



YOUTH VOICE & SCHOOL CLIMATE & CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS & STORIES

Read about exemplary schools and organizations that illustrate the power of incorporating youth voice, and specifically how youth voice can positively impact school climate and culture. The Design Team cultivated these stories from their own experiences and learning about the experience of others.

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Have another inspirational school or example to share?

We would love to hear about it! Email your stories to Youth-Nex at youth-nex@virginia.edu.

NUVU: THE INNOVATION SCHOOL [CAMBRIDGE, MA]

NuVu is a full-time innovation school for middle and high school students. NuVu's pedagogy is based on the architectural studio model and geared around multi-disciplinary, collaborative projects. NuVu teaches students how to navigate the messy creative process from inception to completion by prototyping and testing their ideas.

No Courses.

Instead, we have studios. Around 12 students work closely with their two coaches on solving big (and small) open-ended problems.

No Subjects.

Instead, everything is fused together. Students find themselves moving between a studio that requires them to design a telepresence robot, to another that requires them to re-imagine Boston with a cable car system.

No Classrooms.

Instead, we have an open space that changes all the time to adapt to the needs of every studio.

No One-Hour Schedule.

Instead, students spend two weeks from 9am-3pm solving one problem.

No Grades.

Instead, we have portfolios that document students' design decisions and show their final products.

NuVu was founded in 2010 in Cambridge, MA by PhDs and Graduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). For the last six years, NuVu has been providing an innovation-focused experience for students, ages 11-18. NuVu has reached over 3,000 students worldwide, and created and energized a generation of entrepreneurs, designers, makers and inventors. NuVu forms unique partnerships with schools in the public, private, charter, and international sectors that allow students to enroll full-time at NuVu for a trimester or semester. NuVu also enrolls long-term students who spend 1-4 years full-time completing their middle or high school years.



VALOR COLLEGIATE [NASHVILLE, TN]

Our Compass model is a human development model that is grounded in the foundational elements of what it means to be human.

“Working the Compass” means growing in body, heart, mind, and spirit in pursuit of excellence in every dimension. We chose the metaphor of the Compass because we were inspired by the idea of helping students (and adults) create their own “inner Compass” to help guide them through their lives in a reliable and clear way.

In order to lay out the path to excellence in our Compass model, we created a high-level scope and sequence called the Compass Developmental Pathways. There is a pathway for each of our 10 core Compass Habits. This is our competency-based framework and sets us up to both develop curriculum and design or align assessments to make sure our students are making progress towards development of an inner Compass. We have created what we call the Compass Phase System, a playlist-like curriculum that allows adults and students to develop their Compass habits from 5th to 12th grade, year-to-year. Both students and faculty participate in their unique versions of the Phase System.

In many ways, the Compass Phase System is like the process of earning badges in Boy Scouts. You perform different experiential tasks that are designed to help you grow in a habit and a discipline within the Compass. Similar to a Boy Scout Den, we also have a group and a process in which the work of the Phase System is presented to a group of peers. We call this our Circle process.

Top Achievement Scores

On the spring 2018 TNReady state test, Valor scholars achieved the highest overall scores of all non-academically selective middle schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools. Our scholars' scores were in the Top 5% of achievement scores in the state of Tennessee.

Overall Growth

Valor's middle schools are in the Top 1% of schools in Tennessee for our growth scores. Our schools were also the only two in Nashville to rank in the Top 5 for both growth AND achievement.

Inverting the Achievement Gap

Valor's low-income scholars outperformed their middle and upper income peers in Nashville and the state of Tennessee, inverting the “achievement gap” for the second year in a row.



ONE STONE [BOISE, ID]

One Stone is a student-led and student-directed nonprofit that makes students better leaders and the world a better place.

Our program empowers high school students to learn and practice 21st century skills through experiential service, innovative initiatives, social entrepreneurship, and the radical reinvention of learning.

One Stone does not charge membership dues or fees, ensuring that our programs are accessible to any high school student who wants to be a better leader and make the world a better place.

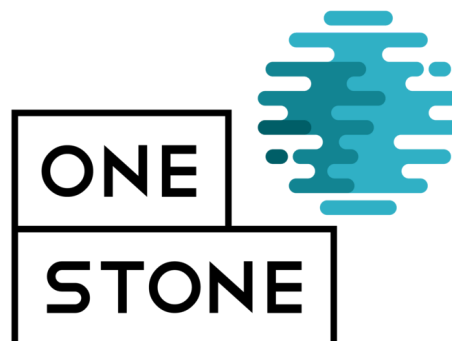
One Stone set out to start a revolution. As active participants in the governance and direction of the organization, with a board of directors comprised of two-thirds students, one-third adults, students are in the driver's seat.

Our innovative initiatives grew out of the desire to help students use their voice to change the world. At the starting line for One Stone is Project Good, an experiential service program that mobilizes the power of passionate students to bring real-world solutions to complex issues. Next came Two Birds, our student-led and directed creative services studio. Then we doubled down on entrepreneurship through the launch of Solution Lab, a business incubator for high school students. In each of these platforms we teach and use design thinking, ensuring we are relevant, innovative, and focused on our end user for real results.

When One Stone's end user—high school students—began asking for a One Stone high school ("because we learn so much at One Stone!") we listened. We incubated. We researched. We tore through sticky notes. And what we discovered was this:

Our unique student-led and student-directed culture—rooted in empathy and powered by design thinking—was the special sauce that would allow us to reimagine learning. One Stone High School was born, and a revolution was launched.

We are in the habit of disruption. We are unafraid. We believe. And together with our partners, we are forging an army of good, for good.





CAMPAIGN CONNECT AT LUIS MUNOZ-RIVERA COMMUNITY MIDDLE SCHOOL **[TRENTON, NJ]**

Campaign Connect (CC) is a process schools engage in so that they may become more supportive, engaging, inspiring, and safer for their students.

At the center of this process is a team of stakeholders—students, administrators, faculty, other staff, families, community members, and organizations—who go through iterative, relationship-driven, and data-informed cycles of continuous improvement.

The Campaign Connect stakeholder team at Rivera Middle School in Trenton, NJ began their process by analyzing both student suspension data and climate and culture survey data. The analysis showed that a majority of students felt unsafe outside of the classroom, largely due to bullying, teasing, and relational issues with other students. Climate survey results showed that 7 out of 10 students had experienced bullying and teasing in the building, that 6 out of 10 students worried about violence in the school community, and that only 5 out of 10 students believed that their peers treated each other with respect. Indeed, the peer conflicts in this school often led to violence, and consequently, a high number of student suspensions.

Student voice was critical in determining an action plan to address the negative dynamics among students in the community.

The school had recently participated in an assembly about the importance of recycling, “going green,” and taking care of the environment. Since student buy-in had already been cultivated around this issue, student and adult stakeholder team members together determined that creating a school beautification/recycling discipline alternative was an innovative way to foster positive peer relationships and lower suspension rates.

Students who were referred to administration for in-school fighting or bullying behaviors were given the opportunity to choose between serving a suspension, or participating with other students—often other students involved in the conflict—in a school-based beautification project. These projects included gardening, cleaning up the school grounds, and painting murals. Most students elected to participate in the beautification project rather than be suspended. Upon learning about the new initiative, some family members of the students became involved by donating materials and time to this project.

The stakeholder team monitored overall discipline referrals between January 2017 and April 2018, and found a 49% decrease in discipline referrals during this timeframe of action implementation.

The initiative has continued to lower discipline referrals and suspension rates to the present day, and a full-time staff member has been hired to coordinate the projects and expand the program to be a preventative, rather than just reactive, initiative to build positive peer relationships.





CAMPAIGN CONNECT AT MELVIN H. KREPS MIDDLE SCHOOL [EAST WINDSOR, NJ]

Campaign Connect (CC) is a process schools engage in so that they may become more supportive, engaging, inspiring, and safer for their students.

At the center of this process is a team of stakeholders—students, administrators, faculty, other staff, families, community members, and organizations—who go through iterative, relationship-driven, and data-informed cycles of continuous improvement.

After an in-depth review of disaggregated discipline data, the Campaign Connect stakeholder team at Kreps Middle School in East Windsor, NJ noticed that a small number of students were responsible for the majority of disciplinary incidents (“frequent flyers”). A closer analysis revealed that these handful of students were also less likely to be engaged in extracurricular activities outside of the classroom.

As a result, the Kreps team--which included 6 students, more than a third of the entire team--decided to implement initiatives to engage all students in a way that would foster meaningful connection to the school community.

The resulting action plan reflected a two-fold strategy for engaging students: First, it provided an opportunity for targeted students to choose a service learning project in lieu of receiving a punitive consequence (i.e. detention, suspension) for their disciplinary infractions. Then, the team invited the entire student body to participate in the service learning opportunities, with the goal of integrating the disconnected subgroups of students into the broader school community. This facilitated connection between the students who might not have otherwise connected with the broader school community.

The service learning opportunities included volunteering at a local animal shelter and serving at a local soup kitchen, both chosen by the students involved in the initiative.

A follow-up quantitative analysis showed a 13.7% decrease in disciplinary referrals over a two-year period. The team celebrated great success!





YOUNG VOICES [RHODE ISLAND, STATE-WIDE]

Young Voices is a Rhode Island-based non-profit that transforms urban youth into powerful advocates, partnering with the State's major leaders to create systemic reform and policy changes that improve the lives of thousands of youth statewide.

Young Voices was launched in 2006 to address the desperate need for an authentic youth voice in policy-making in Rhode Island. Since Young Voices was founded, more than 250 young people have become advanced leaders making a difference across the State.

We believe young people are uniquely positioned to inform decision making and deserve to have a seat at the table whenever decisions are being made that impact their lives.

Advocating for a seat at the table is only the first step. Young Voices also works to ensure that once at the table, youth have the training and skills needed to dialogue with adults as equals. Their year-round Leadership Transformation Academy (LTA) trains youth in advanced research, public speaking, and debate skills. The LTA prepares youth to work with influential adults to shape statewide policies that impact the future.

Example of Young Voices Impact:

A Young Voices alum (and now a college freshman at the University of Rhode Island) interviewed Providence High School and Middle School students about the disciplinary practices at their schools. The data collected showed varying degrees of consequences for similar infractions, inconsistent school rules, and troubling racial disparities.

In response, Young Voices participants worked together to craft a new Code of Conduct for all schools. This new code introduced restorative practices as the basis for all behavioral consequences. The code was presented to the superintendent and school board and was accepted.

Young Voices youth had been pushing the Providence Public School District to revise its Code of Conduct to include restorative justice practices for several years: This important victory, ensuring that students are supported to stay in school and succeed, is a victory for youth voice.



IOWA BIG [IOWA]

BIG exists to assist students in developing their agency, efficacy, and passions while gaining valuable real-world and academic skills so they can succeed in a world of rapid and constant change.

Iowa BIG is a high school program for sophomore, junior, and senior students within the Cedar Rapids, Linn-Mar, and College Community School District. The program is designed to help students lead their own learning journeys and discover their gifts, talents, and interests along the way.

BIG is a place where students get to learn through experiences and work that they care about. It's a place to learn not only the "stuff" in courses, but also how to get along in the world and build the skills to make them both "present-and-future-ready."

What is a BIG project?

Projects at BIG are real. Students complete projects for real audiences with real outcomes and real expectations.

Projects are authentic learning experiences, not tasks. Projects are initiatives that students own and navigate with the guidance of you and our staff to create new opportunities.

Each project varies depending on the topic, the student, and the choices they make. The BIG staff works closely to set expectations up front for the amount of time the student can put into the project. Together, students and staff work on student-centered projects, with the hope that each project is an inherently rewarding learning experience.



VERITAS PREP [ARIZONA]

A Great Hearts education prepares students to be more than just proficient test takers, but rather, to become great-hearted leaders capable of success throughout higher education and their professional careers.

We emphasize that in order for students to become great-hearted leaders, they must share in a knowledge that is rooted in the classical liberal arts tradition.

By offering a classical liberal arts curriculum, Great Hearts not only cultivates the hearts and minds of students in the pursuit of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, but also graduates great-hearted leaders prepared for success at the top colleges and universities worldwide.



VERITAS
PREPARATORY ACADEMY
A Great Hearts Academy



IN REAL LIFE **[NORTH CAROLINA]**

In 2008, the Asheville City Schools Foundation received a grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to engage in a Listening Project.

In partnership with the Rural Southern Voice for Peace, the ACS Foundation trained 40 community members to interview 60 students at Asheville Middle School and the Randolph Learning Center, 28 parents and family members, and 20 representatives from service providing agencies.

A result of that study identified students' desires to participate in after school programming. Using the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) as a model, service providers, teachers, and university and community volunteers began In Real Life (IRL).

Currently, IRL provides high quality, hands-on, equitable, and accessible after-school programming for all Asheville City Schools middle school students.

By partnering with 50+ community organizations and professionals, IRL has developed unique youth-informed programs to meet the demands of Asheville City Schools middle school students.

