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Public Opinion Poll Confirms Michigan Voter Support for Student Engagement as Important Measure of School Quality

Student perception survey used as critical assessment tool for improving statewide education

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – (October 5, 2023) – EPIC-MRA poll data released in September at the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA) Fall Conference in Traverse City, Michigan, soundly validates the need for work surrounding student engagement, ranking it as an important component of student assessment.

The public opinion poll was commissioned to better understand public sentiment around student engagement in school. Of the 600 individuals polled:

- 79% believe that student performance should be graded on much more than just standardized test scores.
- 60% believe student engagement is more important than how students do on standardized tests for measuring classroom performance and understanding the material being taught.
- 75% believe it is important for their local public-school district to join with other Michigan public school districts in adopting policies that have proven to increase the level of student engagement – both in Michigan and nationwide.

Currently, there is no uniform measure of students' wellbeing nor a common means to evaluate student engagement and the impact of related social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities for students beyond standardized test scores. Yet, the research is clear about the significant role of student engagement and student belonging on student success. Engaged students are 2.5 times more likely to say they do well in school and 4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about the future (*Jackson, C.K. et al. Linking social-emotional learning to long-term success. Education Next*).

“If we truly want to see student performance increase and position Michigan to be a Top 10 state for public education, we must take care of our students' social, emotional and mental well-being,” said Dr. Daveda Colbert, Superintendent, Wayne RESA. “Students need to know that we care, and the best way to demonstrate that is through our actions – first by listening to them and then taking steps based on their voice, their concerns and their ideas.”

The MI Student Voice Perception Survey aims to fill this void. In 2019, a group of superintendents in Kent County, Michigan, developed a common survey that could provide a holistic picture of student experience, focusing on the areas of student engagement, social-emotional learning (SEL) and belonging. This led to the development of the MI Student Voice Perception Survey, which was administered by 20 school districts across the state in 2022. Participation nearly tripled in spring 2023, with 58 districts administering the survey to 33,366 total students.

“The MI Student Voice Perception Survey is playing a transformative role in how we approach our district and school improvement planning by prioritizing the voice of our students,” said Gerald Hopkins, Superintendent, Kenowa Hills Public Schools. “Not only did we administer the survey, but we then used the data to conduct student focus groups to further validate and understand the findings. As a result, the students are seeing first-hand that their voice is driving action.”

Aggregate data from the Spring 2023 Student Perception Survey further underscores the need to listen to students. The data shows that one in five students have low SEL skills, largely stemming from relationship skills and responsible decision making. Additionally, student engagement is notably lower in middle and high school students compared to elementary grades, which may impede students from enrolling in college and seeking advanced degrees. Likewise, students in elementary grades have a higher sense of belonging than students in high school, particularly as it relates to relationships and cultural awareness.

“If every student has a sense of wellbeing, if they feel as though they belong in the classroom and they’re engaged in their instruction, that’s a remarkable measure of school success,” said Ron Koehler, Superintendent, Kent ISD. “Those are the things that live beyond any test. Those are the things that make a community of learning and foster opportunities for students to thrive.”

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About MI Student Voice

[MI Student Voice](#) is a free service for public school districts across the state of Michigan. Led by a coalition of superintendents from across the state, MI Student Voice is now playing a transformative role in how education leaders approach district and school improvement planning by prioritizing the voice of their students. This work is supported by a grant from the [Michigan Health Endowment Fund](#).