign. Use Another Word was also featured in *Rethinking Schools*, a nationally recognized educational publication, which led to a variety of schools across the country implementing a mirrored curriculum to help battle harassment and discrimination.

### Resources

- *Use Another Word Campaign*  
Find at: <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/UseAnotherWord.pdf>
- *Video: Use Another Word – High School by Springfield Public Schools*  
Find at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM-nWXz1YHo>

# Use Another Word

by Nancy Meltzoff  
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At Springfield High School, the bell between third and fourth period rings and 1,450 students pour into crowded hallways. The students congregate, joke, and jostle with one another.

Michael, a sophomore wearing headphones and a blue sweatshirt, knocks into Chris's backpack, and Chris calls out, "Watch it, fag!"

An English teacher standing in her doorway overhears the disrespectful language. She sighs, thinks about interrupting the student banter, and then smiles as she realizes she doesn't need to say anything. A third boy, uninvolved, hears what happened. "Hey, Michael," he says, "use another word, please, OK?"

A typical response? Hardly. It occurs at Springfield High School, in Springfield, Ore., where the "Use Another Word" campaign is in its second year.



Illustration: David McLimans

## How 'Use Another Word' Started

"Use Another Word" is a student-led initiative to decrease the use of disrespectful language on this diverse, suburban campus. Approximately 27 percent of the students identify as students of color, mostly Latino, in a county that is predominantly white. In 2004-05, nearly 50 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The campaign has its origins in an incident in September 2005. Joey Palermo-Silence, then a sophomore, was sitting in math class and a boy behind him said, "This is gay." Joey, who had long been bothered by such remarks, turned and said, "Use another word, please."

Other students in the class chimed in, "Yeah, use another word!"

The boy responded, "My bad. Sorry if I offended anybody."

Later that week, Joey was in the office of Carmen Gelman, the assistant principal, as part of a Student Advisory Committee formed during the summer.

Gelman, the first Latino/a administrator in the district and a strong advocate of a school culture respecting all students, had told the 15 or so students present that the committee was to give students a voice in what happened at school. The message was, "If you don't like what is going on, you have to find solutions, not just complain."

At the meeting, junior Adam Davis, who self-identifies as European and homosexual, said, "I'm so tired of hearing kids say things like, 'That's so gay... 'faggot'... and racist comments."

Joey, who describes himself as white and Native American, told the story of his interaction in math class. It was like a tiny rock thrown into a still pond.

Students wanted to expand on Joey's initiative and talked about a schoolwide campaign. The principal supported the idea and the students decided to do some preliminary research. That November, members of the Student Advisory Committee fanned out into the hallways, classrooms, and outside around the school with clipboards. For two weeks, they tallied the kinds of disrespectful language they heard.

The students separated the tallies into five categories that they had previously identified: racist, sexist, homophobic, able-ist, and foul language. (Some students did not understand the term *able-ist*, which the committee then defined as derogatory comments about mental or physical disabilities.) Those taking tallies were a racially diverse group of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, both male and female, who self-identified as biracial, Caucasian, Asian-American, and African-American.

During the tallying, students noted 80-90 racist comments; 30-40 sexist comments; 30-40 able-ist comments; and 50-60 homophobic comments. They tallied only about 20 instances of foul language, but Adam noted that they hadn't really focused on foul language, as they were more interested in discriminatory or derogatory language.

After the tallying, the Student Advisory Committee agreed to start a campaign, which turned into their biggest project of the 2005-06 school year. First, they came up with their kick-off plan. Adam took leadership, ordering buttons, and Jennifer Lam designed a poster. Sylvan Edmonson came up with a pledge for students and teachers to sign. Her idea was: if you want a button, you have to sign the pledge.

*I \_\_\_\_\_ am signing this pledge to stop the use of language that is racist, sexist, able-ist, homophobic, or is offensive and derogatory to any other student, teacher, staff member, or administrator at Springfield High School. I will accomplish this goal by wearing my "Use Another Word" button and encouraging other students to sign the pledge and become aware, like I have, that the words I choose do affect other people and the overall environment in the school. I will also consider becoming involved in the Student Advisory Committee and help to make SHS a safe and diverse place.*

*Signed: \_\_\_\_\_.*

Assistant Principal Gelman held an all-staff meeting so the students could tell the teachers how they could support the campaign. "We hear these things in the school, and a lot of times no one says anything," explained one student. They showed the teachers the tallies and Adam Davis said, "From now on, if you hear disrespectful language, we'd like you to say, 'Use another word, please.'"

While the Student Advisory Committee discussed listing words students could use instead of disrespectful put-downs, they decided not to do so because they didn't want their peers making up new discriminatory words. They wanted to give a simple and clear message: If you're being disrespectful, you're acting the fool.

The campaign started with a kick-off day in January. During the next week, members of the Student Advisory Committee staffed a table in the courtyard where students could sign the pledge and get buttons. Word spread quickly; Adam had ordered 400 buttons and the committee gave out most of them that first day.

The students also plastered the campus with colorful posters that read, "Use Another Word" in large letters, followed by "Help Prevent Discrimination" and the text, "When you hear a degrading word from another person, just react with the simple phrase, 'Please use another word!'"

## Responses to 'Use Another Word'

What was the response? Some students supported the campaign, even describing it as cool. But there was also initial resistance and backlash. Joey estimated that about 40 percent of students were supportive and 60 percent were resistant. Some, for example, claimed the program constituted "school censorship of language." Others said, "This is dumb." Some substituted a different disrespectful word — for instance, if a student used the word "gay" and someone said, "Use another word please," the offending student might respond, "OK, fag."

Other students emphasized the foul language aspect of the pledge, saying, "I can't get a button because I know I'm going to cuss and I can't stick to it." Others cussed more to see what would happen. The student-leaders were prepared for this. "A lot of what I'm trying to do is get people to use more intelligent words to express their emotions," Adam said.

"...Not just say 'Use another word' — say 'Use another word' and say why. Have a little conversation with them. A lot of hatred comes from un-education."

For example, Adam recalled a conversation with a fellow student:

"That's so gay."

"Use another word, please. Is it gay?"

"No, but it's stupid."

"Then you think that homosexuality is stupid?"

"Homosexuality isn't stupid — just this assignment."

"Well, then, it's not gay, you need to say what you mean."

Joey remembered that he received a lot of ridicule at first. Guys on his athletic team regularly used words like *gay*, *Jew*, and *retarded* in a derogatory manner. But the members of the Student Advisory Committee kept exerting positive peer pressure and repeating that disrespectful commentary was not welcome in the school.

Some students claimed that due to freedom of speech, they had the right to use any words they wanted.

Members of the Student Advisory Committee, especially those who had taken government class, countered that the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that offensive or derogatory words directed towards a minority group are considered fighting words; at a school, fighting words create a hostile environment and are thus not constitutionally protected free speech.

Many students supported the campaign, especially in the area of racist, sexist, homophobic, and able-ist comments. Some responded, "Oh, sorry," or began to use the generic — and less offensive — *jerk* or *stupid*.

The student leaders met and decided that even though they thought stupid could be considered able-ist, they would let it slide in the interest of cooperation. As time went on, most of the students who had been resistant toned down their outward criticism of the program. Although they might not have visibly supported the program by wearing buttons, they kept quiet and didn't push the issue.

## The Impact of 'Use Another Word'

The ability to say, "Use another word, please" gave power and support to students who were offended by derogatory put-downs but who may not have wanted to say anything out of fear of repercussions. Because of the campaign, a critical mass of support formed at the school, which made it safe to speak up. It turned out that "there were lots of kids who were bothered by this," Gelman said.

The campaign has also given students a positive experience in social activism. A group of young people, with the support of the adults around them, tried to change things and their actions had a visible impact. "There is a discussion about racial remarks and the fact that it's happening among the kids is wonderful," Gelman said. "I know that many times the discussion doesn't even happen among adults. It's not always pleasant — sometimes it's painful."

Teacher James Mattiace said he has noticed a decrease in the number of fights at the school, and that students are being nicer to each other. District data supports this conclusion: Suspensions went from 318

during 2004-05 to 142 in 2005-06. Suspensions for fighting dropped from 86 to 38, and suspensions for defiance from 176 to 11.

"It works," Mattiace said of the campaign. "We're giving kids tools so when they're offended they can clearly express the fact that they're not happy with what was said."

While students initiated and led the campaign, the support of Gelman has been important. The daughter of a Mexican mother and Russian-Romanian-Jewish father, Gelman has "street credibility" with the students. Following a troubled adolescence, she went on to get a college degree, and worked in human services and juvenile corrections before becoming a school administrator.

## Reaching into the Future

When students launched their "Use Another Word" campaign in the fall of 2006, Joey noticed that the incoming students were very supportive. "We set up a table during freshman orientation," he said, "and the freshmen really took it in, which is really good. They would ask me about the buttons and I would tell them about it and they'd say, 'That sounds pretty cool' and then they'd go get a button."

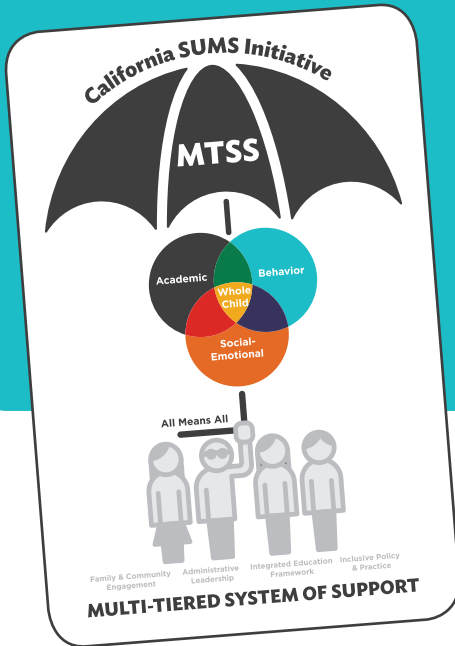
At the end of September, the Student Advisory Committee held another promotional week for "Use Another Word." For three days, members of the SAC sat in the booth, encouraging students to take the pledge and wear the buttons. Adam observed that about every fifth person in the hallways had on a button, and every classroom had a poster. Joey commented that, "I haven't heard the words being thrown around as much."

The SAC is planning more promotions this year to keep the campaign alive, and this year's juniors have promised to provide leadership next year. "Use Another Word" continues to be successful due to the enthusiasm of the entire school community, from students to teachers, staff, administrators, school board members and parents.

More important, the young people spearheading the campaign have learned an essential lesson about the importance of social activism. They have become that "small group of thoughtful, committed people" that Margaret Mead said can "change the world."

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She is interested in hearing from any schools that implement the "Use Another Word" campaign.



# Building PBIS Around Shared Schoolwide Expectations

*How have the shared values and beliefs of both internal and external stakeholders informed the shared expectations for the school community?*

## What was the Need?

To meet one of the major goals of the Santa Ana Unified School District, Valley High School was challenged to get a comprehensive system based on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) off the ground. The leaders at Valley realized that implementing PBIS throughout their campus was an opportunity to also meet a systematic need to have common language and expectations for students and staff, both in school and in the greater community. To truly address this need, Valley launched a rebranding transformation.

A representative school leadership team that works with staff, students, and administrators was tasked with developing a system of support, implementation, and sustainability, with the ultimate goal of creating a positive school climate and effective learning environment. In addition, it was critical that a data system for progress monitoring be created to better serve student needs and inform best practice around instruction.

## SCHOOL FACT BOX



Valley High School, located in Santa Ana, California, serves over 2,200 students, with 93% participating in the free and reduced-price meal program and 33% in programming for English Learners. The demographic profile reflects that 97% of the students are Hispanic/Latino; 2% Asian; 1% White; <1% African American; <1% American Indian or Alaska Native; <1% Filipino; and <1% Pacific Islander.

## What did they Do to Address the Need?

Valley first needed to gather the voices from their stakeholders (students, staff, families, and their community), with the goal of identifying their common values and beliefs. To do this, Principal Dave Richey asked facilitators from Epic School Partnerships (ESP) to conduct listening sessions with all stakeholders. Based on the overarching themes that emerged, the ESP team developed an awareness campaign identifying the Valley community as strong, lifelong learners, and connected to each other. Once these schoolwide values were established—

Strong, Lifelong Learners, and Connected—they guided the creation of the PBIS schoolwide and classroom expectations. Because Valley is a career academy high school, the PBIS team felt it was important to have





classroom expectations that were specific to each academy, while also being aligned with schoolwide expectations. Each classroom teacher gathered feedback from students on a Google document to find out which expectations were the most in line with their values, and then created a survey which was given to the Student Advisory Group (a student group that is truly representative of the student body). From this work, the schoolwide expectations emerged. To reinforce student ownership of these expectations, the students put together an assembly at the beginning of the year to communicate the expectations to their peers. Instructors followed up by teaching the expectations in their classrooms at the start of each semester.

In addition to the schoolwide expectations matrix, representatives from the PBIS, counseling, and administrative teams, along with

**High School Inc.** is a nonprofit organization located on Valley High School's campus. Its goal is to provide small learning environments, multiple pathways to student success, and career academies to help students acquire specific skills needed for employment in high-tech industries. High School Inc. partners with the Santa Ana Chamber of Commerce and Santa Ana Unified School District; its success is made possible by the coordinated efforts of industry-led academy councils, businesses, specially trained faculty, and postsecondary education institutions.

Valley High School <b>SCHOOL-WIDE STANDARDS</b>			
<b>ESTAMOS CONECTADOS</b> <b>We are CONNECTED</b> Aceptamos nuestras diferencias We embrace our differences. Involucramos nuestra comunidad We engage with our community			
<b>WHAT DOES CONNECTED LOOK LIKE?</b>			
<b>In the CLASSROOM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mature</li> <li>• Be respectful</li> <li>• Pay attention</li> <li>• Wait for your turn</li> </ul>	<b>On the CAMPUS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in school events</li> <li>• Join a student group (such as choir, band, cheer, colorguard, etc.)</li> <li>• Be in an academy</li> <li>• Join a club</li> </ul>	<b>In the COMMUNITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycle trash</li> <li>• Keep the community clean</li> <li>• Do community service</li> <li>• Attend or give to fundraisers</li> </ul>	
<b>ESTAMOS APRENDIENDO Y CRECIENDO</b> <b>We are LIFELONG LEARNERS</b> Aprendemos y crecemos en todo lo que hacemos We learn and grow in all we do Preparamos para nuestro futuro We prepare for the future			
<b>WHAT DOES LIFELONG LEARNING LOOK LIKE?</b>			
<b>In the CLASSROOM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in class</li> <li>• Asking questions &amp; for help</li> <li>• Be curious and inquisitive</li> <li>• Collaborate with other students</li> <li>• Pay attention</li> </ul>	<b>On the CAMPUS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to teachers &amp; counselors</li> <li>• Attend tutoring</li> <li>• Form study groups</li> <li>• Use Chromebooks</li> </ul>	<b>In the COMMUNITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open-minded</li> <li>• Try new things</li> <li>• Teach others and learn from others</li> <li>• Gain work experience</li> </ul>	
<b>SOMOS FUERTES</b> <b>We are STRONG</b> Avanzamos para lograr nuestros metas We push through to reach our goals Determinamos nuestros propios caminos We determine our own paths			
<b>WHAT DOES STRONG LOOK LIKE?</b>			
<b>In the CLASSROOM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be confident enough to speak out</li> <li>• Bravely take on new challenges</li> <li>• Help others</li> <li>• Be persistent</li> </ul>	<b>On the CAMPUS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate at events and have school spirit</li> <li>• Greet people</li> <li>• Show common courtesy</li> <li>• Show respect</li> </ul>	<b>In the COMMUNITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate from Valley</li> <li>• Show school spirit</li> <li>• Attend games, performance, dances, and other school events</li> <li>• Be a positive representative of the school</li> </ul>	

other teachers, helped to create a multi-tiered integrated support system that offers both academic and social-emotional support. This system has not only helped to clearly identify and communicate all that is happening at Valley, but it also gives everyone an opportunity to see the gaps in the system, so that they can be more strategic when implementing resources as they move forward.

Finally, to address their need for increased capacity to track student progress, the team worked with High School Inc. to develop a data management system that allows them to monitor progress in both academics and behavior. This system will help Valley to make informed decisions on how to better serve students, while informing best practice around instruction.

## How's it Working?

Valley has gone through one full year of PBIS implementation with lesson plans and activities to teach the schoolwide behavior matrix. Because students created the expectations, they have a shared ownership of them and are therefore more aware and knowledgeable of them. An audit was conducted on Valley's PBIS system of the last two years; it showed a growth from a 13% grade to an 87% grade in one year's time. This next year, the staff will continue to look at the data and refine their MTSS to truly reflect the needs of the school community and to drive system changes.

**Resources**

- *Family Engagement within Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* by Garbacz, A., McIntosh, K., Eagle, J. W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Hirano, K. A., and Ruppert, T. Find at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1045988X.2014.976809?journalCode=vpsf20>
- *The Sustainability of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* by Coffey, J. H., and Horner, R. H. Find at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001440291207800402>



# SCHOOL-WIDE STANDARDS

## WHAT DOES CONNECTED LOOK LIKE?

**Estamos CONECTADOS**  
**We are CONNECTED**

Aceptamos nuestras diferencias  
We embrace our differences

Involucramos nuestra comunidad  
We engage with our community

### In the CLASSROOM

- Be mature
- Be respectful
- Pay attention
- Wait for your turn

### On the CAMPUS

- Participate in school events
- Join a student group (such as choir, band, cheer, colorguard, etc.)
- Be in an academy
- Join a club

### In the COMMUNITY

- Recycle trash
- Keep the community clean
- Do community service
- Attend or give to fundraisers

## WHAT DOES LIFELONG LEARNING LOOK LIKE?

**Estamos APRENDIENDO SIEMPRE**  
**We are LIFELONG LEARNERS**

Aprendemos y crecemos en todo de lo que hacemos.  
We learn and grow in all we do

Preparamos para nuestro futuro  
We prepare for the future

### In the CLASSROOM

- Participating in class
- Asking questions & for help
- Be curious and inquisitive
- Collaborate with other students
- Pay attention

### On the CAMPUS

- Talk to teachers & counselors
- Attend tutoring
- Form study groups
- Use Chromebooks

### In the COMMUNITY

- Be open-minded
- Try new things
- Teach others and learn from others
- Gain work experience

## WHAT DOES STRONG LOOK LIKE?

**Somos FUERTE**  
**We are STRONG**

Abrimos paso para lograr nuestras metas  
We push through to reach our goals

Determinamos nuestros propios caminos  
We determine our own paths

### In the CLASSROOM

- Be confident enough to speak out
- Bravely take on new challenges
- Help others
- Be persistent

### On the CAMPUS

- Participate at events and have school spirit
- Greet people
- Show common courtesy
- Show respect

### In the COMMUNITY

- Graduate from Valley
- Show school spirit
- Attend games, performance, dances, and other school events
- Be a positive representative of the school