

# TEACHER STORIES



## BELE NETWORK ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

	Measure What Matters	Empower Youth	Transform Teaching & Learning	Invest in Staff	Make Systems Human-Centered	Partner with Caregivers & Communities	Create Equitable Policies
<a href="#">A First-Year Middle School Science Teacher Uses Elevate Data to Challenge Her Own Assumptions</a>							
<a href="#">Celebrating 7th Grade Math Students with Better Feedback &amp; Compliments from Peers</a>							
<a href="#">Creating Opportunities for Student Choice in a 7th Grade Language Arts Class</a>							
<a href="#">Evaluating Equity in Classroom Culture</a>							
<a href="#">Rediscovering a Love for the Classroom Through Partnering with Students</a>							
<a href="#">"Student Voice: The Better Choice"</a>							
<a href="#">Using Classroom Organization to Drive Improvement Across the Board</a>							
<a href="#">Using Elevate Data to Make Learning Meaningful and Increase Engagement</a>							

# SCHOOL STORIES



## BELE NETWORK ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

Measure What Matters      Empower Youth      Transform Teaching & Learning      Invest in Staff      Make Systems Human-Centered      Partner with Caregivers & Communities      Create Equitable Policies

[Dismantling Adulthood and Inviting Students to the Table](#)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

[Expanding Classroom Focus Beyond Content to Include Student Experience](#)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

[How Student Experience Feedback Can Be SEL for Educators](#)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

[Recognizing and Giving Better Feedback in Middle School](#)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

[Using Elevate to Spur the Development of a Student-Centered, Project-Based Science Curriculum](#)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

# DISTRICT STORIES



## BELE NETWORK ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

Measure What Matters      Empower Youth      Transform Teaching & Learning      Invest in Staff      Make Systems Human-Centered      Partner with Caregivers & Communities      Create Equitable Policies

[Creating the Conditions for Math Teachers to Learn from Their Elevate Data](#)

[Getting Advice from Students About How to Build Classroom Community](#)

[Ideas for Improving Student Engagement from Baltimore's Virtual Engagement Fellows](#)

[Leveraging Relationships to Implement Elevate in a Meaningful Way](#)

[Making Curriculum Meaningful by Connecting to Students' Identities](#)




# A First-Year Middle School Science Teacher Uses Elevate Data to Challenge Her Own Assumptions

Nicole LoCurto | Middle School Science Teacher | Mineola Public Schools | Mineola, New York | 2021-2022 SY

Ms. LoCurto administered the Elevate survey as part of a first-year teacher professional development project in Mineola.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can I improve classroom management by supporting student voice and student ownership?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Student Voice

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Classroom survey

## STRATEGIES

- Created surveys asking students:
  - What being a productive lifelong learner meant to them
  - What the qualities of lifelong learners are and what they look like in the classroom
  - What a productive classroom community looks like and means to them, and
  - What the teacher can do to encourage their voice in the classroom
- Reviewed survey results with students
- Generated a classroom Code of Cooperation and with students devised a way to track progress
- Created an agenda slide for each day and students set daily goals based on the agenda
- Hung a goal attainment chart in the classroom and tracked students' progress
- Created post-it parking lot for students to anonymously ask any science-related questions and answered those questions once a week

## IMPACT

- Students completed more work
- Teacher noticed less disruptive behavior in the classroom
- Students improved their grade point averages

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- As part of a New Teacher Workshop, the District gave Ms. LoCurto the time and structure to administer Elevate in her classroom.
- The District itself is focused on noncognitive factors and Learning Mindsets so there was a culture of learning and growing within which Ms. LoCurto could develop.
- Elevate responses challenged Ms. LoCurto's assumptions about learners and Middle School students.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

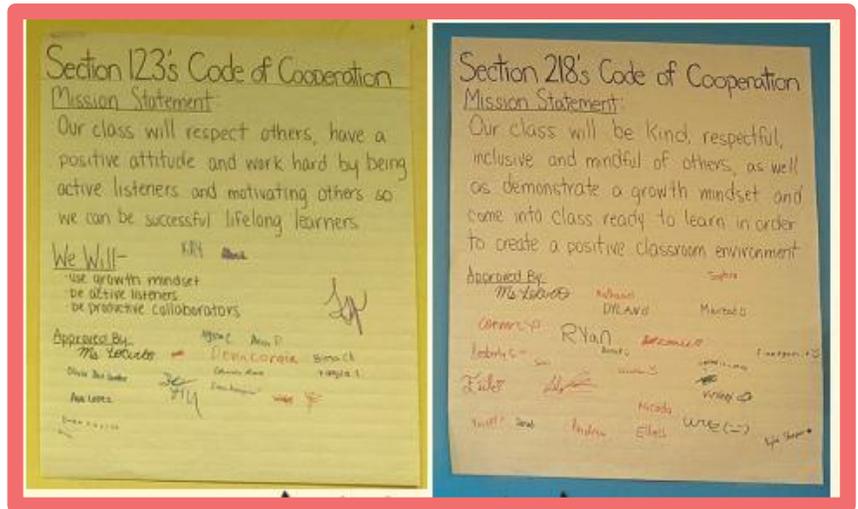
In Elevate cycle one, Student Voice was the lowest reported learning condition.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In response to Student Voice having the lowest rating on the Elevate survey, Ms. LoCurto worked to improve classroom management by implementing a number of strategies that sought to bring more student voice and ownership into her classrooms. She began by creating her own survey for her students that asked how she could make her classroom better. She reviewed the results with her students.

She also created opportunities for students to set their own learning goals and track their progress towards these goals. She also collaborated with her students to create a Code of Cooperation that enabled students to have input into classroom rules and structures.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

- Creating a code of cooperation shifted the culture of the classroom from compliance to ownership
- Students' goals became more refined and meaningful
- Students increased productivity and completed more work
- Improved grade point average in third trimester progress reports

### MINEOLA MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Mineola, NY

WEBSITE: [www.mineola.k12.ny.us](http://www.mineola.k12.ny.us)

SIZE: 650 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Science

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 47%

Latinx: 35%

Asian: 13%

Multiracial: 3%

Black: 3%

"It is my goal to start next year implementing all of these strategies from the very beginning to set the tone for a productive learning environment, embedded with student voice and ownership, from day one"

- Nicole LoCurto, Teacher

# Celebrating 7th Grade Math Students with Better Feedback & Compliments from Peers



Teresa Eng | 7th Grade Math Teacher | Mineola Public Schools | Mineola, New York | 2020-2021 School Year

Ms. Eng administered the Elevate survey and presented her work related to it as part of an action research project for first year teachers in Mineola.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

Does improving Learning Conditions improve student achievement?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Affirming Identities
- Feedback for Growth
- Classroom Community

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Conversations with students

## STRATEGIES

- Presenting students with varying levels of feedback and inviting them to reflect on what helpful feedback would look like for them
- "P.S. I love you" day where students spent the day giving each other compliments
- Incorporating "get to know you" check in questions into the daily classroom routine

## IMPACT

- 85 percent of students improved their trimester averages

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- The Elevate program not only organized and calculated the data, but it offers many strategies on how to improve on those learning conditions in the classroom.
- Three cycles of Elevate provided more actionable data.
- As part of a New Teacher Workshop, the District gave Ms. Eng the time and structure to administer Elevate in her classroom.
- The District itself was focused on Growth Mindset so there was a culture of learning and growing within which Ms. Eng could develop.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

In her initial exploration of understanding student experiences, Ms. Eng asked her students what made a good teacher a great teacher. Her students told her that a great teacher is: someone who listens, makes learning fun, and gives their students choices and interactive chances.

They also used these words to describe a great teacher: "respectful, patient, caring, fun, creative, funny, smart, responsible, helpful, patient, easy to talk to," and — the most common adjectives they gave — "nice and kind."

In cycle one, Ms. Eng's Elevate data showed her that of all the Learning Conditions, she had scored the highest in Teacher Caring but needed to improve on making math more meaningful and affirming cultural identity



in her class. Also, although Feedback for Growth and Classroom Belonging ranked as her second and third best areas, she was not comfortable with the gap between those two learning conditions and Teacher Caring.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In her work on Feedback for Growth, Ms. Eng presented students with samples of student work that included varying levels of feedback and asked them to reflect on their own assignments and what helpful feedback would look like for them. Ms. Eng believed this was an excellent way for her students to be more aware of their mindset around growth and to see that even after taking a test they can learn from their mistakes.

For Classroom Belonging, Ms. Eng held a “P.S. I love you” day. The students spent the day complimenting each other. They sat in a circle and wrote compliments for each and every one of their classmates — not one student left behind. Ms. Eng felt that this activity brought a sense of togetherness. In addition, Ms. Eng began incorporating daily check-in questions into her classroom routine. This helped her get to know her students better and for them to get to know each other better. Everyone was expected to participate and listen to each other's responses with the idea that they would then realize how much they have in common with each other. This activity also helped get the students out of their comfort zone.

### MINEOLA MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Mineola, NY

WEBSITE: [www.mineola.k12.ny.us](http://www.mineola.k12.ny.us)

SIZE: 650 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Math

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 47%

Latinx: 35%

Asian: 13%

Multiracial: 3%

Black: 3%

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Throughout the three cycles of Elevate that ended right before the end of the second semester, Ms. Eng improved in all six Elevate Learning Conditions and 85 percent of her students improved their trimester averages.

Based on the data, Ms. Eng concluded that:

- Her students felt more connected and motivated when talking about their backgrounds
- Students learned more effectively when they were recognized, encouraged, and supported
- When they were given critical feedback, students were more motivated to learn
- When they saw how class material related to their lives outside of school, students were able to take ownership of their own learning through sharing their knowledge and perspectives in the classroom
- Students engaged more deeply in their work when they felt like their teacher cared about them

If I was going to improve learning conditions in my classroom I have to first believe that I could.  
Belief fuels action. Action leads to growth and growth reinforces the belief.

- Teresa Eng, Teacher



# Creating Opportunities for Student Choice in a 7th Grade Language Arts Class

Ryan Henry | 7th Grade Language Arts teacher | Mineola Public Schools | Mineola, New York | 2020-2021 SY

Mr. Henry administered the Elevate survey and presented his work related to it as part of a first year teacher project in Mineola. He had been a teacher for 13 years but this was his first year in Mineola.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can my classroom be more successful at facilitating student learning?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Affirming Identities

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate

## STRATEGIES

- Created opportunities for students to decide what to read and study
- Created relevant curriculum by bringing in familiar pop culture references

## IMPACT

- In cycle two of the Elevate survey, percentages went up in five of the six learning conditions, including a 7% increase in Meaningful Work.
- There was also a small but meaningful improvement in Affirming Identity from cycle two to cycle three.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- As part of a New Teacher Workshop, the District gave Mr. Henry the time and structure to administer Elevate in his classroom.
- The District itself was focused on Growth Mindset so there was a culture of learning and growing within which Mr. Henry could develop.
- The Elevate system includes links to research and a lot of specific strategies for teachers to implement in their classrooms. The one stop system made it easier for Mr. Henry to implement and try different strategies.
- Just doing the Elevate survey improved Belonging and Student Voice conditions in Mr. Henry's classroom because the students felt like they were heard and part of a community working on the conditions together.

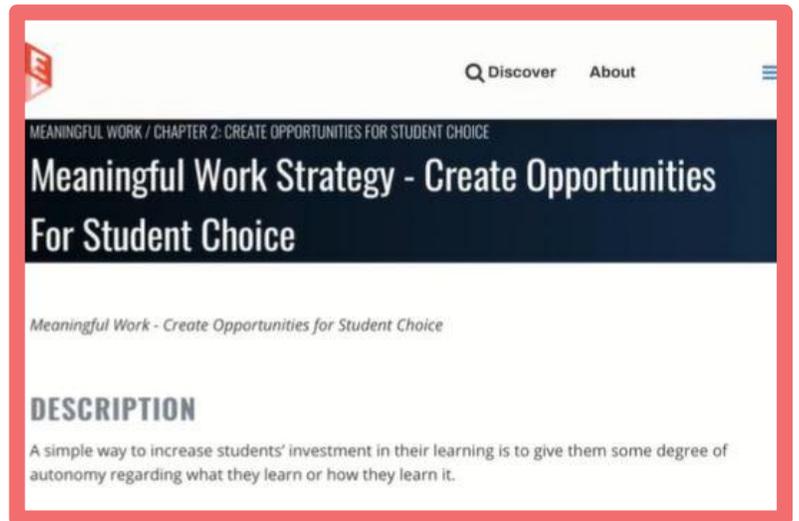
## INITIAL FINDINGS

In Elevate cycle one, Meaningful Work was the lowest reported learning condition. There was also a drop in percentages between the first and the second Elevate cycles in the Affirming Identity learning condition.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Mr. Henry believed that by creating opportunities for choice his students would find their work more meaningful, so he gave students more opportunities to decide what to read and study. He also worked on creating a



curriculum that was more relevant for his students by bringing in familiar pop culture references to his Environmentalism unit.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

- In cycle two of the Elevate survey, percentages went up in five of the six learning conditions, including a 7% increase in Meaningful Work.
- There was also a small but meaningful improvement in Affirming Identity from cycle two to cycle three.

### MINEOLA MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Mineola, NY

WEBSITE: [www.mineola.k12.ny.us](http://www.mineola.k12.ny.us)

SIZE: 650 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Math

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 47%

Latinx: 35%

Asian: 13%

Multiracial: 3%

Black: 3%

Just creating this feedback loop yields a more productive dynamic in the classroom because students sense that their voices are valued and have influence on the exact form and style of their learning.

- Ryan Henry, Teacher

# Dismantling Adultism and Inviting Students to the Table



Patricia Reynolds, Principal & Brenda Fonseca, Teacher | Walsh Elementary School | Chicago Public Schools | Chicago, IL | 2020-2021 SY

Using an equity lens, educators at Walsh Elementary School worked together to dismantle adultism and critique the systems of discipline that were in place, while allowing for student voice to be heard.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we dismantle adultism, especially for students who identify as male?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Student Voice

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Conversations with students
- Discipline data

## STRATEGIES

- Brought students to the table as “equity champions” to get student feedback on hiring and grading practices
- Brought in real life context to student work
- Worked to align grading policy to support growth mindset

## IMPACT

- Teachers are more open to pushing the thinking of others and have open and honest conversations

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

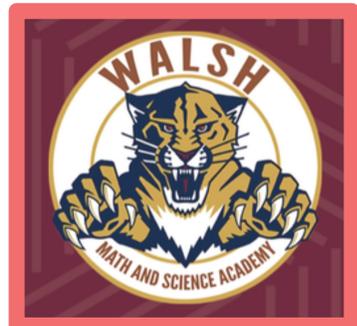
- Created buy-in from the start by asking staff to recall a teacher from elementary school who had an impact on their lives – or lack thereof – then interrogated their answers using the Elevate Learning Conditions to pinpoint what their own teachers had or had not done.
- Began with “bite sized” pieces in order to avoid overwhelming staff.
- Vulnerability, especially from leadership, is essential to receiving the feedback necessary for change.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

The work at Walsh Elementary actually began with a conversation. A male student expressed to the principal that he was feeling policed – by teachers, by security – everywhere he went in the building. This sparked the desire among staff to dismantle adultism, understand the implications of the discipline systems that were in place, and center student voice.

When staff looked further into the discipline systems, they found that – in a school where the staff was over 85 percent female and the student population was more than 60 percent male – students who identified as male were receiving harsher consequences than their female peers.

They also looked at their Elevate data and saw that students gave low marks for meaningful work.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In order to address the concerns presented by the student who felt policed, and other eighth grade boys, the entire staff – pre-k through eighth grade – began with self-reflection and mirror work to interrogate how they were showing up in school spaces. They asked how they were upholding detrimental systems and what kinds of systems they wanted to create instead. They also asked how they could include students in the process without making promises they wouldn't keep. Ultimately, the educators brought students in to be part of the dialogue. This inclusion of students was carried over into other areas as well, including hiring (which began to include both students and parents) and regular meetings with student advocates and equity champions.

In addition to their work on discipline systems, staff also began to rethink their grading system to ensure that it better aligned with the growth mindset they wanted to embody. They asked themselves, "If this is a place where mistakes are welcome, then how can our policy reflect that?"

### WALSH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

WEBSITE: <http://walshschool.cps.edu>

SIZE: 298 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

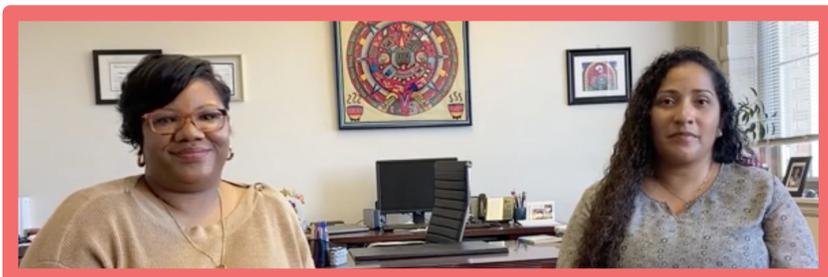
DEMOGRAPHICS:

Latinx: 79%

Black: 15%

Multiracial: 3%

Black: 3%



Finally, in order to make work more meaningful to students, the middle school team brought their Elevate data to students and asked for feedback about how they might add real life context to the work they were doing across all subjects.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

- Grade level meetings went from compliance meetings, where teachers simply went through a checklist, to being spaces where colleagues felt comfortable challenging each other's thinking. They pushed each other to always consider why they were implementing what they were implementing, and they focused on what input students could and should have.
- Teachers felt safe being vulnerable and open to understanding how they might be upholding systems that were harmful to students.
- Shifting the grading policy allowed students to make mistakes as they built toward mastery.

"Just be ready for change. Yes, it's going to be uncomfortable. Yes, you're going to be pushed. Yes, you're going to see things that you thought weren't there for yourself. But it is well worth it, because when we start really digging deep and thinking and listening... like really listen, that's the biggest valued added for us."

- Brenda Fonseca, Teacher



# Evaluating Equity in Classroom Culture

Kaitlyn Healey | Social Studies Teacher | Thomas Grover Middle School | West Windsor, NJ

Using Elevate data, a middle grades social studies teacher partners with her students to explore and address their classroom experiences by empowering youth to co-develop resources and protocols to support more inclusive classroom discussions.

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- Are all students experiencing improvements in classroom conditions?
- Are all students' voices represented in the classroom?
- How can solutions to classroom disparities be co-created with students?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Affirming Identities
- Classroom Community
- Student Voice

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Informal classroom observations

## STRATEGIES

- Co-developed classroom discussion protocol with students to ensure equity of voice

## IMPACT

- Improvement in student voice
- Observable increase in student participation (more students, greater diversity of students) in class discussion

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- The importance of attending to how students' experiences of improving classroom conditions may differ for different groups of students
- The value of engaging directly with students in co-design of protocols and tools to address shared concerns

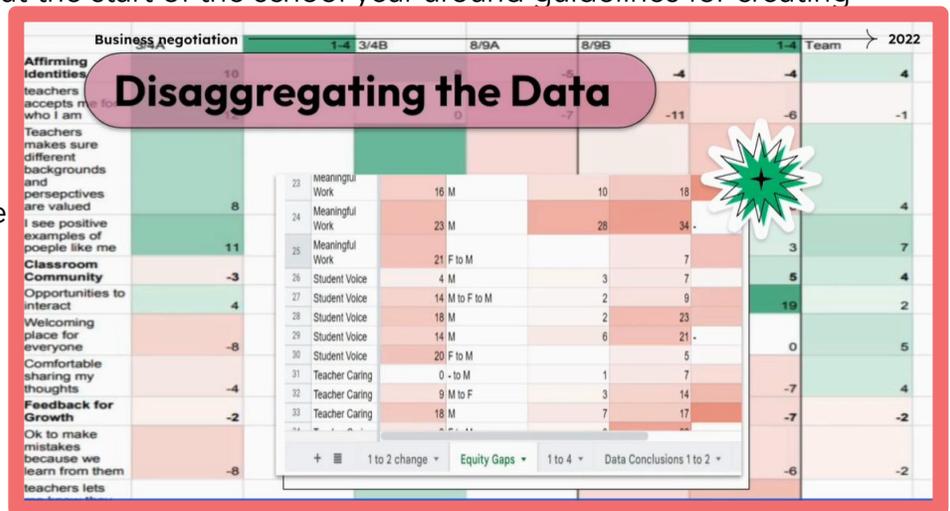
## INITIAL FINDINGS

Elevate scores on the Student Voice measure indicated that students in Kaitlyn Haley's middle grades social studies classes were experiencing their shared classroom spaces in significantly different ways. Haley took her Elevate results and put them into a spreadsheet, which she used to interrogate students' responses for patterns and potential differences between groups of students. Her exploration of her data revealed a disturbing difference in how students perceived their opportunities for exercising voice in her classroom. Students who identified as male felt they had greater voice in their classroom than students who identified as female. Haley identified this difference immediately as a problem—what she described as an 'equity gap'—and as something that she and her students needed to address together.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Haley shared the Elevate results back with her students directly and held an open discussion about the differences in how students were experiencing voice in their classroom. Haley connected this discussion to previous conversations the class had at the start of the school year around guidelines for creating 'brave space' for difficult conversations. Drawing on strategies included in her Elevate reports, including resources for affirming identities and developing community agreements provided by the National Equity Project, Haley and her students worked together within an existing design protocol to co-create a new class discussion protocol and an associated set of tools for supporting more inclusive classroom discussions. Haley and her students subsequently tested their co-developed discussion protocol during their next social studies unit, focusing on the history of the Silk Road and the globalization of trade.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Haley and her students were thrilled with the result. As Haley explained, the students declared the new co-developed discussion protocol a success. Haley observed a broader cross section of students participating in classroom discussions using the protocol and students themselves asked Haley if they

### THOMAS GROVER MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: West Windsor, NJ

WEBSITE: [west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/schools/grover\\_middle\\_school](http://west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/schools/grover_middle_school)

SIZE: 1,200 students

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Social studies

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Asian: 71%

White: 18%

Black: 5%

Hispanic: 5%

Two or more races: 2%

could export the protocol and associated tools (discussion prompts and cards) to other classrooms. Students were excited to have a deliberate way to

not only exercise their own voices but to solicit the voices of others. As Haley explained, the tool that students helped co-create 'gave students a voice' on multiple levels in the classroom.

Compliance can seem great ... but [it] can be really difficult when you're trying to get [students] to really learn ... I had, from the start of my career, been talking with students about reflecting on the class and using reflection tools ... I discovered PERTS and it changed how I viewed my classroom. It was incredibly helpful to see that data, to share it with the students, and to look at the growth that was happening in the classroom.

- Kaitlyn Healey, Teacher

# Expanding Classroom Focus Beyond Content to Include Student Experience



Walter Payton College Preparatory High School | Chicago Public Schools | Chicago, Illinois | 2020-2021 SY

As part of their work with National Equity Project’s Midwest District Network, educators at Walter Payton wanted to find ways to shift systems so students were always at the center of the decision-making process.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we ensure that classroom spaces are no longer solely dedicated to teaching content but instead are focused on the entirety of the student experience?

## FOCUS AREAS DATA SOURCES

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Voice</li> <li>• Teacher Caring</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate</li> <li>• Equity Audits</li> <li>• Leadership Circles</li> <li>• Student Focus Groups</li> <li>• Classroom Observations to identify themes of implicit bias</li> <li>• Other student outcomes, including academic performance and other behaviors</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## STRATEGIES

- Widespread use of Mood Meter from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to allow students to report their daily energy and pleasantness levels
- Adjusting course curriculum to better reflect student identities

## IMPACT

- Students noticed teachers proactively reaching out about their experiences

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- You cannot simply collect feedback from students; you need a plan for responding and following up with them
- Students need to be given a say in what is done with the information they share so they don't feel their stories are being exploited
- This work opened up a partnership with students where teachers and students could share power and co-construct the types of environments that could better meet students' needs
- Addressing feedback in a collaborative manner both builds community and ensures teachers don't feel shamed

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Educators noticed gaps in outcomes between students of color and their white peers, including the fact that students of color were far less likely to take classes like AP US History, despite meeting all eligibility requirements. They followed up with students by conducting focus groups where students — without any adults present — were asked to record their responses to the question, “Why aren’t you taking AP US History?” Students shared that they did not feel as if their identities were reflected in the content of the course.

# WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In response to the overall charge to center student experience, teachers were directed to dedicate some part of each class period to student identity and students' feelings. This time could vary from highly structured practices — including the widespread adoption of the Mood Meter from Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence — to more individualized responses to students' needs. Rather than confine relationship-building exercises to the first weeks of the year, teachers were encouraged to constantly reach out to students to show they cared, make sure to provide space for students to speak, and give accommodations as necessary.

The response by educators to the more specific issue of representation for students of color in AP US History was twofold. First, the recording students made was presented to AP US History teachers, who reflected on how they might adjust and augment their curriculum. The feedback from the focus group was also shared externally with both district leadership and the AP Board.

## WALTER PAYTON COLLEGE PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

WEBSITE: [www.wpcp.org](http://www.wpcp.org)

SIZE: 1,216 students

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 44%

Hispanic: 22%

Asian: 19%

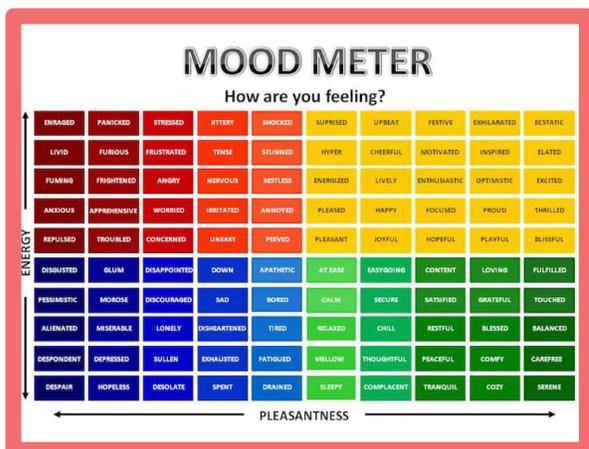
Black: 10%

Two or more races: 4%

# WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

While it is unclear where the complaint with the AP Board ultimately landed, the work undertaken by teachers more broadly did not go unnoticed by students. During a discussion hosted by the Aurora Institute, student Nia Innis shared her impression of the myriad ways that teachers worked to prioritize and attend to the entirety of her experience in their classes. She observed how teachers used student responses to the Mood Meter to guide interactions on a given day and provide accommodations where needed. She noticed teachers proactively reaching out and asking about her experience.

A specific encounter with her algebra teacher during the period of the Black Lives Matter protests following George Floyd's murder was especially meaningful to Nia. This teacher, Nia recounted, reached out when she saw that Nia hadn't finished an assignment. She told Nia she didn't want to add any extra pressure or stress. She took the time to say that she was there for Nia and if she needed an extension or to make the assignment optional, she was happy to do that. Nia recalled how helpful this was and added, "That changed my perspective of her a lot too, because in the beginning of the year I didn't feel like she really cared about me as a student. I really think she was very passionate about working with her students to make sure that they were comfortable and, you know, grasping all the content. So seeing her take that time — that extra step to reach out to me — really meant a lot to me and it made me completely see her in a different way... I [thought], okay she's really acknowledging how she may have failed as a teacher and she's trying to start remedying that. And again that was amazing for me."



"When you employ strategies that shift the power... that's when you're beginning to create a system where you're making decisions with your students versus for them."

- Erica Bauer, Director of Student Engagement

# Getting Advice from Students About How to Build Classroom Community



Madison Metropolitan School District | Madison, WI | 2020-2021 SY

As part of the National Equity Project’s Midwest District Network, teachers in Madison partnered with students to listen, learn, and co-design the conditions and opportunities that students were looking for.

- I N Q U I R Y   Q U E S T I O N**

How can we really look at all of the systems that are harmful to black, brown, indigenous, and other students of color? What must we dismantle and disrupt in order to make students feel that they are valued and affirmed within school?
- F O C U S   A R E A S**

  - Classroom Community
  - Affirming Identities
  - Student Voice
- D A T A   S O U R C E S**

  - Elevate
  - Focus Groups
- S T R A T E G I E S**

  - Participatory data analysis with students around the lowest Elevate items to determine next steps, in this case asking students about how they feel about connecting with their peers. Using a discussion protocol, students talked through their thoughts without interruption by teachers. (Adults were there just to take notes.) Some strategies implemented in response:
    - More unstructured time (in the context of remote learning due to COVID)
    - Lunch Bunch - time for students to just talk to each other over zoom and joke around
    - Consistent grouping in breakout rooms because students said switching people made it hard to feel comfortable
- I M P A C T**

  - Students became more comfortable, shared more, engaged more fully, and even turned their cameras on more often in breakout rooms.
- L E S S O N S   L E A R N E D   &   E N A B L I N G   C O N D I T I O N S**

  - Messaging to students was clear and intentional, telling students the surveys were to help them change teacher practice to make school better.
  - Work on teacher mindsets and identity was essential, especially because so many teachers were white women.
  - A voluntary, cross-school network of teachers and coaches who felt ready to center youth voice met regularly to find trends and share ideas.

## I N I T I A L   F I N D I N G S

Participants started by looking for commonalities in their Elevate results and considered how individual actions and school systems might impact the experience of students. They determined what they were most curious about and then decided what data they were going to share with their students and how. All four schools chose Classroom Community as a focal learning condition. Two schools also wanted to dig into Affirming Identities, while another school wanted to also look at Student Voice.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In order to find out more about students' survey responses, teachers decided to create a discussion protocol for a small group conversation among students where they could respond freely to a set of questions while adults simply listened and took notes. Teachers asked students to discuss their feelings around connecting with their peers, especially in a virtual environment. These discussions led teachers to try several new strategies, including:

- Creating more unstructured time where students could just interact with one another. One specific example was "lunch bunch," where students could spend their lunch time joking around and speaking loudly over one another.
- Maintaining consistent breakout rooms for the different academic blocks. Teachers had been switching the student groupings for breakout rooms, thinking this would allow students to get to know more of their classmates. Students reported, however, that it made it harder to really get to know their peers or feel comfortable sharing.

Teachers also noted that when they shared the survey data with their students, they

planned it out like they would any normal lesson. They made their reasons for sharing clear at the start of the lesson and moved through a standard instructional model as they presented and reflected on the data with students. In doing so, they ensured students saw this as an opportunity to really be included in the conversation and give critical feedback.

In addition to these activities by the teachers formally included in the program, a team of first grade teachers—whose students are too young to take Elevate—began to think about how they might also center student voice in their classrooms and how they could partner with their students along the way.

**MADISON METROPOLITAN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
AT A GLANCE**

<b>LOCATION:</b> Madison, WI	<b>DEMOGRAPHICS:</b>
<b>WEBSITE:</b> <a href="http://www.madison.k12.wi.us">www.madison.k12.wi.us</a>	White: 43%
<b>SIZE:</b> 27,000+ students	Hispanic: 21%
<b>TIME USING ELEVATE:</b> One year	Black: 18%
<b>SUBJECTS INVOLVED:</b> All	Asian: 9%
	Two or more races: 9%



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Students became more comfortable with and understanding of their peers. They shared more, engaged more fully, and even turned their cameras on more often in breakout rooms. They also joked more during lunch and enjoyed time to have fun with their friends.

During the second round of Elevate data collection, teachers saw that students receiving special education services – who were disproportionately Black – continued to feel disconnected from their peers. They realized that those students were receiving their "minutes" during the time when others students were working on core instruction and getting to spend time with peers. The district transitioned back to in-person instruction just weeks after they learned about this trend, which helped alleviate some of this issue, but teachers still expressed a desire to dig deeper with these students through individual conferences.

"We think we're doing all of these things as an educator in terms of our practice. But what's being received and what's being noticed and what's being lifted by students is really different. And so I think this has allowed us to have really in-depth conversations... to really think about how do you make that connection or how do you navigate the disconnect that's happening?"

- Rachelle Stone, Restorative Justice Educator

# How Student Experience Feedback Can Be SEL for Educators



Shan Carter | SEL Coach | Guilford County Schools

Working within the high emphasis on adult social emotional learning (SEL) in Guilford County Schools, District SEL Specialist Shan Carter focused on making Elevate a tool not only for attending to student SEL but also an opportunity to promote teacher outcomes.

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How do coaches [roll out/introduce] Elevate in a way that allows teachers to buy in and lead the process themselves?
- How can Elevate, a tool that centers student outcomes, also be leveraged to promote [teacher outcomes / teacher self-awareness, vulnerability, and agency]?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Classroom Community

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate

## STRATEGIES

- Allowing teachers to lead the process of responding to Elevate feedback

## IMPACT

- Teachers formerly skeptical of Elevate bought into the tool

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Allowing teachers flexibility in how they address their Elevate feedback will enable them to enact changes in the classroom that they can feel ownership over, ultimately encouraging them to buy into the tool.
- Student experience data is a worthwhile source for informing improvement efforts, not just for students' conditions but also for teachers'.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Upon receiving results from the initial implementation of Elevate, Shan's cohort of teachers was surprised and confused by their low results. They felt that the overall student response was not reflective of their classrooms.

The initial survey results identified Meaningful Work as the area with the most potential for improvement, with only 57% of students responding that they felt that their classwork was meaningful. Classroom Community (67%), Feedback for Growth (76%), Student Voice (71%), and Teacher Caring (68%) were also measured. Shan noticed that female students reported more positive experiences overall than male students and that the structured-advantaged race responded consistently more positively than the structure-disadvantaged race results.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE?

First, Shan engaged in data dive to develop a plan of action with the Elevate Project Lead, Shonda. Then, he was able to talk his cohort through their initial confusion regarding their Elevate results and eventually look towards addressing the feedback. In coaching them through their reaction and response, Shan was centered on responsiveness and teacher SEL. In this way, when teachers responded that, even though Meaningful Work had the lowest score, they were not interested in working on Meaningful Work, he listened. Instead, they hypothesized that if they focused on Classroom Community, a learning condition they found to be more fulfilling, Meaningful Work and all five Learning Conditions, would also improve.



The teachers followed the prescribed Rapid Learning Cycle developed by CASEL, implementing suggested practices from the Classroom Community Learning Guides such as Student-Generated Norms, Classroom Circles and Chalk Talk. Within Shan's cohort, the teachers adopted a structure of Instructional Rounds & Reciprocal Learning, with each teacher becoming an expert in a particular principle of Classroom Community and modeling it within their classrooms for the other teachers. This approach helped facilitate an open conversation among teachers and allowed them to learn from each other.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

When Elevate was administered again after the Classroom Community interventions were implemented, the teachers were proved right. Not only did Classroom Community see gains (a

three-point increase), but so did Feedback for Growth (three-point increase), Student Voice (four-point increase), Teacher Caring (four-point increase), and finally Meaningful Work with the highest increase of five points.

### JAMES BENSON DUDLEY HIGH SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Greensboro, NC

WEBSITE: <https://www.gcsnc.com/>

SIZE: 1,500 students

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Black: 77.8%

Hispanic: 14.4%

Asian: 2.1%

White: 2%

Two or more races: 3.1%

It showed some of the changes we were hoping for but also that building those relationships helps with how students feel in the classroom. The whole process itself is reflective, causing you to look at your role as an educator much deeper and understanding that the students' perspective is also very important in determining what success looks like in the classroom.

- Teacher in Shan's Cohort

# Ideas for Improving Student Engagement from Baltimore’s Virtual Engagement Fellows



BMore Me Pilot Group | Baltimore City Public Schools | Baltimore, Maryland | 2019-2020 School Year

As members of the BMore Me Pilot Group, a group of Virtual Engagement Fellows – middle and high school general and special education teachers of every subject in schools across Baltimore – used Elevate to improve student engagement in virtual classrooms at the start of the COVID pandemic.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we increase student engagement in virtual classrooms?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Classroom Community
- Student Voice

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Empathy Interviews
- Assignment Inventory
- Learning Preference Surveys

## STRATEGIES

- Provided opportunities for students to learn about their peers through student highlights collected and presented by the teacher as student celebrations.
- Allowed students to weigh in on their preferred assignment format and then gave students the opportunity to choose their output on at least two assignments per week.

## IMPACT

- Student Celebrations: saw 11% increase in sense of belonging and 23% increase in students reporting that they had the opportunity to know their classmates.
- Choice in Output: saw increases in Student Voice (100% of students saying they had opportunity to make choices and their teacher responds to their ideas to make class better) and Meaningful Work, as well as increases in assignment completion and mastery rates.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Having leadership support of SEL was essential.
- Being explicit with students about why new strategies were being implemented allowed them to buy in more and feel like their opinions were important.
- Consistency was key – both for implementation of the strategies themselves, and for collecting data about how students thought the teachers’ efforts were going.
- Being intentional about the implementation of new strategies and starting small ensured that the new strategies didn’t feel like more work for teachers and led to better outcomes for students.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Following the shift to remote learning, nine teachers from six schools in Baltimore, along with district personnel, came together to create plans to increase student engagement. Interrogating their Elevate data, along with answers shared during student empathy interviews and additional follow up surveys, teachers noticed that common areas for growth were Meaningful Work, Classroom Community, and Student Voice. They learned that teachers with well-honed classroom routines and strong relationships with students had higher assignment completion rates. They also heard from students that they trusted their teachers, but that they did not feel as comfortable talking in breakout rooms. With this information in hand, teachers then formed groups based on their intended focus area to develop change ideas.

# WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Teachers used these data to inform their change ideas. Gina Le, an English teacher at the Academy for College and Career Exploration, and Andy Rader, an art teacher at Augusta Fells Savage Institute of Visual Art, decided they wanted to work to improve Classroom Community. They chose to do this through “Student Celebrations” where they provided opportunities for students to learn about their peers through highlights that students chose to share about themselves. Examples of some of the questions students answered include: What is a moment you want to relive? What is a lesson you want to pass down? What are three wishes you have?

**STUDENT HIGHLIGHT: QUANETTE**

- What I'm most proud of: Sense of humor
- One moment I'd want to relive:
  - Being able to go on cruises again with my family
- Bucket list:
  - Skydive, go to a drive in theater with friends, travel to every country in the world, learn at least seven languages
- 3 wishes: To have my dream career, Be happy, To give my family members one gift each of something that will change their lives!
- The lesson I would pass down is to live your life one step at a time just because every one is already ahead doesn't mean you need to catch up. Take your time it will come eventually.

AGENDA WARM UP OPENING ROUTINES MAIN LESSON GUIDED PRACTICE INDEPENDENT PRACTICE LAUNCH

**Option 1: Poster and Written Reflection**  
The first option is to create a poster and a short written reflection about the story. Your poster should include images that make you think about the story, evidence, and key words. You may use Google Drawings or Canva to create your poster. Add your poster and a short written reflection to a Google Doc and turn it in.

**Option 2: Social Justice Personal Reflection**  
The second option is to write a reflection about the reading on one or more of the themes in your reading. This reflection should discuss the story and use evidence, but will relate to your own personal experience in America by making a connection to the theme, how it is still a problem, and your solution to fix it.

**Option 3: Themed Presentation**  
The third option is to create a presentation about each theme. You can do this on Google Slides, PowerPoint, or Prezi. Each of the 4 themes should have 2-3 slides with text evidence and an explanation.

**Option 4: Regular Essay**  
Write a regular essay with a topic sentence, theme statement, and body paragraph that is 3-5 paragraphs about what you read. You may choose to focus on one original theme in the essay you read, or multiple themes.

Example of choice menu

A second group of teachers, Maryrose Hembd, a social studies teacher at Maree G Farring EMS, Hannah Scinta, an ESOL teacher at Digital Harbor HS, Jordan Morell an English teacher at Reginald F. Lewis, and Tavon Pope, a social studies teacher at Harlem Park Elementary, decided to work on Meaningful Work and Student Voice. Their change idea was to give students “choice in output.” They asked students their preferred mode of output and then on two assignments a week they would allow students to pick from three different formats to demonstrate their learning.

# WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

After implementing their student celebrations change idea, teachers saw an 11% increase in sense of belonging, along with an overall increase of 23% of students reporting that they had the opportunity to get to know their classmates. Students also were more likely to turn their cameras on, talk in breakout rooms, and engage with their classmates rather than rely on the chat.

## BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Baltimore, MD

WEBSITE: [www.baltimorecityschools.org](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org)

SIZE: 77,807 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Black: 74%

Latinx: 16%

White: 7%

Asian: <5%

American Indian: <5%

Pacific Islander: <5%

Students who were given choice in output reported increases in Student Voice and Meaningful Work. Specifically, 60% of students reported experiencing student voice, with 100% saying they were able to make choices, 67% saying their ideas were taken seriously, and 100% saying their teacher responded to student suggestions to make the class better.

In addition, teachers reported that they now intended to always go to their students when planning. They also expressed their appreciation for what they learned from empathy interviews and their desire to continue to use the method – especially with underserved students.

“There were so many things that I knew were not going well with virtual learning. So many things that I wanted to change and target. And it's just incredibly overwhelming. The [Elevate] survey really gets down to very specific – even within those six buckets you can look at the individual questions – and that was just a reminder that, like, “Let's focus on this,” and let's pair a change with that one specific goal or indicator and that will help celebrate small wins. And you know, kids can feel it when teachers are feeling burnt out and at the end of their rope and overwhelmed. And so when I was able to focus on small wins and just really targeted areas, I think that helped my mindset and trickled down for sure.”

- Maryrose Hembd, Teacher



# Leveraging Relationships to Implement Elevate in a Meaningful Way

Teachers | Deforest Area School District | DeForest, WI | 2021-2022

As part of their participation in the National Equity Project's (NEP) BELE Network, DeForest Area School District administered the Elevate survey. It was embraced and supported within the District by the Instructional Coach who was a member of the BELE Circle Team

## INQUIRY QUESTION

- How does an Instructional Coach lead the use of Elevate in a meaningful way?
- How do you help people start using Elevate so others will also want to try it and make change?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Elevate Implementation
- Data review support for teachers
- Student conversation support

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Informal observations of students' agency and engagement

## STRATEGIES

- The Instructional Coach embraced Elevate as a means to create Liberatory Education within the District
- Through informal and formal means, the Instructional Coach leveraged relationships that enabled teacher buy-in and participation in the Elevate survey

## IMPACT

- Teachers collaborated around use of Elevate.
- Teachers gained a deeper understanding of challenges in their practice.
- Teachers began to question whether the voices of students who are more marginalized are being elevated.
- Teachers gained a better understanding of how to use and include students in data discussions.
- Teachers began using restorative practices in their classrooms.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- The BELE Network Circle Team structure enabled the Instructional Coach to leverage his relationships with other Circle Team members (Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Principal, teachers, school psychologist) across roles and hierarchies to initiate the work of Elevate and encourage its use and uptake.
- By starting small with a willing team of teachers (including teachers who were not on the Circle Team), the middle school was able to build the interest of Elevate beyond the initial few participants and expand its use through relational networks that included teachers who were Circle Team members.
- The Instructional Coach also made sure there was consistency of meetings, meeting spaces, and follow up emails to teachers using Elevate to discuss data and its use.
- The NEP Coach also provided consistent coaching to the District team and to the Instructional Coach who led the effort to bring Elevate to the District.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

The district Instructional Coach and the NEP Coach assisted teachers in looking at their Elevate data. The coaches recognized they needed to shift the paradigm for teachers as they received their Elevate data back. The coaches sought to move teachers from immediately explaining and interpreting data to sitting with uncertainty and the unknown, asking themselves and then the students - what are students saying here? The coaches assisted teachers in having conversations with their students about the data and using protocols that encourage teachers to ask students, "What did this question mean for you? What would you like to see more of?" The Instructional Coach supported teachers through listening sessions, observations, one on one coaching sessions, and in group meetings. He spoke to them in both formal and informal settings and leveraged his relationships with them to encourage and support their engagement in unpacking their Elevate data. In addition, through the Circle Team relationships, the Instructional Coach encouraged the District Superintendent to observe teachers' conversations with students in their classrooms, illustrating how teachers are supporting student voice in their classrooms.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Because the Instructional Coach embraced Elevate as part of the BELE Network initiative, it moved the teachers to process and think about data differently. It led to teachers having a deeper understanding of challenges in their practice. It also enabled teachers to see how the survey and subsequent conversations lifted up the voices of students who were more marginalized. In addition, the use of Elevate in some cases highlighted teachers' capacity and readiness to change their classroom culture and classroom environment to better students' experiences. The work of the Instructional Coach also had implications for teacher collaboration about when and how they work more collectively in partnership as adults and with their students. Moreover, the teachers are committed to learning and continuing their use of Elevate moving forward. For the Instructional Coach, Elevate highlighted

inequities he already recognized in his District and through his Circle Team participation. Finally, having the Superintendent observe the classrooms where Elevate conversations were happening led to consideration of how resources are allocated for certain initiatives and work across the District.

### DEFOREST AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: DeForest, WI

WEBSITE: <https://www.deforest.k12.wi.us>

SIZE: 4,025 students

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 88%

Latinx: 6%

Asian: 3%

Multiracial: 2%

Black: 1%

"He (Instructional Coach) calendered those meetings...he carried it forward...across levels of hierarchy, and that has been significant."

- Heidi Gill, NEP Coach



# WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Teachers and NEP coaches used Elevate data to further inform their curriculum transformation work aimed at establishing culturally responsive classrooms that would better meet the needs of youth, specifically the districts' BIPOC students. During the fall social studies network sessions, teachers engaged in discussion and planning around how to use identity work with students to build connection to content and improve relationships. One key point of inquiry in these sessions was focused on how teachers could better understand student identities by understanding more about students' lives outside of the classroom. Between these network sessions, each social studies teacher implemented one or more activities that focused on student identities. These activities included: having students create autobiographies as a way to highlight how and why studying history is important while also giving students an opportunity to share about themselves, administering interest surveys in which students shared about themselves and what in history they were interested in learning, and student identity projects. Information from these activities was also used in one-on-one student conferences. These activities further highlighted why students desired more meaningful work, work that would help them think about their role in the world. Teachers also modeled by sharing about their own identities with students. Taken together, these change efforts not only served to make learning more relevant and to inform the curriculum transformation work, but also organically forged connections among students.

## OAK PARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Oak Park, IL

WEBSITE: [www.op97.org](http://www.op97.org)

SIZE: 6,042 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: Two years

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 54%

Black: 17%

Hispanic: 13%

Asian: <5%

American Indian: <5%

Pacific Islander: <5%

Two or more races:

13%

# WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

After implementing their identity-focused activities in their classrooms, teachers saw a 2% increase in positive reports of Meaningful work and 4% overall increase in student reports of Teacher Caring. Positive reports of Classroom Community also saw a 3% overall increase. Most significantly, positive responses for the Teacher caring item "This teacher cares about my life outside of school" increased 11%.

**Who Are You? What is Your Identity?**

Goal: Create a presentation that describes what your identity is and what you want your identity to be in the future.

Type of Presentation Options:

- Google Slides
- iMovie or iMovie Trailers (only for iPhones)
- Video Recording (7.8.16, or regular video, youtube, etc)

CPS:

In this project there are several sections that you need to create:

**Section 1: Who are you?**

- o Describe your identity in terms of your physical characteristics: hair, race, height, hair, age, gender; things you can do like play sports, an instrument, or other talents you have. (include at least two pictures or videos)
- o Describe your identity in terms of what your beliefs are: your religious beliefs, how you feel about people of other religions, sexual preferences, race, etc., thoughts on education, college, etc. (include at least two pictures or videos)
- o Describe your identity in terms of what your culture is: What race or ethnicity do you identify with, what languages do you speak, what is the clothing like in your culture, what foods are important in your culture, what clothing is important in your culture, what traditions do you have in your culture (or family), what is the religion in your culture (or family), what music is important in your culture. (include at least two pictures or videos)
- o Describe yourself in terms of your history: What is your personal history? Where is your family from? Where are your ancestors from? What are some things that your ancestors have done in your history? What do you know about your history? What are some important events in your history that have impacted who you are? (include at least two pictures or videos)

**Section 2: What has made you who you are?**

- o What or what has had the biggest impact on your life to make you who you are?
- o What events have happened in your life to make you who you are?
- o Who do you look up to? Who is your mentor? Who influences you? And how have they helped make you who you are?

**Section 3: How do you see yourself in the future?**

- o What does your life look like 5 years from now?
- o What does your life look like 10 years from now?
- o If you could design the perfect life for yourself for you and your family what would it look like? What would be the task to make that happen?

**What should I look like?**

- o In your presentation you need to answer or describe everything listed above.
- o Use pictures or video to help describe your identity.

**Where I'm From...**

I am from (night and thing you use in your everyday life).....

I am from (sounds and things you hear in your neighborhood and house).....

I am from (smells).....

I am from (tastes and foods that stand out to you).....

I am from (feelings and moods that you feel a lot when you're in your house or neighborhood).....

I am from (values and beliefs that you are taught by your family).....

I am from (one word that expresses what you feel about where you're from).....

**Tell Me About You!**

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Nickname: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mom's cell phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Dad's Cell phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Cell phone # (I'm going to set up a class Groupme account to be able to communicate with all of you easily about assignments, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' or guardians' names: \_\_\_\_\_

What do your parents or guardians do for a living? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any brothers and sisters? If you do, list them from oldest to youngest. \_\_\_\_\_

Who else lives in your house with you? \_\_\_\_\_

Who do you want me to tell when you do something good? \_\_\_\_\_

Name 3 people that you admire and look up to that are not in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you get to and from school? \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers reported that getting to know more about student identities and helping them connect to the curriculum was integral in making the transition from remote to in-person learning. Students reported that these experiences made them feel seen

and connected to their peers and teacher after more than a year of remote learning. Additionally, teachers found that focusing on identity and culture with students and in the curriculum helped dispel a long held false binary choice between engaging in work and learning and building community.

# Recognizing and Giving Better Feedback in Middle School



Middle School Teachers | Mineola Public Schools | Mineola, New York | 2020

Eleven teachers cultivate and measure authentic student engagement by implementing Elevate as part of a Professional Development opportunity called the Engagement Project.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we use a student experience survey to improve our practice?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Feedback for Growth

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Teachers in Professional Development sharing data and having conversations

## STRATEGIES

- Implemented Stars and Steps\* - where Stars are used to acknowledge students' good work and Steps are provided to outline how students can get better
- Created videos of teachers teaching each other tasks to model helpful feedback

## IMPACT

- Big improvement in how students understood and applied feedback

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- This work was taken on as part of an already existing Professional Development structure in the District. The District's openness to innovation enabled this new initiative to move forward.
- Trust and vulnerability were critical to the success of the project.
- Teachers were motivated to track their progress, share what they tried, and learn as a team.
- Messaging around the survey was really important:
  - PERTS provided helpful tools about how to talk to students about the survey. The teachers used these tools, adapting them to their contexts, and asking students what the questions in Elevate meant to them personally.
- This group already had a lot of knowledge and awareness of the research around mindsets and SEL.

\*Chappuis, Jan. Seven strategies of assessment for learning (1st ed., p. 208), © 2009.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

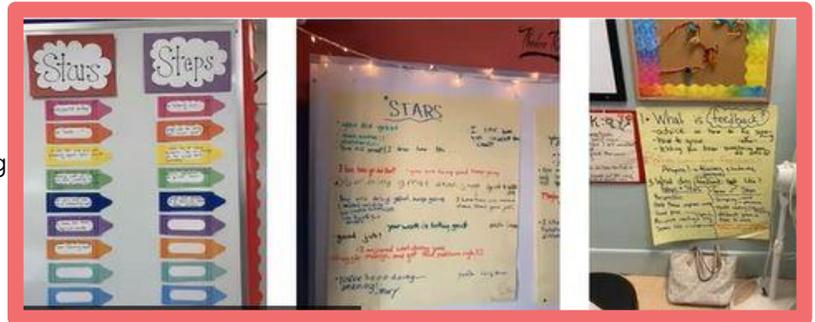
After being shown the results of the Elevate survey, several teachers were shocked by their results for the Teacher Caring Learning Condition. Ms. Hazen, a math teacher, wondered why the percentage was not 100%. Another math teacher, Ms. Borges, asked, "Who didn't feel loved in my classroom?" A third math teacher, Ms. Durnin, expressed surprise, but added, "We all care but to receive the authentic data from students is really eye opening."

Ms. Franscona, a math and science teacher, noted that the teachers were a close knit team and there is a sense of vulnerability when comparing your data to colleagues, but that you have to let it go and be there for each other. She also recognized that the experience teachers were having in comparing survey results to one another was a parallel process that students often go through when they compare themselves to their peers.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

The teachers decided to focus on Feedback for Growth because it was also low in their survey reports. They found the Stars and Steps strategy on the PERTS website, where strategies are suggested for all the Learning Conditions. All the teachers took this strategy into their own classrooms and let their students know they were testing a new protocol. Teachers created systems to ensure they were distributing feedback equitably and effectively, including checking off who was getting what type of feedback on seating charts and thinking intentionally about the type of feedback to give higher achieving students so they would continue to grow.

The teachers also wanted to demonstrate helpful feedback to their students, so they videotaped themselves teaching each other a task (tying a tie, braiding hair) and giving feedback. While watching these videos, they asked students to identify the helpful feedback and what would have been more useful.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Ms. Amzler, a special education teacher, said that Stars and Steps made a huge difference in how students viewed and applied feedback. Using Stars and Steps was a concrete way for students to see what they were doing well and what the next steps would be. Having students look at their own work, starting with what they did well and then the step ("next time I will..."), gave them more responsibility for their learning. Using Stars and Steps as a starting point helped students who sometimes shut down when getting feedback become more open to discussing the next steps. Overall, the students felt more confident and Ms. Amzler saw an amazing change in students!

Mr. Tramonte, a humanities teacher, said he saw that students were even able to give each other helpful feedback. In the second cycle of Elevate, Teacher Caring also went up. Ms. Maichin, an Instructional Leader, said that giving the students the survey and telling them "I care about you and want to improve myself so we can improve together" was freeing, and

### MINEOLA MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Mineola, NY

WEBSITE: [www.mineola.k12.ny.us](http://www.mineola.k12.ny.us)

SIZE: 650 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: One year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 47%

Latinx: 35%

Asian: 13%

Multiracial: 3%

Black: 3%

an intervention in and of itself — students saw that teachers wanted to do better for them. Kerry Murphy, a math teacher, felt that simply using the Elevate survey probably increased the results in Teacher Caring because the students could see their teacher was doing something to make their classroom environment better.



First row: Staci Durnan, Michele Frascogna, Heather Hazen, Lindsay Borges, Jenn Maichin

Second row: Leslie Van Bell, Anthony Tramonte, Gina Amzler, Courtney Serio, Kerry Ann Murphy

I remember during the passing period, [teacher colleague] and I were in the hallway and [she said] I already feel like I'm a better teacher. And it was like such a moment for me as her colleague... I said, you're right. And, you know, when you've been teaching 25 years and you can have a moment where you feel better just like from something this simple, it is pretty profound.

- Leslie Van Bell, Teacher

# Rediscovering a Love for the Classroom Through Partnering with Students



Anna Stewart | 6th Grade Math Teacher | Yulee Middle School | Nassau, Co., Yulee, FL

Elevate helped Ms. Stewart find ways to connect with her students, reinvigorate her love of teaching and improve the aspects of her classroom her students cared about most.

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How can student feedback encourage connection between teacher and students? How can student experience data be used to help a teacher rebuff feelings of burnout?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Student Voice
- Meaningful Work

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate

## STRATEGIES

- Implemented “talk time” at the start of each class period.
- Created choice boards that allowed students to pick how they wanted to practice their skills and demonstrate their learning.

## IMPACT

- Over four rounds of survey administration, scores on Student Voice increased from 36% to 66%.
- Meaningful work increased from 29% to 56%.
- Scores improved for all the Learning Conditions surveyed.
- The average student grade went up for each class period.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Asked for student input about what was working and what could be improved.
- 90 minute block period with 45 minutes dedicated to small group instruction, facilitated the implementation of choice time.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Ms. Stewart decided to use Elevate because she was feeling burnt out from teaching and felt she was not bringing her best self to the classroom. She saw Elevate as a way to see if her perception was shared by students. When she first received her results she felt like a failure because the scores were quite low. Students’ written responses also highlighted that they did not feel as if they had a voice in the classroom, “She’s the teacher, she just tells us what to do” and that they did not feel listened to, “She never asks what we want.”

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Ms. Stewart's initial response to her data was to engage her students. She asked them to vote on which learning conditions they thought should be prioritized. The students selected Student Voice and Meaningful Work as focus areas. To address Student Voice, Ms. Stewart’s first step was to give students sticky notes and asked them to think about and write down what they liked and didn’t like about class, what they thought was working best, what the class needed to improve, and what they wanted more of. Together they also wrote down what they couldn’t change about class (i.e. the curriculum, & that they had to do work while in class). Students were then asked to vote again on which of those more specific

changes they wanted to see, one of which was the desire for 'Talk time' to connect with each other. In response, Ms. Stewart established a routine of starting each class with five minutes of talk time. To encourage students to feel comfortable sharing during this time, she worked to emphasize that these talks took place in a 'Circle of trust' - meaning that what was said during talk time stayed in the classroom.

The second area students voted to focus on was choice - they wanted choice in what they did. To facilitate this, Ms. Stewart created a choice board for their small group and peer-to-peer instruction time. The board included options that students had identified as liking including bingo, scavenger hunts, creating and playing games, being the teacher and making real world problems to solve related to magazine pictures. From this students were able to make regular choices about how they wanted to practice and demonstrate their learning. The choice board was not stagnant, students had some of the same options every week, other options changed weekly or monthly. Students not only choose the kind of work they were doing but also who they were doing the work with. The activities they were choosing covered the same content they had been addressing with paper and pencil work just in a new and more engaging format.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

The implementation of talk time helped students communicate with each other and Ms. Stewart about their struggles, gave them opportunities to identify similarities and helped them learn how to support one another. They also learned how "to communicate and become a family". In addition, Ms. Stewart noticed that by providing students with choices they saw more value and took an increased sense of ownership over their work, and they worked a lot harder to get it done. Over time, students became more relaxed, vulnerable and started to have fun in class. The results of subsequent surveys appeared to validate Ms. Stewart's observations about how her classroom was changing for the better. Students increasingly knew what they were learning in class was something they were going to use in their lives outside of school. The learning conditions Ms. Stewart's students had voted to focus on both improved dramatically -- meaningful work jumped 27 points and student voice rose 30. All of the other learning conditions improved as well, and students' grades improved right along with them.

### YULEE MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Yulee, FL

WEBSITE: <https://fl02213748.schoolwires.net/Domain/13>

SIZE: 1,040 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: First year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Math

#### DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 74.8%

Black: 9.6%

Hispanic: 7.7%

Asian: 0.9%

American Indian: .1%

Pacific Islander: 0.2%

Two or more races: 6.7%

I feel like I owe the success of this year to my students and their willingness to go through this process with me and to change and to learn and to go through the strategies and tell me what worked and what didn't work.

Overall, this program has worked. It changed me, it changed my students.

- Anna Stewart, Teacher



# Sharing Power with Students

Teachers | Baker Middle School | Troy, MI | 2021-2022 School Year

Baker Middle School Staff co-designed fourteen Listening Sessions with 70 Eighth Grade students in order to center student voice and better understand students' experiences at school

## INQUIRY QUESTION

How can a school staff co-design listening sessions with students and respond to their concerns in a meaningful way? How do adults step out of the way to make this happen?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Activating Student Voice
- Responding to Student Voice

## DATA SOURCES

- Listening Sessions

## STRATEGIES

- Students named a trusted adult in the school to be the adult present in their listening session
- Two teachers facilitated co-design with students of listening sessions
- The two teachers created scripts and FAQs for adults chosen to be in the listening sessions
- Adults who were not chosen as trusted adults stepped aside
- Counselors and support staff were present if sessions became emotional and additional support was needed

## IMPACT

- Students felt empowered and heard
- Adults recognized the importance of a structure that enabled student voice.
- Behavior matrix and school rules that students flagged as outdated, inconsistent, or unfair are behind reevaluated by school staff.
- Adults recognized that students understood need for school rules, but the lack of respect in applying the rules and their interpretation of the rules was problematic for the students.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- The BELE Network Circle Team structure enabled the two teachers to take up the work of co-designing the listening sessions. This work was supported by the Equity ... and the principal of the school.
- The school principal, in particular, supported the listening sessions and the work of the teachers who co-designed the project. He recognized when he needed to step aside and let the process move forward.
- Having scripts and protocols enabled reluctant adults to participate in the listening sessions more comfortably.
- National Equity Project Coaches who supported the Troy School District Circle Team provided consistent coaching to the team



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

At the end of the 2020-2021 School Year, BELE Network Circle Team members from the Troy School District attended the BELE year end convening. It was there, on zoom, that a student from Troy shared that they did not feel heard when they spoke up about their school experiences and challenges. That sparked a conversation among the Circle Team members about how student voice can be better activated and listened to. This school year they embarked on an initiative to enable listening sessions in their schools. Baker Middle School emerged as having a successful structure around conducting listening sessions with and for students to share their concerns about their school experiences.

The work at Baker was led by Lauren Eve, a Language Arts teacher, and Andrew LaTorre a Math teacher. With students, they co-designed fourteen listening sessions that reached 70 students. Each student identified a trusted adult at the school and the listening sessions were structured so that all the students who chose the same adult were grouped together. Ms. Eve and Mr. LaTorre created protocols, scripts and FAQs for the adults that were selected in order for them to feel comfortable with the process and understand their role. The listening sessions focused on the school's behavior matrix and other school rules.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

The students felt empowered, by being able to identify the adult that they trusted, having a role in planning the listening sessions, and sharing their voices about the school's behavior matrix. The school administration recognized the need for students to have a place where they can talk and be heard. The adults heard from the students that they understood the need for rules and systems that benefited their safety but their concerns focused on the level of respect with which the rules were enforced as well as how they are interpreted.

While the sessions were implemented this year with 8th graders, it will be expanded in the future to include 6th and 7th graders. In addition, the structure shined a light on who is considered a trusted adult in the building. For the staff that were chosen it facilitated their involvement in the listening sessions because they saw they were recognized. Going forward the school recognizes the work that needs to be done with the staff who are not named as a trusted adult.

### BAKER MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Troy, MI

WEBSITE: <https://baker.troy.k12.mi.us/>

SIZE: 4,025 students

GRADES: 6th-8th grade

SIZE: 711 students

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 54%

Latinx: 4%

Asian: 32%

Multiracial: 4%

Black: 6%

"I realized I was not always the trusted adult and needed to get out of the way"

- Principal Baker Middle School



# “Student Voice: The Better Choice”

Katrice Dixon | Equity and SEL Liaison & Middle School Math Teacher | Broward County Public Schools | Florida

Elevate enabled Ms. Dixon to step back and view her students’ experiences through a fresh lens which in turn helped her to be more responsive to their needs as learners and people

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- Am I reaching my goals as an educator? How can I expand on what I am already doing in the classroom?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Student Voice
- Classroom Community

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate

## STRATEGIES

- Let students know that she cared
- Became more intentional in lesson plans by using word problems that were more relevant to students
- Began using [jeopardy labs](#) in teams; [jigsaw puzzles](#) – interactive puzzles students work together to solve; and circle time – once a week, 15-20 minute sessions where students could check in with one another from a mental, physical, academic, and social perspective
- Along with these [Additional Strategies, Tools and Resources](#)

## IMPACT

- The Teacher Caring measure saw a 4% overall increase, including an 11% increase for the item “This teacher cares about my life outside of school” following implementation of identity-focused activities in the classroom.
- The percentage of students who reported understanding that Elevate survey data was going to be used for improvement increased in the majority of classes.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Introduced survey to students with truth and transparency.
- Told students to be authentic in their responses.
- Viewed the survey as an opportunity for growth.
- The data helped Ms. Dixon become more aware of herself and her actions.
- Worked with a teacher partner at school
- The school administration team trusted Ms. Dixon. They let her try new things. Once the school leadership and other teachers saw the increase in academic data marks there was greater buy in. They all saw how Elevate helped student growth and culture.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Overall, Ms. Dixon saw that her students trusted her. Student comments included: “She’s really funny;” “she makes us feel good and chill;” “the teacher respects me very well and helps me with anything I need;” and “my teacher makes me feel comfortable.” She also saw that students wanted to be heard and given choice in their learning experiences. She found that the needs of students varied based on sex, race, background, etc. – some students needed love and acceptance, others needed to be continuously affirmed, and another group needed to be left alone.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

In response to the data, Ms. Dixon focused on making math more relevant, particularly for students who felt math was scary. She found out what students were interested in and what type of activities they did outside of school and incorporated those into math problems. Ms. Dixon also worked to create a better classroom community particularly for those students who didn't understand the material but were scared to speak up and share what they didn't understand. She instilled in her students that the class was a community and family and they had each others' backs. She told the students, "these are your peeps... you can learn from your peeps." And she orchestrated situations where the "peeps" were teaching each other math strategies to help everyone to feel comfortable.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Ms. Dixon saw much higher student academic performance, with the data marks of the bottom 30% of students in her class increasing 32%. This was the highest increase in the entire school and was particularly noteworthy because it beat out other subjects. Students were confident and had a more positive attitude towards math. Ms. Dixon calls this "math-esteem," and she found that it went through the roof – students were even asking to do math competitions. In addition, students felt they were able to do math and were more willing to try it and take risks. Student engagement increased – students were ready to get started and get to work when they entered the classroom. The student community flourished. When a student shared with their "peeps" that they



flourished. When a student shared with their "peeps" that they couldn't do something the other students encouraged the first student and they all worked to get answers together.

### CRYSTAL LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Broward County, Florida

WEBSITE: [www.browardschools.com/Page/51](http://www.browardschools.com/Page/51)

SIZE: 1,148 students

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Math

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Black: 53.67%

Hispanic: 34.8%

White: 9.7%

Asian: .8%

American Indian: .1%

Two or more races: 1.1%

"The proof is in the pudding," Ms. Dixon said. "This is it: my teacher caring results went up 19 percent."

The last key takeaway was I didn't know it all. Coming from this same community. I grew up in Broward County public schools and I was deliberate in my practice coming back to Broward County...I thought I was gonna be able to reach this demographic of students and you know just be this rock star educator and these surveys showed me I didn't know it all. In fact, I didn't know half of it.

- Katrice Dixon, Teacher



# Using Classroom Organization to Drive Improvement Across the Board

Shannon Feineis | High School Physics Teacher | Barrington High School | Barrington, IL

With the help of Elevate, Ms. Feineis, a 20 year veteran teacher, learned that her classroom was not as organized as she thought, so she turned to her students for ideas about how she could improve.

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How can schools use classroom organization and community survey measures to support students' return to in-person learning, after two years of learning remotely?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Well-Organized Classroom
- Classroom Community

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Test scores

## STRATEGIES

- Creating new organizational systems within the online classroom, including assignment calendars and new, easily accessible folders for things like labs and lesson recordings.

## IMPACT

- Over three rounds of Elevate survey administration, scores on Well-Organized classroom increased from 51% to 73% to 80%
- Scores on Classroom Community increased from 78% to 84% to 96%.
- Test averages increased from 77% on the first test to 84% during cycle two and to 91% during cycle three.

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Ask students for specific ideas – they know what kinds of things they need to be successful.
- Be honest about the data with students. Pairing openness and vulnerability with a growth mindset around student feedback shows students that you are listening and take their ideas seriously, and can also serve as a model for how they can approach academic content.
- Improvement in one condition – in this case, Well-Organized Classroom – can lead to improvement in others, as you build relationships, open up dialogue, and help students feel a sense of ownership in the classroom.

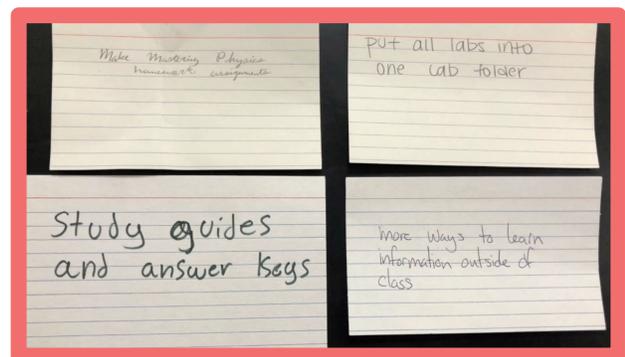
## INITIAL FINDINGS

Ms. Feineis was really disappointed by the results of the first Elevate survey. The results showed that only half of her second hour honors physics class students reported experiencing a well-organized classroom – a result that was also reflected in students' test scores.

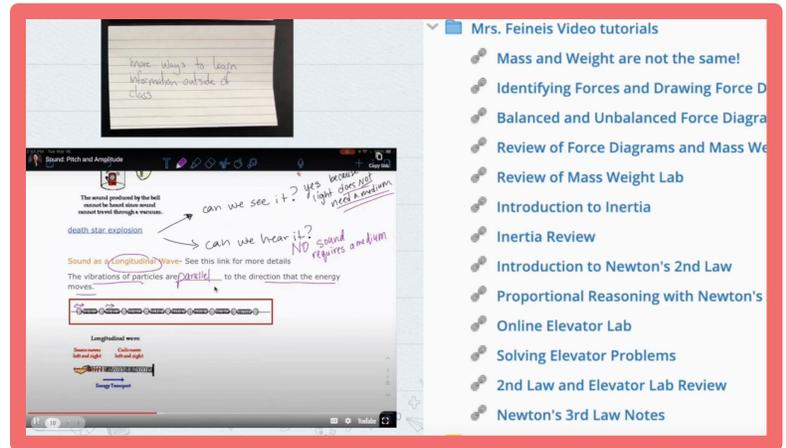
## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

While Elevate offers students the opportunity to write in short-responses to questions, not many students took advantage of the feature. In order to hear more from her students, however, Ms. Feineis handed out blank notecards to all of her classes asking student:

- How can our class be more organized?
- What works well in your other classes?
- Be specific. What can I do to help you?



There was a wide variety of responses, ranging from calls for eliminating all homework to requests for study guides. An overwhelming number of the ideas students shared asked Ms. Feineis to incorporate more structure into their online classroom, Schoology. This included a way to ensure assignments populated into students' Schoology calendars so they could see everything at a glance, as well as the specific request for folders where students could go to find all relevant course links from throughout the school year in one place – something that would have previously required sifting through the individual agendas for each lesson.



## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

Ms. Feineis modeled a growth mindset for her students by being honest about the initial feedback she received – even sharing the data with students – while letting them know that she was going to work to improve by trying the strategies they suggested. She related this to her students' experiences learning physics, saying they could learn and grow together.

Students began giving her feedback immediately – both informally by simply telling her that they loved or appreciated the changes she made and by taking the time to fill out more of the short answer section of the Elevate survey. After three rounds of survey administration, scores on Well-Organized Classroom increased from 51 percent to 80 percent.

### BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Barrington, IL

WEBSITE: [bhs.barrington220.org](http://bhs.barrington220.org)

SIZE: 2,791 students

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Physics

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 58.7%

Hispanic: 18.4%

Asian: 17.3%

Black: 1.9%

American Indian: .5%

Two or more races: 3.3%

As she worked on organizing her classroom, Ms. Feineis reported that all the learning conditions “came along for the ride.” She saw similar increases in Classroom Community, with scores going from 78 percent to 96 percent, as students felt like they were a part of things and feeling heard. The growth was even mirrored in students’

academic outcomes. The average score on the first test was 77 percent, and by the end of the year that average had increased to a 91 percent. When describing her class, Ms. Feineis said, “It was a really special group. We went on a really big journey – a lot of growth – together, and it really bonded us as a class.”

I love giving these surveys to my students and seeing how our class changes based on what they say. Everytime I give a PERTS survey it's kind of the same: we start low and end high and that growth follows through everywhere.

- Shannon Feineis, Teacher



# Using Elevate Data to Make Learning Meaningful & Increase Engagement

Ashley Kannan | MS social studies teacher | Oak Park School District | Oak Park, Illinois | 2020-2021

Mr. Kannan administered the Elevate survey and presented his experience at the 2021 BELE Network Convening. He has been a teacher for over 20 years.

## INQUIRY QUESTION

In a year of remote teaching, how can I build relationships with students and help them connect with the content?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Meaningful Work
- Affirming Identities

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Student Conferences
- Class Discussions

## STRATEGIES

- Created opportunities for student to reflect on the class and share ideas about content
- Created personalized learning opportunities for students

## IMPACT

- Improved scores on Meaningful Work
- Led to a student participation in redesigning the curriculum

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Elevate was introduced through the district's participation in the BELE Network.
- Mr. Kannan opted into using the Elevate survey in hopes of increasing student engagement in a remote learning situation. His commitment to this mission helped him be vulnerable and respond to student data even when results were distressing.
- Dr. Lofton, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer, supported and championed Mr. Kannan's work in his school and supported district engagement and response to curricular issues identified in student feedback.
- BELE Network resources and Elevate Practice Guides helped students identify potential solutions that their teacher could try in response to Elevate data.

## INITIAL FINDINGS

Results for the first round of Elevate were "eye-opening" because scores were low in places where Mr. Kannan expected them to be higher. Particularly, he was surprised to find that many of his students felt that the work he provided was not meaningful and was not affirming of their cultural identities. The open ended responses students provided via the survey provided Mr. Kannan with additional details as students were able to share their own comments and experiences related to the survey questions.



## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Initially, Mr. Kannan took some time to process his feelings from some surprisingly low scores. After winter break he entered the classroom with a two-pronged plan to learn more about his students' perspectives. First, he used the Elevate survey questions as the basis for individual conferencing with students. In doing this he was able to learn what meaningful work would look like for a variety of students and came to a better understanding of what they hoped

to get out of their work. Second, he designed a reflection and discussion protocol for his African American studies class, provided them with the Elevate data, and asked them to analyze the data and provide recommendations on potential changes. To facilitate their recommendations he shared the Elevate Practice Guides with the students. By doing this students were able to select options they felt would

be a good fit based on their experiences and what they were seeing in the survey data. Mr. Kannan used the new insights coming out of student analysis, conferences, and discussions to make significant changes to his curriculum, the work he assigned and, perhaps most meaningfully, the way he interacted with students.

### OAK PARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Oak Park, IL

WEBSITE: [www.op97.org](http://www.op97.org)

SIZE: 6,042 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: Two years

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: All

DEMOGRAPHICS:

White: 54%

Black: 17%

Hispanic: 13%

Asian: <5%

American Indian: <5%

Pacific Islander: <5%

Two or more races: 13%

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

- In providing students with opportunities to exercise control and agency around what they were learning and how they demonstrated that learning, Mr. Kannan saw increased engagement and connections which manifested as an increase in the number of cameras on during remote learning sessions; rich, productive student discussions in breakout rooms; and more meaningful comments in the chat and on Google documents.
- Mr. Kannan redesigned curricular units with student input, embedding some Elevate survey items directly into the units to collect specific feedback and help students make meaningful connections between the content, themselves, and the world around them.
- Mr. Kannan saw his relationship with his students change. By sharing Elevate data with them and making himself vulnerable, his students became less adversarial and more honest. They came to see him as a partner with whom they co-designed their learning experiences.

"The one thing that this did prove to me, if they are invested in it they'll do it. I knew that but I never had the data to actually prove that, but now I do."

- Ashley Kannan, Teacher



# Using Elevate to Spur the Development of a Student-Centered, Project-Based Science Curriculum

Science Teachers | Social Justice High School | Chicago Public Schools | Chicago, Illinois | 2021-22

As part of their work with the National Equity Project, teachers across the science department at Social Justice High School in CPS partnered with students in their classes to collect and analyze student experience data, reflect on their curricula and instructional practice, and develop tests of change to drive improvement in student experience and performance in science courses.

## INQUIRY QUESTIONS

What are we learning about how students experience their work in science classes? Where and how do students experience science courses as meaningfully connected to their lives and communities within and beyond the school?

## FOCUS AREAS

- Classroom Community
- Meaningful Work

## DATA SOURCES

- Elevate
- Classroom discussions

## STRATEGIES

- Redesigned curriculum and instruction to emphasize experiential, project-based learning that actively centers students' communities, lived experiences, and curiosity and creativity

## IMPACT

- Although the targeted Meaningful Work measure was flat across initial cycles, the department saw modest improvements in how students experienced their science courses on multiple other measures
  - Student Voice and Feedback for Growth each increased by two percentage points
  - Classroom Community, Affirming Identities, and Teacher Caring each increased by a percentage point
- The increase in the Student Voice measure reflected substantially larger proportions of students reporting that they had the opportunity to make choices about their work (+4 percentage points), that their ideas were taken seriously (+2 percentage points), and that their teachers responded to their suggestions (+3 percentage points)
- Across all of the classes in the science department, large majorities of students reported both believing that they could be honest in responding to survey questions and understanding that their survey results would be used by their teacher for improving their classroom experience

## LESSONS LEARNED & ENABLING CONDITIONS

- District participation in the BELE Network and close, focused support from National Equity Project coaches emphasized the importance of partnering with students to learn about their experiences, concerns, and passions both inside and outside of school, and to co-design efforts to address and improve the learning experience within their classrooms
  - Coaching included support and tools for planning and facilitating educators' regular review of and reflection on Elevate data
- The support of district and school administrators for the implementation and use of Elevate, including providing regular, protected time for educators to review and reflect on data, underlined its value and investment in its success

## WHAT WAS DONE IN RESPONSE

Teachers across the science department at Social Justice High School used their Elevate data and conversations with their students to develop novel curricula and instructional approaches that centered students' lived experiences, communities, and creativity. Teachers discussed and developed a variety of experiential, project-based approaches to address students' expressed interests in issues directly affecting them and their communities, including in mental health and wellness as well as industrial waste and environmental justice, among others. Teachers followed up new units with additional conversation with students and analyzed subsequent rounds of survey data for clues about how student experience shifted in response to their change efforts.

Teachers met regularly to discuss students' feedback and to review and analyze subsequent rounds of Elevate data. These discussions identified increases in Student Voice and improvements in Classroom Community, even while teachers and students collectively continued to grapple with how to make experiences in science courses more engaging and their work more meaningful.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS

After sharing initial results from the first round of Elevate surveys, science department teachers held a series of conversations with students in their classes to understand what might make work in science feel more meaningful. Those discussions, in turn, helped to surface students' interests in mental health and wellness as well as climate change and environmental justice.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE HIGH SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

WEBSITE: <http://sj.lvhs.org>

SIZE: 303 students

TIME USING ELEVATE: <1 year

SUBJECTS INVOLVED: Science

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Black: 12%

Latinx: 87%

White: 0.7%

From these conversations with students, science teachers were able to generate a list of potential lessons and unit plans directly connected to students' lived experiences, concerns, and interests, from which they then individually selected ideas around which to design experiential, project-based approaches for their classrooms.

Examples of projects included efforts to track and measure the impact of tailpipe emissions from tractor trailers on air quality in the community surrounding the school, as well as efforts to measure, assess, and monitor students' screen time and its impact on sleep quality and attentiveness. The development of a partnership between teachers and students shaped these projects and generated a range of ideas for additional ways to make students' work and learning inside their science classrooms more connected and more meaningful to their lives outside of it.

"They say it all the time when ... there's something that directly impacts [the school community] – they complain that we're not talking about these things. Students are very critical and they feel like they have something strong to say ... [they] are very aware of ... [and] very critical of the school and what we're doing ... We're not talking about those things and maybe we should be ...

When there are kids in a class with interest in a topic, other kids pick up that energy. Individual students can totally change the class in terms of even just how they sit or how they engage."

- Sue Nelson, Science Teacher