



# Authentic Student Voice in School Governance

**Association of Washington Student Leaders**

A well-rounded, high-quality civic learning experience includes Student Participation in School Governance. The Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL) actively partners with school principals to provide authentic, school-wide student voice to support and increase the academic and social success of all students.

*In Washington state schools you will find...*

## Students Leading in Successful Schools

The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) Leadership Framework provides the criteria for effective principal leadership. Principals foster success by working to achieve excellence in eight defined framework areas. Students are also using the eight criteria as their lens for effective leadership. AWSP and AWSL have elevated an awareness of the need for principal and student partnerships to achieve the goal of academic and social success for all students.



## RSVP – Raising Student Voice and Participation

In Washington the RSVP process has worked well in schools crossing all demographics– urban, rural, suburban, alternative, comprehensive, high school and middle level. Schoolwide summits, facilitated by students for students lie at the heart of RSVP. Student leaders organize an RSVP Leadership Team that is diverse, representative and capable of listening to and honoring student voice. Issues are identified, solutions prioritized, and the entire student body engages in action plans to solve school and community issues. Schools utilize the model on an annual or bi-annual basis. Following each summit, a student leadership team meets with administration to share results, discuss issues and prepare action plans.

### Summit 1: Voice

In all classrooms, student-led summits address the following questions:

- What’s going well in our school?
- If you could change one thing about our school, what would it be?
- If you oversaw our city, town or neighborhood, what issue would you tackle first?
- What national or global issue would you want to address?

Lists are generated and issues/concerns are prioritized.

### Summit 2: Recommendations

Based upon results of Summit 1, students answer the question, *What should we do?* Recommendations for action are determined.

### Summit 3: Response & Implementation

In this summit, students answer the question, *What is your response to this plan?* Feedback is provided to improve the plan.

Students then answer the question, *How can we make our plan a reality?* Volunteers are recruited to carry out the plan.

## Student Representation of State and Local Boards of Education

AWSL is responsible for the selection of two student members to the Washington State Board of Education (SBE). Students are selected to serve a two-year term, with balanced representation from eastern and western Washington. In addition to providing input to guide policy, the student members prepare a presentation for each board meeting that highlights student perspective on a “real issue” facing our school systems.

On the local level, many school districts in Washington have student representation on their school boards. In some districts this position is simply a report on school life. In a growing number of districts, the role of the student board representative has been elevated to engagement in policy discussion. Although students hold non-voting positions, local boards seek input and often rely on authentic student perspectives to inform their decisions.

## Schools embracing authentic student voice are working together to find effective solutions to issues such as...

- Grading policies
- School schedules and course offerings
- School meal offerings and options
- Restorative justice practices
- Instructional feedback
- Creating culturally responsive schools
- Bullying, Intimidation and Harassment
- PBIS reinforcements
- Creating connections to increase student success
- Community engagement of minority populations

## Authentic Student Voice in Elementary Schools

Student leadership is often viewed through the lens of secondary schools. However, AWSL has found that engaging elementary students in school decision making leads to significant school improvement and ownership. In some schools this is taking the form of a Principal’s Cabinet, where student representatives from all grade levels meet regularly to discuss school issues and seek student-led solutions.

AWSL also works with elementary schools to promote social success for all students, beginning on the playground. Students are taught games and behaviors that guide them toward fun, inclusive, self-monitored recess-time. Results are finding fewer discipline issues, more student engagement and in turn, greater student success!

## AWSL Executive Committee

### Student Voice at the Heart of Our Organization

The AWSL Executive Committee is a 12-member team comprised of high school students (10 regional representatives and two student members of the Washington State Board of Education). This diverse group of individuals work to develop programs, train students and adults, enact leadership initiatives, and bring student voice to every aspect of AWSL.

The AWSL Executive Committee grew out of the work of the Student Steering Committee that helped transition our programs from WASC (Washington Association of Student Councils) to AWSL, expanding our focus from serving only formal, recognized student leaders to serving all students as they are empowered to lead. The AWSL Steering Committee felt that it was important that student voice continue guiding our programs. The Executive Committee provides these voices, ensuring the continued development of student-centered programs that address emerging needs.



The AWSL Fall Leadership Conference (FLC) is held each October. This venue provides the opportunity for the AWSL Executive Committee to share their program focus and challenge delegates to implement these initiatives in their schools. Pictured are current committee members at the 2017 FLC.



Leadership opportunities that support the academic and social success of all students.



Supporting principals and the principalship in the education of all students.