Your thoughts, your passions, your experience, your dream school. Let’s talk about it!

XQ
Great new ideas for your high school will come from you and your peers.

- You’ll want to speak with students who represent the entire student body—go beyond your usual friend group. The goal is to include all types of students.
- You’ll want to understand what they need to feel like they can succeed in school, academically and socially/emotionally.
- You’ll want to spend time truly analyzing what you’ve heard.

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

How To Use These Cards

These cards are intended to guide you and your peers into exploring and amplifying your voices.

Adults are likely to be there to support and help you, but it is ultimately your ideas that matter in this exercise.

You’ve probably done something like this before. That’s great. If not, we’re glad you’re participating. Here’s some help:

Speak openly, fairly, and with respect towards your peers.

Listen intently. Give your peers the space to be heard. Contribute, don’t constrict.

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 you share with people. It’s good and important work.
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?
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?
Your Future

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?
Your Future

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?
Your Future

How do you define success for yourself?

What would help you achieve that success? Where can you go to find that help?
Your Future

Think of a question you want to ask your peers about how they envision their future.

Write your question here:
Think of a question you want to ask your peers about how they envision 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?
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?
Your Passion

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?
What do you wake up thinking about every morning?
Think of a question you would like to ask your peers about their interests and passions.

Write your question here:
Your Passion

Think of a question you would like to ask your peers about their interests and passions.

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?
Your Experience

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?
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?
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?
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?
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...
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 your peers about their “dream” high school. What ingredients do they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally? Or to get them ready for whatever comes after high school?

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Write your question here:
Taking the Next Steps

YOUR VOICE MATTERS:
Share an insight from this conversation with a teacher, parent or friend. Share with them why this mattered to you.

TAKE ACTION:
Identify one thing you can do to make a positive impact change in your school community. Share what would make you feel empowered.

REFLECT:
Take a moment to think back on this conversation. Share with others what you learned about yourself and your peers.

KEEP GOING:
Talk with a teacher or other adult at your school about how you can bring more students to the table. Share why this work is important for your school and community.

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.

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