



LVN Case Study: Freeport High School (Maine)

Context

After the death of George Floyd, many important topics arose within the RSU 5 School District in Maine connected to their DEI curriculum and ways of being more inclusive, which were not included in the original strategic plan from 2020. School leadership realized a deep need to re-engage youth voice in the planning conversation, asking students about their personal experience with equity and making sure their voices are heard by teachers and local leadership. A few unrecorded conversations were led by a facilitation consultant, but students did not feel engaged and notes piled up on large pieces of paper. LVN is providing a way to include students as leaders in this effort, making sure their voices are a documented part of strategic feedback, and introducing a strong feedback pipeline that connects students directly to leadership.

Approach

Over the course of a month, students led every step of this effort to collect and share experiences, thoughts, and feelings from their peers. A core group of 12 student leaders drafted questions, served as facilitators, recruited their peers for the conversations, and elevated highlights, themes, and insights for broader sharing. Outputs will be designed and developed by students in order to share with school leadership and other audiences they have identified.

Throughout this process, student facilitators have acted as stewards of all that was shared by their peers, taking deep care in deciding what gets shared and who hears it. Throughout their planning process, important themes emerged such as: the importance of making sure these conversations felt as informal as possible to combat the power dynamics present in school systems, the importance for students to feel they have complete anonymity in order to contribute honestly and meaningfully, and the importance of making sure this effort was 100% student-led and that this was communicated to participating students.

In just three days students held 11 conversations with 52 unique student voices. When students met for a follow-up sense-making session, they identified 221 highlights that meaningfully connected to student-identified feelings and themes across conversations. Students will now share these highlights and themes with peers, teachers, and school administration.

Results/Impact

Students have openly shared that this input effort has felt very different from past administration-led initiatives; they have dedicated over 10 hours of their own time to this process and are motivated to see this through to the end.