



Youth Engagement Network Final Report

Overview

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, (AASA) is the membership organization for school system leaders and is a national voice for public education and district leadership. With this pilot, AASA worked with FUTP 60 students to discover effective ways for students to influence decision-makers in school districts on making healthy changes happen in schools.

Objectives

- Students create presentations and pitches with the objective to change the hearts and minds of district leaders to bring about healthy changes led by students in schools, with an emphasis on the Learning Connection.
- Students will learn tactics for thinking creatively about persuasion and storytelling, along with the basics of Superintendents' job responsibilities.
- Best practices for storytelling created based on student input for use by students to empower and aide more to approach their districts with suggestions for healthy changes.

Insights

- 86% of students who participated in the Youth Engagement Network Pilot felt they developed new skills (i.e. Communications, Storytelling, Leadership) from being a part of this pilot.
- 100% of students indicated they enjoyed speaking with decision makers and leaders from different organizations.
- 90% of students feel more confident that student voice matters than they were before.
- 86% of students feel more empowered to create change in their schools and communities than they did before.
- When asked if they would participate in the Youth Engagement Network again if given the option to continue next year, 100% of students said yes.

Student Responses

- "I really thought being a part of this made an impact on me in a great way."
- "I really enjoyed working with other students on the phone call. I felt I was able to feed off of what the other students said! I also loved hearing what each student was able to come up with and what their personal thoughts and ideas were!"
- "This was the most enjoyable thing that I have done through Fuel Up to Play 60 yet! I learned so much and I took back so much to my school."

Summary of Calls and Student Findings

Students were interested to learn about all of the aspects of the role of the Superintendent. They were pleased to learn that the favorite part of the job for Superintendents is spending time with the students, and the least favorite are meetings. Their main focus is to meet students' needs – academic, social and emotional and to provide a positive learning environment.

The Superintendents shared ideas with the students about how to approach/present an idea to them.

- Superintendents want to hear from students.
- Be sure to be objective and not emotional; do not be intimidated.
- Make sure that your information is research-based.
- Idea should be coherent between the presentation and the plan. The need and the idea must match and fill a gap.
- If using Power Point, do not read word for word. Give descriptions so people will understand.
- Do not underestimate your influence as a student leader – use your courage to create solutions.

When reviewing the Learning Connection and the Wellness Impact Report, students learned about the importance of eating right and how to be a good leader.

- Did not know about how your body connects with your brain regarding eating. Breakfast is super important, and so is daily physical activity.
- Anyone at any age can be a leader – leaders foster growth and application of information.
- Don't be afraid to be a leader – and if you need help, just ask. You are not alone.

During conversations with principals/Superintendents students asked their views on School Wellness.

- Conversations were easy to have – seemed happy to talk with students.
- Wellness is a process. It matters because it affects everything we do, including our actions and emotions.
- Schools need to pay more attention to the issue of wellness, as it affects school attendance, grades, test scores and the ability to learn and focus in class.
- One principal shared his own struggle with weight and how he hopes to promote healthy eating in the school.
- It would be better if students showed more effort in PE Class.
- Another principal would like to have a breakfast cart with fruit on it, as he notices the students do not eat enough/any breakfast.

Students were intrigued to learn about the power of storytelling and persuasion techniques from Jerome at Narativ, a company which specializes in storytelling training (read more [here](#)). This session was designed to help students working with the projects at their school with superintendents and AASAS to help persuade school boards, principals and administration to understand the reason to support health and wellness within the school.

Principles of Storytelling by Narativ:

1. We are hard-wired for story. Storytelling is the most ancient way of communication and the most effective. We remember stories more than anything else – a connection is made with our listener. Studies show a function in the brain that relates to storytelling; the same areas of the brain light up for the storyteller and the listener. The listener is

expecting what will happen; a challenge, and turning point and a resolution. You can tell that your story is having an impact because brain is hard-wired for it.

2. Everyone has a story. It doesn't matter how old you are or what your background is. Everyone can learn to tell their story better. There is a way to tell a story for brains to best respond. You can learn to tell your story better if you ask yourself this question: What happened?
3. Listening and telling are reciprocal. The way people listen shapes the way the storyteller speaks. Storytellers need to share opinions, thoughts, and feelings. Listeners' brains will become engaged and want to know what happens next. How will it be resolved? Emotion can be an obstacle when listening and telling a story.

Students shared personal obstacles that they experience when trying to tell their story:

- "I like to improv when telling stories, but when I stop to get input from the audience, I stumble depending on the answer. The obstacle is the response from the audience – sometimes I need a moment to think about what to say. The time that I take may make people lose attention."
- "In big crowds, there can be tension or stage fright. I try to not get distracted and stay motivated."
- "Freezing up – it's not obvious to my audience, but my heart is racing. I am passionate about what I am sharing and I hope that my improv won't go the wrong way. I want to come off as natural."
- "My obstacle is that people will make a counter-argument when I am sharing my story. I want to show that my point is strong without freezing up."
- "How to pick out the main points. If I have a lot of things to say, I may lose the audience. I need to be more specific."
- "Sometimes your audience will get bored if you go too long. I want to keep it short and sweet but get my message to them."

The lesson learned by the students is that storytelling is very specific, the more specific you are the better. The more you can talk about experiences that happen to you, the better. Try to stick to the rule of what happened to you and you will be in good shape. Always think about the obstacles that arise and see if you can do something about them; try to work on them – remember to breathe and it is okay if your heart is beating fast. The more you work on it, the more comfortable you will be with it.

Outcomes

- Student Ambassadors interviewed principals and superintendents about school wellness and the Learning Connection. Overall, students reported back their experiences as positive and felt they could use this information when presenting to a larger group.
- Some Student Ambassadors created stories with Adobe Voice to practice storytelling skills.
- The attached PDF is a brief guide to empower students to make presentations in their school based on the insights from this group.