A core purpose of a student council is to be the catalyst and conduit for student voice on campus and to support broader school efforts that foster a culture where student voice is valued. National Student Council (NatStuCo) champions student voice as one of its four tenets and has promoted student voice as an essential responsibility of student council leaders since its early beginnings. Realizing that purpose to its fullest, however, is not an easy task.

Transforming a school into one that values and maintains strong student voice is seldom accomplished without facing hurdles that can dilute or derail efforts. Building a culture of voice can be challenged by the various implicit definitions found in educational and lay circles. The inability to articulate what student voice is and what it looks like has allowed school and student leaders alike to form definitions suited to their preferences and agendas, thereby limiting the scope and effectiveness of efforts to create a culture that values and promotes authentic student voice.
RSVP Executive Overview

A core purpose of a student council is to be the catalyst and conduit for student voice on campus and to support broader school efforts that foster a culture where student voice is valued. National Student Council (NatStuCo) champions student voice as one of its four tenets and has promoted student voice as an essential responsibility of student council leaders since its early beginnings. Realizing that purpose to its fullest, however, is not an easy task.

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About National Student Council

National Student Council (NatStuCo) provides and promotes professional development and leadership training to student council advisors who, in turn, teach leadership skills to student council members. NatStuCo is dedicated to preparing and empowering student leaders to better serve their schools and communities.

For more information, visit www.NatStuCo.org

About NASSP

The National Association of Secondary School Principals is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student’s potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Student Council. For more information about NASSP, located in Reston, VA, visit www.nassp.org.
What is Student Voice?
The Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations defines student voice as:

1. Students sharing genuine thoughts, ideas, and opinions in an environment underpinned by trust and respect
2. Students accepting responsibility not only for what they say, but also for what needs to be done. 
3. Students being valued by adults and worthy of their trust.
   
WHAT RSVP?

"Students who believe they have a voice in a school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice.

— Quaglia Institute 2016 voice research report

Traditionally, student councils and school staff have relied on surveys and open forums to be their student voice "projects." Student voice, however, is not a one-and-done event. The foundation of any effort to infuse student voice into a school’s culture must aim to give voice to and continually engage all members of the student population.

The RSVP Process

ENGAGES the largest percentages of the student body.

PROMPTS meaningful discussions and student-led action.

INCLUSIVE of underrepresented, fringe, and marginalized populations.

WHY RSVP?

"Summative evidence of student voice across our school culture is the students’ commitment to wanting to be heard. Their interaction is purposeful, respectful, and reflective. They want to know that adults value their input and that their input is meaningful. They want to know that adults are able to see things through the students’ perspective. RSVP is able to listen to the entire student body’s opinions on issues and problems that are important to them. Through RSVP, the administrators and adults are able to see things through the students’ perspective.

— Attleboro High School in Attleboro, MA

How Does RSVP Work?

A series of three student-led summits held in classrooms and conducted schoolwide lies at the heart of RSVP.

The summits systematically move students from identifying school and community issues and concerns to proposing actions the students might take to address priority issues. RSVP is thick with the elements of service-learning as students must research and understand the issue and then propose realistic solutions. Student voice is about respectful listening and dialogue, and student leaders must always be role models who demonstrate respectful interactions.

Keys To RSVP Success

RSVP and student voice as a whole are possible when the following three stipulations are in practice:

1. Principal support: Principals must value and support student voice by giving students input on issues impacting their school and learning, and they must commit time and resources to the RSVP process as a part of building student voice in the school. The support of the principal is critical to all school-based initiatives, and RSVP is no exception.

2. Faculty and staff support: School faculty, staff, and school council advocates must support student leaders and value student voice in the classroom and on campus, because student voice must be sustained and can grow from within the school. Student council members benefit from their council advisor’s guidance as they become familiar with RSVP and work to manage the process and resulting action plans.

3. Dialogue with the student body: Student leaders must be willing to genuinely listen to the voices of the student body and share leadership roles existing within and emerging out of the RSVP process and action plans. Student voice is about respectful listening and dialogue, and student leaders must always be role models who demonstrate respectful interactions.

Outcomes

The projects and activities within completed Civic Action Plans have reflected student concerns ranging from seemingly minor inconveniences—like replacing latches on bathroom stalls—to significant safety issues such as getting a traffic signal installed at the entrance to a school parking lot. Some plans included projects that extended beyond school walls, an example being the creation of a community awareness campaign on teen pregnancy.

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The flexibility of RSVP permits easy adaptation of the summit process to address larger societal issues that are well-documented and affect all communities (e.g., bullying).

From Plan to Action

With the Civic Action Plan finalized at the third summit, the student leadership team performs a community mapping exercise to identify potential obstacles, community allies, key stakeholders, and school and community support people. Community mapping is followed by establishing contacts and meeting with various community leaders or stakeholders to secure commitments, forming subcommittees to lead project tasks, securing necessary resources, building a coalition, and engaging the student volunteers. Upon completion of the plan or at the end of the school year, the leadership team, student council, and all volunteers celebrate success.

The Third Summit: Response and Implementation

Summit Three has a dual purpose. During the summit, students are presented with a draft of the Civic Action Plan and asked to meet with suggestions for additions and changes that would strengthen it. Students also consider how the projects and actions the students themselves prioritized during the previous summits would address the student experience, and what community issue they would like to see addressed. The summit begins with students setting ground rules for their group to establish the respectful and orderly environment necessary for meaningful dialogue to occur. The summit concludes when each summit group prioritizes its list and hands it off to the RSVP student leadership team where it is combined with results from all other groups into a prioritized master list for the school. From that list, the RSVP leadership team will determine the top issues to be shared with the principal and become the focus of the next summit.

The Second Summit: Recommendations for Action

In Summit Two, students are presented with three of the issues that were identified by top reporting by multiple groups in the first summit. Students are charged to discuss each issue and then prioritize their actions that address them. Students in each summit group then prioritize the recommendations they believe to be realistic and most effective to act upon. Top recommendations are again shared with the leadership team. In consideration of all Summit Two results, the student leadership team determines which recommendations will be the subjects of a Future Civic Action Plan. Before drafting the plan, all recommendations under consideration are reviewed with the principal to determine feasibility and garner approval.

The First Summit: Voice

Summit One stimulates discussions in a positive, non-threatening environment. Students are asked to consider what they perceive to be going well in their school and what issues about them their community members are asked to consider what they perceive to be going well in their school and what issues about them their community members are. Students are then asked to think about and share what positive changes they envision being made to improve or enhance the school as the "student experience," and what community issue they would like to see addressed. The summit concludes with students setting ground rules for their group to establish the respectful and orderly environment necessary for meaningful dialogue to occur. The summit concludes when each summit group prioritizes its list and hands its off to the RSVP student leadership team where it is combined with results from all other groups into a prioritized master list for the school. From that list, the RSVP leadership team will determine the top issues to be shared with the principal and become the focus of the next summit.

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WHAT IS STUDENT VOICE?

…students who believe they have a voice in school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice.

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2. With the Civic Action Plan finalized at the third summit, the student leadership team performs a community mapping exercise to identify potential obstacles, community allies, key stakeholders, and school and community support people.

3. Upon completion of the plan or at the end of the school year, the leadership team, student council, and all stakeholders to secure commitments, forming subcommittees to lead project tasks, securing necessary resources, building a coalition, and engaging the student volunteers.

**What has Student Voice?**

1. **PROMPTS**

   - meaning and purpose;
   - fringes, and marginalized populations

2. **ENGAGES**

   - the largest percentage of the student body

3. **INCLUSIVE**

   - engaged and included, descriptors of youth leadership that are familiar with RSVP and work to manage the process and resulting action plans.

**The RSVP Process**

1. **The First Summit: Voice**

   - Quaglia Institute 2016 voice research report

   - Student leaders must be willing to genuinely listen to the voices of the student body and share leadership roles existing within and generating out of the RSVP process and action plans.

   - Student voice is about respectful listening and dialogue, and student leaders must always be role models who demonstrate respectful interactions.

   - The third summit stimulates dialogue in a positive, non-threatening environment. Students are asked to consider what they perceive to be going well in their school and what they like about their community. Students are then asked to think about and share what positive changes they envision being made to improve or enhance the school or the “student experience,” and what community issues they would like to see addressed. The summit begins with students setting ground rules for their group to establish the respectful and orderly environment necessary for meaningful dialogue to occur. The summit concludes when each summit group prioritizes its list and hands it off to the RSVP student leadership team where it is combined with results from all other groups into a prioritized master list for the school. From that list, the RSVP leadership team will determine the top issues to be shared with the principal and become the focus of the next summit.

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3. **The Third Summit: Response and Implementation**

   - During the final summit, students are presented with a draft of the Civic Action Plan and asked to meet with stakeholders for additions and changes that would strengthen them. Students also consider how they will be engaged with the plans as volunteers or role models.

**HowDoes RSVP Work?**

A series of three student-led summits held in classrooms and conducted schoolwide lies at the heart of RSVP.

The summits systematically move students from identifying school and community issues and concerns to proposing actions the students might take to address priority issues. RSVP is thick with the elements of service learning as students must research and analyze pertinent topics, make presentations to school administration, civic organizations, government officials, and other groups. The flexibility of RSVP permits easy adaptation of the summit process to also address larger societal issues that are well documented and affect all communities (e.g., bullying).

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RSPV and student voice as a whole are possible when the following three stipulations are in practice:

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The RSVP process gives all students a voice at school and provides students with the opportunity to take responsibility for making positive change.
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