

Ladder of Meaningful Student Involvement

Understanding the Ladder

Before exploring the Ladder in-depth, it's important to understand that the Ladder is not meant to position one relationship as better than all others, or that a classroom, school, or education system can be one way all the time. Instead, it is to help understand the gradient ways students are involved throughout schools.



RUNG 9: STUDENT/ADULT EQUITY

Everyone involved is recognized for their impact in the activity, including students and adults, and each has ownership of the outcomes. Adults and students are positioned in healthy, whole relationships with each other while moving forward through action and learning.

RUNG 8: COMPLETELY STUDENT-LED

Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by students and decision-making is shared amongst students and adults.

RUNG 7: STUDENT/ADULT EQUALITY

Students are fully equal with adults while they are involved in a given activity within schools. This is a 50/50 split of authority, obligation, and commitment.

RUNG 6: STUDENT CONSULTATION

Adults ask students their opinions on topics, including what happens, why it happens, who is involved, or when it happens. Adults may or may not act upon their guidance, however, the important part is that students consult in the process.

RUNG 5: STUDENT INFORMED

Students give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by adults. The students are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by the adults.

RUNG 4: STUDENT CENTERED

Adults assess what students want or need; determine how they'll meet those wants or dreams; and decide the validity of what students learn in the process of an activity.

RUNG 3: STUDENT TOKENISM

Students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they do it.

RUNG 2: STUDENT DECORATION

Students are used to help bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by students. Causes are determined by adults, and adults make all the decisions.

RUNG 1: STUDENT MANIPULATION

Adults use students to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by students.

Adapted from: <https://soundout.org/2015/02/02/ladder-of-student-involvement/>

Feedback Dilemma

Dr. Ellen Harris, superintendent of a ACME suburban school district, recently initiated a bold move towards enhancing transparency and collaboration within her leadership team. Known for her innovative approaches, Dr. Harris decided to undertake a self-assessment of her leadership style by soliciting anonymous feedback from her staff, including principals, teachers, and administrative personnel. Her goal was to identify strengths and areas for improvement to foster a more effective and supportive educational environment.

After collecting and reviewing the feedback, Dr. Harris found herself in a quandary. The responses revealed a mix of admiration for her dedication and vision but also pointed out significant concerns. Many staff members felt that while Dr. Harris was exceptionally forward-thinking, her fast-paced initiatives often left little room for input, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed and under consulted. This feedback hit hard; Dr. Harris had always prided herself on being a leader who valued collaboration and inclusivity.

Dr. Harris grappled with how to address this feedback constructively. Her commitment to transparency meant she wanted to share these insights openly with her team to model accountability and set the stage for collective growth. However, she also feared that such vulnerability might undermine her authority and the perception of her leadership effectiveness. The challenge was not only in seeking this feedback but now in sharing it in a manner that could constructively bridge the gap between her self-perception and how her leadership style was being received.

How should Dr. Harris navigate this delicate situation?