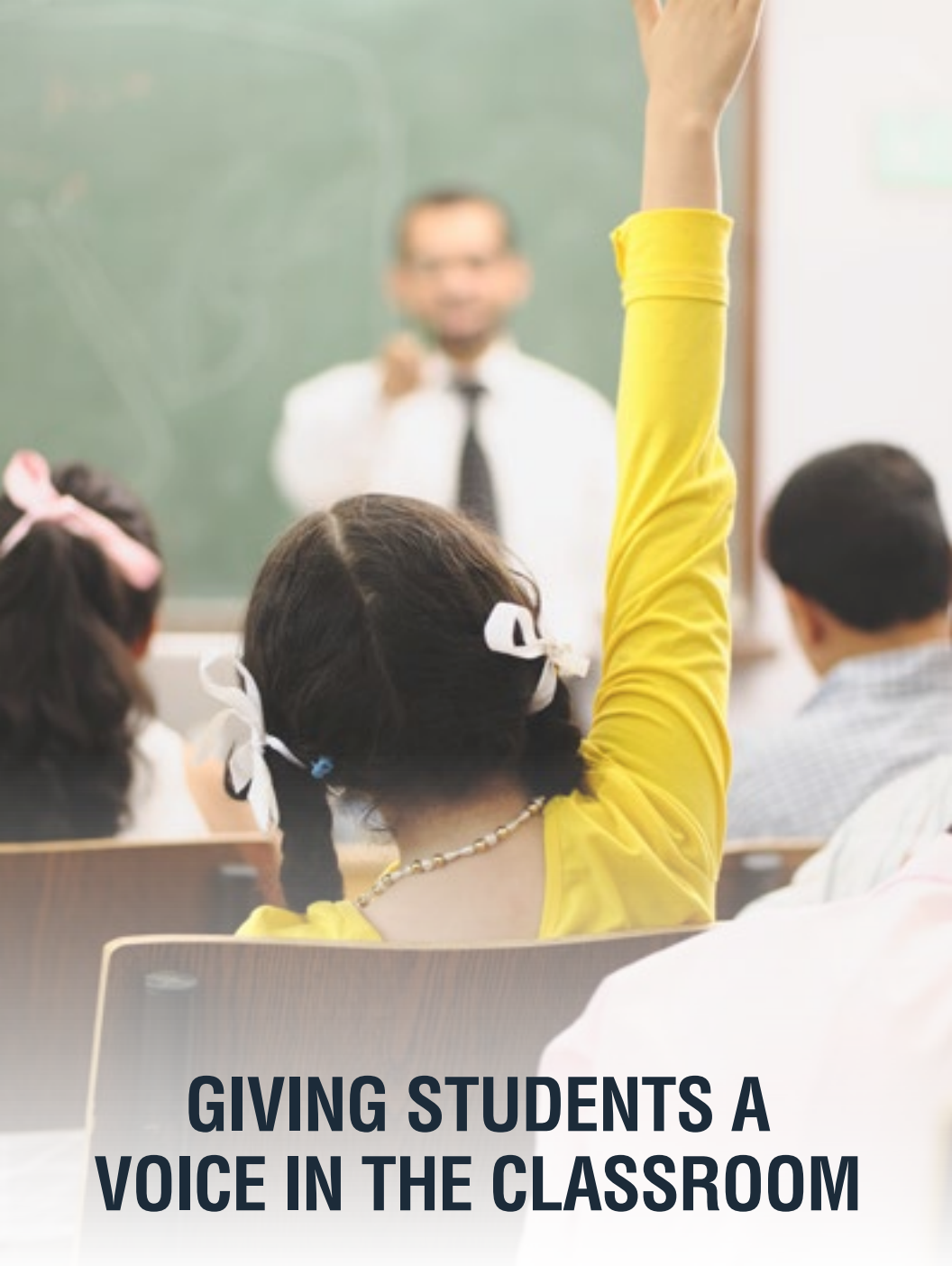

GIVING STUDENTS A VOICE IN THE CLASSROOM

Jostens®

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In a typical school day, how many meaningful decisions about their role and learning do students get to make? Too often, the answer is "not many." The educational system and teachers decide what students need to learn, when and how they will learn it, and how long it will take. Standardized tests determine whether they learned it.

So it's not unreasonable to ask: If students believe administrators and teachers hold all the power, why should they put in any effort in school? Does it really matter what they think and what's important to them? If they don't have any say, why speak up or step out?

Those are difficult, challenging and sometimes controversial questions. However, if the goal is for students to become self-motivated, responsible learners, a key strategy is to give them more voice and choice — more power — in their classrooms and schools. When students believe that what they think and say really matters, it unlocks their commitment to and potential for learning and for investing themselves in the school community. On the other hand, when teachers and administrators make all the decisions, students can become less motivated to learn and they become more passive and dependent on educators for their learning. That makes it harder for everyone.

As citizens go to the polls to select local, state and national leaders, it is fitting to ask about whether, how, and when students do, or should, have a voice in their schools and classrooms. In the process, we offer practical ways teachers and other educators can create opportunities can have more of a voice in their classrooms and schools. It can be challenging to shift and share power. But when it occurs, it likely has tremendous benefits for student engagement and learning. It also enhances student-teacher relationships, which benefits everyone.

It means shifting from an emphasis on "teaching" to "learning." It means that teachers and other adults in the school sometimes need to stand aside (or, more often, stand beside) so students can take the lead, learn and grow. And when it doesn't work out well, teachers and other adults help students learn and grow through the setbacks.

> Students develop relationships in schools with both adults (teachers, staff, administrators) and peers. Those relationships can be a positive resource for growth and learning, particularly when they are well rounded. As highlighted in Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework, a key aspect of positive teacher-student relationships is how power is shared, which is the focus of this month's content.

SOURCES:
Bundick, M. J., Quaglia, R. J., Corso, M. J., & Haywood, D. E. (2014). Promoting student engagement in the classroom. *Teachers College Record,* 116, 1–34.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice (2nd Ed.).* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wolfe, R. E., & Poon, J. D. (2015). *Educator competencies for personalized, learner-centered teaching.* Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

The Critical Role of Friends Who Listen

In the past 20 years, researchers have learned a lot about student-centered learning, which includes an emphasis on student voice, student choices and other ways that teachers share power in their interactions and relationships with students.

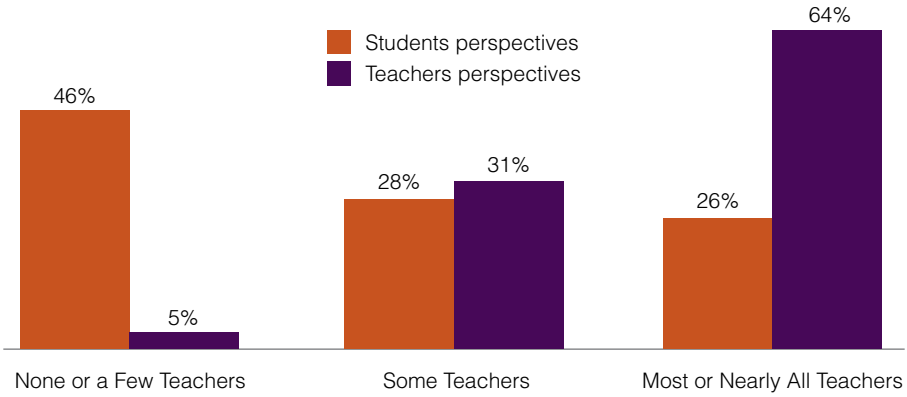
The Power of Sharing Power in Classrooms

High school students who feel more empowered in learning are more likely to report higher grades, higher educational aspirations and fewer behavior incidents in school, according to a survey of 381 students in five urban high schools. What factors contribute to students feeling more empowered? When teachers have positive relationships and share power with students and when there's a sense of community — relationships with other students — in the classroom.

SOURCE:
Kirk, C. M., Lewis, R. K., Brown, K., Karibo, B., & Park, E. (2016). The power of student empowerment: Measuring classroom predictors and individual indicators. Journal of Educational Research, 1-7.

Teachers and Students: Different Perspectives

Teachers may believe they are asking students for their input, but students may not see themselves having opportunity for input. In May 2016, Search Institute pilot tested The Pulse Survey for Jostens in eight schools, surveying 2,448 students and 118 teachers. They asked both teachers and students how many teachers asked students' opinions "when making decisions that could affect them."



Who is right? The best way to answer that question is to talk with students and teachers about their own experiences in the school. Perhaps teachers are doing things that students don't notice. Perhaps students are focused on decisions that teachers haven't considered. Just the conversation can open up new opportunities for exploring when and how students have a voice in decisions that affect them.

For more information about using The Pulse Survey in your school, visit www.JostensRenaissance.com/pulse

What Does Sharing Power Look Like in Classrooms?

A shift to learner-centered teaching results in a classroom in which an adult lectures to students sitting in rows every day. A panel of experts worked together to identify what educators do to encourage student voice and choice (or agency) and student ownership in learning. They see effective educators doing the following:

- Offering students choices in the curriculum and co-designing learning experiences.
- Giving students opportunities to set their own goals and monitor their progress.
- Providing students with several options to demonstrate mastery or competence.
- Creating opportunities for students to make decisions, solve problems, and contribute to classroom learning and climate.

SOURCE:
Wolfe, R. E., & Poon, J. D. (2015). *Educator competencies for personalized, learner-centered teaching.* Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

Shifting Power to Students: A Growth Process

Students don't start out ready to be independent, autonomous learners. Rather, they need responsibility to shift to them as they become more and more competent and self-directed. Thus, shifting power in teacher-student relationships can happen anywhere along a continuum:

DEPENDENT
Students need specific instructions and coaching in advance.

SUPPORTED
Students begin setting goals for themselves. Teachers support them.

INDEPENDENT
Students are responsible for their own learning. Teachers seek progress reports.

SELF-DIRECTED
Students set their own goals and the standards they want to achieve.

SOURCE:
Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice (*2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Strategies to Help Students Become Autonomous Learners

The central goal of sharing power with students is to develop their ability to learn independently and to take responsibility for their own actions, choices and learning. Researchers find that teachers nurture this kind of autonomy at the middle school level when they do the following:

- Give student opportunities to move around, work with others and make choices about their learning.
- Help students identify their own interests, goals and values.
- Explicitly show links between what is being learned and students' own life plans.
- Show flexibility, following students' ideas, leads and perspectives.
- Integrate students' ideas into planning activities.
- Ask questions that push students to think through problems and improve their skills.
- Introduce students to multiple viewpoints so they have to think through their own perspectives.
- Letting students disagree and criticize as ways of helping them feel safe expressing their opinions and feelings.

SOURCE:
Wallace, T. L., Sung, H. C., & Williams, J. D. (2014). The defining features of teacher talk within autonomy-supportive classroom management. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 42, 34-46.*

Barriers to Sharing Power with Students

Though educators have long known about the value of student-centered learning, most teaching still focuses primarily on teachers conveying what they know to students — most often through lectures. Then teachers evaluate whether students have learned what the teachers wanted them to learn. When researchers investigate why teachers resist student-centered approaches, they find the following barriers at work:

- Teachers want to show what they know.
- They are supposed to cover too much content.
- Using new approaches is initially awkward.
- Teachers feel more vulnerable when teaching is less scripted.

Often, however, teachers start with other ways to share power. This might include giving students choices in their assignments or deadlines, working with students to set classroom policies and expectations, or creating together the criteria that will be used in assessments.

SOURCE:
Weimer, M. (2013). Learner-centered teaching: *Five key changes to practice (2nd Ed.).* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Student Centered Isn't "Hands Off"

"Student-centered" learning does not mean "hands-off" teaching. A review of two decades of research on teacher-student relationships suggests that students do better educationally when teachers both communicate what they know effectively while also giving students freedom and responsibility during group and independent work. But the way the teachers use their influence also matters. When teachers are oppositional, admonishing or dissatisfied, students are less likely to learn. When they are cooperative and warm, students become more engaged and learn better.

This kind of relationship — characterized by both high teacher influence and a cooperative spirit — is also what both students and teachers say they prefer. When teacher-student relationships are characterized by this kind of high influence and cooperation, researchers also find lower levels of discipline problems as well as lower levels of teacher stress and burnout.

SOURCE:
Wubbels, T., & Brekelmans, M. (2005). Two decades of research on teacher-student relationships in class. *International Journal of Educational Research, 43* (1–2), 6–24

Wubbels, T. (2005). Student perceptions of teacher-student relationships in class. *International Journal of Educational Research, 43* (1–2), 1–5. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2006.03.002

Sharing Power and Classroom Authority

People often object to the idea of sharing power because it implies giving up classroom authority and control. However, researchers find just the opposite: When teachers form strong relationships with students that include sharing power and support for students' autonomy, students are more likely to recognize the legitimacy of the teachers as authority figures.

A study in Portugal found that "a focus on interpersonal relationship strategies that take student interests into account, presents options and minimizes the use of coercive strategies" resulted in students seeing teachers exercising their authority legitimately. However, if students are in an environment that does not support their autonomy (or share power), they are less likely to see teachers as legitimate authority figures.

SOURCE:
Graça, J., Calheiros, M. M., & Barata, M. C. (2013). Authority in the classroom: adolescent autonomy, autonomy support, and teachers' legitimacy. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 28* (3), 1065-1076.

Sharing Power with Students: A Rubric for Reflection

This rubric suggests a continuum of ways educators encourage students to take more and more responsibility and feel more ownership for their learning by giving them choices and a voice.

Circle the statement in each row (on the next page) that best reflects your most common practices as a teacher (knowing they can vary from day to day and from class to class). Then identify one or two areas where you believe it would help students to shift practices one column to the right. Identify specific actions you could take to begin moving in that direction.

TIP SHEET FOR EDUCATORS

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
Informal Interactions	As a teacher, you initiate most or all conversations with students.	Both you and students bring up ideas and questions about topics of interest.	Students regularly come to you to share their ideas, questions, and interests.
Goals and Expectations	As teacher, you identify goals for students, and then coach them in how to achieve them.	You guide students in setting their own goals for learning or behavior.	Students set their own goals. You help them find the resources they need.
Classroom Culture	You set expectations and rules for how things will be done in your classroom.	You ask students for input in setting or refining classroom expectations.	Students work together to establish classroom norms to ensure learning.
Class Assignments	You set expectations and rules for how things will be done in your classroom.	You ask students for input in setting or refining classroom expectations.	Students work together to establish classroom norms to ensure learning.
Knowledge Transmission	Students learn mostly from teacher lectures, textbooks, and pre-determined online content.	Students learn from independent or group projects. As teacher, you ask questions that push for deeper learning.	Students take responsibility for learning from each other through project-based activities, reflection, and demonstration of learning.
Classroom Activities	As the teacher, you summarize content and ask students if they have questions about it.	Students summarize and identify challenging content from lectures, readings or other assignments.	Students present what they are learning to each other for feedback and ongoing learning.
Feedback and Monitoring Progress	As teacher, you confirm that students are learning by grading assignments and giving quizzes and tests.	Students have ongoing feedback so they can track their progress and goals.	Students select how they will demonstrate their mastery of a standard or competency. You provide feedback.
Behavior Management	The school and teachers set and enforce the rules for student behavior.	The school and teachers seek student input into rules for behavior.	Students lead in establishing and enforcing rules for student behavior through, for example, restorative circles.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
THE FOUR CORNERS: POWER SHARING IN THE CLASSROOM

Surveys often find that teachers and students have different perspectives on whether and how power is shared in the school and classroom. This activity gives students a chance to share their perspectives and to work with the teacher to identify one or two ways they might take more responsibility for the classroom experience and their own learning.

This activity can be used in any class setting, particularly during times of transition, such as starting a new unit. The questions should be adapted so that they fit the specific dynamics of your classroom and what you as a teacher believe are areas where students are ready to grow in their ownership and responsibilities. (Many of the questions echo the sharing power rubric in the tip sheet for educators.)

Step 1

Clear space in a room so students can move around and get to four corners. Make and post these labels in each corner so they can be read across the classroom:

- The Students
- The Teacher
- Teacher and Students Together
- Someone Else

Step 2

Say something like:

Lots of decisions are made each day in our classroom. It's important to find the right balance of decisions that I make as a teacher and decisions you make as students. In addition, other people such as the principal, our parents or school district leaders sometimes make decisions that affect what we do in the classroom. (Refrain from giving examples, as they will come out in the activity.)

It's appropriate that different people make different decisions. However, one goal we have as educators is to increasingly give you, as students, more responsibility for your own learning. One way you can gain more responsibility is by participating in and making decisions about school and learning.

One of our jobs as teachers is to guide you so you're ready and can be successful. Sometimes it's hard to get the right balance for everyone. This activity helps us talk about how we make decisions and what we might do to give you more of a voice in the classroom.

Step 3

Point to the four signs around the room. Explain that they represent four broad options for how decisions might be made in the classroom. You'll call out a series of decisions that are made, and students will pick the sign that best matches their experience. Explain the four signs:

- Students make this decision on their own. The teacher supports the students' choices.
- The teacher makes this decision on her or his own. Students are expected to follow it.
- Teacher and students decide what to do together, negotiating when they have differences of opinion.
- Someone else who isn't in the classroom decides. This could include the principal, parents, curriculum planners, the state legislature and others.

Step 4

Have students stand in a cluster in the middle of the room. Read one of the "who decides" prompts from the box on the next page. After each one, have students each move to the corner that best fits who they think makes these decisions most of the time. (Some may choose to stand between different options!)

Who Decides...

1. Classroom rules or expectations for each other.
2. What the class will do when it has parties or celebrations.
3. What textbook or curriculum to use in the class.
4. Who sits where in the classroom.
5. What decorations, posters or other materials are on the walls.
6. What students will work together for class projects or assignments.
7. What projects or assignments students will do for different topics.
8. What students will work together for class projects or assignments.
9. What happens when a student breaks a classroom rule or other expectation.
10. Each student's goals for learning, progress or growth in the class.
11. What classroom activities students will do so they will learn what they need to learn.
12. When assignments are due.

Step 5

When everyone has picked a spot, ask students in each group to talk about why they picked where they're standing, giving examples. The goal is not to convince each other that their perspective is "right" (or what's the "right" way to decide), but to surface different students' perspectives.

In some cases, there may be a "right" answer, such as the decision about what textbook to use. If you choose, you can highlight how these decisions are made, particularly if students have a lot of different perspectives on the issue. However, the main goal is to stimulate thinking about how decisions are made and how they might shift.

Step 6

Get each group's perspective on who makes each decision, then move on to the next topic. Continue for as much time as you have, stopping to learn why students selected the spot they did. Try to pick different topics that will encourage students to move around.

Step 7

Have students return to their desks. Talk as a whole group about the patterns that emerged as you went through the different topics. Use questions such as these:

- What overall patterns did you notice? For example (use if needed as prompts):
  - » Did we all generally agree about some things?
  - » Were there lots of different opinions about others?
  - » Do we see some groups making lots of decisions compared to others?
- As you think about the different decisions, which ones do you think are currently being made the best way? Why do you think it works the best?
- Are there some decisions that you think should shift, particularly any that should shift to more student voice and involvement? How do you think that might work?
- Whether they think this is the best way to make these decisions. Why or why not? If not, what would be other alternatives?

Step 8

Give students a chance to finish brainstorming. Then identify at least one of their ideas that you're most comfortable pursuing. (You may note that the idea is "shared power," so you as a teacher still have a voice as well. Based on what you know about the school and the class, you see this as a good place to start.) If you're comfortable with all the ideas (and they all fit your classroom style), have students select one that they're most eager to pursue.

Step 9

Come up with a next step for moving the idea forward. This might include a future session when you develop guidelines and a plan for shifting power in that area.