



February 3, 2014

Dear Chancellor Fariña,

Congratulations on your appointment to lead New York City schools. It is exciting to hear you recognize in your first days that change must happen “with people, not to people.” We are writing because we are concerned that student voice is limited in our system and want to work with you to improve our schools.

The [Student Voice Collaborative](#) brings together students from eight high schools, across three networks, to affect the sorts of change we want to see in our schools and support one another along the way. Over the last four years we have been implementing collaborative school improvement campaigns in our schools, developing student communities in our networks, meeting with key DOE officials to better understand the way things work, and serving as “Student Shadows” on official Quality Reviews.

The [student voice rubric](#) we created (after a year of research) captures the core of what we value most, including: relationships, communication and listening, meaningful participation, shared decision-making, peer support, and real-world experiences. Research<sup>1</sup> shows that student voice strengthens student engagement, builds trust and capacity, improves critical thinking skills, and increases the effectiveness of school improvement efforts. We know from experience that taking part in important conversations, planning, and action makes us feel valued and drives us to invest in ourselves and our schools.

Below are 6 ways we believe the DOE can immediately strengthen student voice across the system:

**1. Keep Students Informed of What’s Going on in the DOE**

- Publish a “Student Weekly” (with news, updates, and opportunities) for students and families
- Create a “Student Portal” web site with key resources
- Hold periodic conferences for student leaders

**2. Ensure Every High School has an Empowered Student Council**

- Meet on a regular basis
- Include a representative cross-section of students (all ages, all ethnicities, ELLs, students w/ IEPs, etc.)
- Addresses relevant challenges and implement school improvement campaigns

**3. Ensure Every School has a Student-Staff “Action Team”**

- Meet on a regular basis
- Include representatives from student council and staff leadership team
- Student and staff share agenda and engage in meaningful school improvement work

**4. Create More Student Voice Collaboratives at the Network/Cluster and Citywide Levels**

- Network/Cluster collaboratives include students from student councils
- Citywide collaborative includes students from cluster collaboratives and meets w/ Chancellor
- Collaboratives share agenda with DOE leadership and engage in meaningful school improvement work

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<sup>1</sup> Toshalis, Eric and Nakkula, Michael. "[Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice.](#)" *Students at the Center Series.* Jobs for the Future., April. 2012.

"[What is Student Voice About?](#)" Soundout. Adam Fletcher, n.d. Mon. 3 Feb. 2014.

**5. Establish a Team at the Central Office that is Fully Dedicated to Supporting Student Voice**

- Students participate in assembling team
- Supports student councils (offers training to staff and students)
- Supports network/cluster and citywide student voice collaboratives

**6. Continue and Expand the Quality Review Student Shadow Initiative**

- Student Shadows are paired with Reviewers – take part in all QR activities for a day
- Shadows, Reviewers, and schools benefit from sharing perspectives
- Quality Review process reinforces student voice expectations

Our proposal addresses the big picture instead of specific challenges. Before the new administration takes on key issues, we think it is crucial that the DOE first build a system for student voice. A system will ensure that communication and collaboration are always a part of the process. If the work we do to improve our schools is to be truly effective, it must involve students and adults working together as a community at every level.

We cannot express how eager we are to begin the process of transforming our system for the better with you. It is not only important to us, but also our peers, teachers, and principals who support the cause. If the DOE hopes to produce young adults who are prepared to lead and contribute to important decisions, we need to give students practice now.

Thank you so much for taking time to review our proposal. We hope to hear back from you soon to set up a time to meet and talk more.

Sincerely,

**The Student Voice Collaborative**

(CFN 102/113, CFN 106, and CFN 107)

Christian Judy	Academy for Young Writers
Leandro Ribeiro	Baruch College Campus High School
Lian Xin Lin	Baruch College Campus High School
Cristal Cruz	Brooklyn Frontiers High School
Manniely Nieves	Brooklyn Frontiers High School
Yu Qiong He	Flushing International High School
Tenzin Choeyang	Flushing International High School
Emma Devlin	Institute for Collaborative Education
William Marte	Institute for Collaborative Education
Brandon Ortiz	James Baldwin School
Lucy Melo	James Baldwin School
Ivan Ramos	Landmark High School
Jaden Dominguez	Landmark High School
Reyson Lizardo	Landmark High School
Thomas Amankwah	Murray Hill Academy
Salina Kuoc	Murray Hill Academy
Fatoumata Sakho	School for Tourism and Hospitality
Maria Contreras	School for Tourism and Hospitality
Rashida Miah	School for Tourism and Hospitality