Box 7.1 TEAM UP WITH YOUTH! A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

**Why team up with youth?**

Youth are one of the most valuable resources for improving schools. Students can provide insight into everything from instructional methods to school climate to curriculum. When teachers and administrators ask for and listen to their advice, students become more interested in improving their schools; by contributing to school change, they learn to communicate with teachers, address problems, work in teams, and set and achieve goals.

Regardless of ethnicity, religion, economic and family background, talent, and GPA, students who have a say in their educational environment gain self-confidence and leadership skills. Student participation in decision making inside and outside the classroom can bring many benefits for schools: attendance and discipline improve, dropout rates decline, and communication between students and teachers becomes stronger. Schools that encourage student participation can transform into safer, healthier, better places to learn. Even small changes can make a big difference.

**How can educators team up with youth?**

- Encourage youth to play a role in educating their peers, such as by tutoring after school, planning group projects, or mentoring younger students.
- Invite students to team teach with their teachers.
- Ask students to train teachers in subjects in which young people have an interest, such as technology, service learning, and diversity, and give them support in planning, presenting, and evaluating the training.
- Give students opportunities to evaluate their teachers and classroom experiences.
- Involve students in the school's self-study process by asking them to serve on committees, collect data, design surveys, lead focus groups, and help report on findings and proposed changes.
- Create a process by which students can give input into curriculum planning, design, and evaluation on both the school and district levels.
- Invite students to join the local school board (24 of 35 states studied by SoundOut.org have laws allowing students to serve on local school boards).
- Explore using student-led parent conferences in which students, with the support of a teacher, evaluate their own educational progress and accomplishments.
- Have students prepare personal learning plans and goals.
- Form a student committee to advise on the selection of textbooks and instructional materials.
- Allow students to provide appropriate input into hiring decisions; for instance, invite them to sit on hiring committees and interview panels for the selection of staff who will interact frequently with students.
- Involve students in making discipline and classroom management policies.
- Ask for students' ideas in planning school renovations or new facilities.
- Start a leadership class for all students.
- Form a student committee that evaluates budget issues at your school or in your district and proposes ideas on how to spend funds.
- Ask students to help identify financial needs not met by your budget and to help write grant applications or raise funds in other ways for projects such as library technology or student activities.
- Organize student action committees to tackle such issues as elective subjects taught at your school, student activities, teacher-student relations, peer leadership, and safety.

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- Hold student-organized-and-facilitated forums on issues of interest to students, with involvement from all members of the school community.
- Train your student press on journalistic standards and methods and then allow student reporters as much independence as possible.

For more information on positive ways to work with youth, go to http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov, or contact NCFY at (301) 608-8098. Team Up With Youth! A Guide for Schools was developed by the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) for the Family and Youth Services Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised June 2006. Available at: http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/publications/guide-to-starting-and-managing-a-youth-program