

Student Voice in Akron Public Schools

WHAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ARE TELLING US ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, ENGAGEMENT, AND BELONGING



Overview

In partnership with the Summit County Youth Coalition (SCYC), Akron Public Schools students, and the University of Akron Department of Statistics, Summit Education Initiative supported the analysis of a **Student and Teacher Voice Survey** exploring relationships, communication, engagement, and school climate.

The survey included responses from:



Student leaders from the Students for Equity and Excellence (SEE) groups across Akron Public Schools presented findings directly to school staff, school board members, and community leaders, helping ensure student voice remained central throughout the process.

Why Student Voice Matters

Students experience school systems every day and offer critical insight into what helps them feel connected, supported, and motivated to succeed.

This project sought to better understand:

- ▶ **What strengthens relationships between students and teachers**
- ▶ **What helps students stay engaged in school**
- ▶ **How schools can better elevate student voice and belonging**

The findings highlight the importance of relationships, communication, trust, and authentic connection in shaping student experiences.



Key Findings at a Glance

STUDENTS EMPHASIZED:

- ▶ Personal communication and connection
- ▶ Teachers who actively check in and listen
- ▶ Feeling understood and supported
- ▶ Time for relationship-building, not just academics

STUDENTS STAY ENGAGED BECAUSE OF:

- ▶ Relationships with friends, teachers, and family
- ▶ Desire to succeed academically
- ▶ Future goals and graduation aspirations



TEACHERS EMPHASIZED:

- ▶ Trust and care
- ▶ Mutual respect
- ▶ Clear expectations
- ▶ More opportunities for communication and relationship-building



Theme 1: Relationships Matter Most

Across responses, students overwhelmingly described relationships as the foundation of engagement and belonging at school.

The strongest recurring theme from student responses was simple:

Students value teachers who talk with them, listen to them, and show genuine care.

The analysis identified **three major themes** in responses about what strengthens student-teacher relationships:



PERSONAL COMMUNICATION & AVAILABILITY

Students repeatedly described the importance of teachers being **approachable, available, and willing to talk beyond academics.**



They will talk to you outside of class about school work and other things to make sure you're trying your best.



ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT & CHECKING IN

Students value teachers who **intentionally check in, ask questions, and engage with them personally.** Relationship-building was not described as passive - it required consistent effort and interaction.



HELP, UNDERSTANDING, & APPROACHABILITY

Students emphasized the importance of **empathy, patience, and support from adults** in school environments. Students value teachers who are **approachable and consistently available** when they need help or have questions.

Theme 2: Students Stay Engaged Because of Connection

When asked what motivates them to continue showing up for school—even during difficult times—students most frequently pointed to relationships and belonging.

The largest theme identified was:



RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

Students referenced **Friends, Teachers, Parents, and Caregivers.**

These relationships were described as major motivators for remaining engaged in school.

Additional themes included:



ACHIEVEMENT & PERFORMANCE

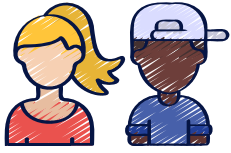
Some students described motivation tied to grades, success, and academic accomplishment.

FUTURE GOALS

Others connected engagement to graduation, career aspirations, and building a better future. Interestingly, very few students described money or financial gain as a primary motivator. Engagement comes from connections - friends, supportive teachers, and parents.

Theme 3: Students and Teachers Want More Time for Relationship-Building

One of the clearest findings across both student and teacher responses was the need for more intentional opportunities to build relationships.



STUDENTS REQUESTED:

- ▶ More one-on-one conversations
- ▶ More opportunities to talk
- ▶ More interaction outside academic instruction
- ▶ More activities and connection-building opportunities



TEACHERS SIMILARLY EMPHASIZED:

- ▶ Building trust
- ▶ Improving communication
- ▶ Taking time to get to know students personally
- ▶ Increasing student involvement in school decision-making

The findings suggest that relationship-building is not viewed as separate from learning—it is foundational to it.

Youth Voice in Action

A key strength of this project was the **direct involvement of youth leaders throughout the process**. Students from the Students for Equity and Excellence (SEE) groups represented schools across Akron Public Schools and presented findings directly to educators, administrators, and community stakeholders.

This process elevated student voice beyond participation and into leadership, allowing young people to shape conversations about school climate, engagement, and relationships firsthand.



Key Takeaways

The survey findings point to several important opportunities for schools and systems:

- ▶ Create more structured opportunities for relationship-building
- ▶ Increase student voice in decision-making spaces
- ▶ Support consistent communication between students and adults
- ▶ Prioritize school environments grounded in trust, care, and belonging
- ▶ Recognize relationships as central to student engagement and success

Looking Ahead

The Summit County Youth Coalition and its student leaders will continue working alongside schools and community partners to elevate youth voice and strengthen systems that support students across Summit County. This work demonstrates the power of engaging young people not only as participants, but as partners and leaders in shaping educational environments.

This project was supported through collaboration between Summit County Youth Coalition (SCYC), Summit Education Initiative (SEI), and University of Akron Department of Statistics.