Tuning in to the youth voice requires asking good questions.
Great ideas for transforming your high school will come from many places—especially young people.

- They’re sure to provide one of the richest sources of insight.
- You’ll want to speak with young people who represent the full range of learners served by your school.
- You’ll want to understand their true needs—and how your school might inspire them to stretch their ambitions.
- You'll want to spend time analyzing what you hear.

Think about what you want to learn from the young people you’ll meet. Look through these cards and choose a few questions to kick off your conversations, or come up with your own questions.

How To Use These Cards

These cards are intended to amplify student voice.

It’s important for adults to guide student conversations, but they should hold back immediate responses until they’ve first heard from students.

Avoid conflating, correcting, interrupting, or rushing students as they speak.

It’s OK if you don’t get to every card, or if you run out of time. Create the space to return and continue.

Lastly, enjoy the time and space with students. It’s necessary and important work. You’re helping to make their ideas possible.
Your Future

What kind of future do you see for yourself?

Now, imagine that the possibilities are infinite. What other ambitions do you have for your future?
How do you want your life to be like or different from the lives of the people who raised you or the people around you?
What do you want school to provide to help you pursue your dreams?

What is your school doing to help you with your dream today? What is your school not doing for you today?
Do you see yourself continuing your education beyond high school with college or post-secondary career certification?

How well is your high school preparing you for post-secondary education and the career you want?
What kind of job or career do you want to pursue?

Why does it interest you? What do you think you need to know—and be able to do—in order to get that career?
What does the American Dream mean to you?

Is it attainable?
What do you need to achieve it? What stands in your way? How can high school help?
Who are the role models you admire most?

What do you admire about them? What stands out for you— their successful careers, their characters, their commitments, other things? What did it take for them to be successful?
How do you define success for yourself?

What would help you achieve that success?
Where can you go to find that help?
Think of a question you would like to ask young people about their future.

Write your question here:
Think of a question you would like to ask young people about their future.

Write your question here:
Your Passion

Tell me about something you’re really interested in right now.

How might that topic, subject, or issue play a role in your future?
What is something you really care about?

Why does it matter to you? How can you keep learning more about it?
If you had to choose one thing to do for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Why does that energize you? What will it take to truly master it?
What is something you would love to teach?

Why does it fascinate you? Why do other people need to learn about it?
Your Passion

What are you an expert at?

Where did you learn about it, and what did it take to become an expert? What did it feel like along the way to becoming an expert?
Finish the sentence: “I feel alive when ______________________.”
Tell me about something you learned recently that you found truly interesting.

What did you learn? What was so fascinating about it? What else do you want to learn about it?
Your Passion

What do you wake up thinking about every morning?
Think of a question you would like to ask young people about their interests and what makes them passionate.

Write your question here:
Think of a question you would like to ask young people about their interests and what makes them passionate.

Write your question here:
Do you feel like you belong, that you are noticed, known, and cared about as an individual at your school? Why or why not?

What would you do to make sure that students feel like they belong, that they are noticed, known, and cared about as individuals at your school?
In what ways, if any do you feel like you have a voice in your own learning and in decisions about your school?

What would you do to make sure students have a voice in their own learning and in decisions about your school?
Your Experience

In what ways does your school or its educators engage with community partners—meaning organizations or companies in your city?

How would you want your school/educators to engage students with outside partners to work together to solve problems in the community?
Your Experience

Do you feel like your school is safe, equitable, inclusive, and fair? Why or why not?

What would you do to make sure your school is safe, equitable, inclusive, and fair?
What opportunities does your school provide you to learn and make decisions about your post-secondary plan?

In what ways would you like your school to introduce you to experiences that await after graduation?
Does your learning connect to the real world and help you build the knowledge and skills you need for the future?

What would you do to make sure that your learning is connected to the real world and helps you build the knowledge and skills you need for the future?
Your Experience

Does your school offer learning opportunities beyond the walls of the traditional building?

Where else in your community could learning take place?
Does your school treat time flexibly to allow for deeper learning and give students the time they need to master subjects?

If you could design your ideal schedule, what would it look like?
Does your school make the most of what technology has to offer?

How would you like to see technology used in your school and your learning?
Tell me about a time in school when you felt really inspired to learn.

What was that experience like? How could teachers create more moments that inspire you to learn?
Your Dream School

If you were a school principal, what is one thing you’d change?

How would that make high school better for students? What would you do to get your students excited about learning?
If you could add one class that would make you really excited to go to school, what would it be?

How would that class prepare you for the future?
If you could add one class that would make you really excited to go to school, what would it be?

How would that class prepare you for the future?
Your Dream School

Get into your imagination. Build a dream school.

What would it be like to go there? What kind of future would it prepare you for?
Your Dream School

If you could build a school that was specifically designed for how you learn, what would it look like? Sound like? Feel like?

Take me through a day at that school...
Your Dream School

What will getting a high school diploma do for you?

How will it set you up for the next step toward achieving your dreams?
How would your dream high school better prepare you for college, a career and a contributor to your community?

What do you think you need to be ready for college?
During what part of the day do you learn the most?

What does learning mean to you? What does it mean to your family?
Think of a question you want to ask young people about the high school of their dreams. What are the ingredients? What do they want that’s different from their current or traditional high school?

Write your question here:
Think of a question you want to ask young people about the high school of their dreams. What are the ingredients? What do they want that’s different from their current or traditional high school?

Write your question here:
Taking the Next Steps

LISTEN AND LEARN: Take time to learn more from our youth. Reflect on what they have shared and how you can continue to empower their voices.

ACT TOGETHER: Collaborate with students to identify ways to make positive changes in your school and community. Empower them to take the lead and encourage more adults to engage with our youth.

REFLECT ON YOUR PRACTICE: Consider how your teaching or leadership style impacts students. Think about how to be more inclusive, supportive, and intentional.

AMPLIFY POSSIBILITIES: Find opportunities to amplify the voices of the youth in your community, whether it’s in meetings, on social media, or in decision-making processes. Set the expectation of how they’re necessary for real change.

KEEP GOING: Make a commitment to continuously engage with the youth in your school and community. Their needs and perspectives may evolve over time, and it’s important to stay connected.

Keep It Going

You’ve engaged and you want to keep going. What’s next? Here are some starters you can choose from to help you dive deeper and keep the collaboration flourishing:

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH: How do you take care of your mental health? What support do you need from your school to improve your mental well-being?

YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM: Who supports you in your learning journey? How can schools better support students like you?

YOUR CHALLENGES: What are the biggest challenges you face in your daily life? How can your school or community help address these challenges?

YOUR CULTURE: How does your culture influence your learning and experiences at school? How can schools be more inclusive and respectful of different cultures?

YOUR IDENTITY: How does your identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) impact your experiences at school? What can schools do to create a more inclusive environment for all students?
Empower Youth Participation

Use the Ladder of Youth Participation as a guide to assess and improve youth engagement in your school.

This ladder outlines different levels of participation, from low to high.

Aim to create a more student-centered school model by actively involving youth in decision-making processes and empowering them to take the lead.

1. Manipulation: Adult-led, youth do as directed without understanding the purpose
2. Decoration: Adult-led, youth understand the purpose but have no input
3. Tokenism: Adult-led, youth understand the purpose but have minimal input
4. Adult-led, youth understand the purpose and have a role
5. Adult-led, youth are consulted and informed
6. Adult-led, youth share some decision-making
7. Youth-led, youth work with little input from adults
8. Youth-led, youth and adults work together and make shared decisions

Adapted from Roger Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation (1992)