Speak Up Forum Report – Barrie Central Collegiate Institute

Held: Friday, November 23, 2013

**Message from the Ministry**

Student Voice is about seeking students’ ideas on what helps strengthen their school communities and ensuring all student voices are heard. Across Ontario, *SpeakUp* forums are helping students get more engaged in learning and their school community.

Students who feel a sense of belonging and who participate in their learning are more likely to achieve success and graduate. Student Voice initiatives provide opportunities to learn directly from students what actions strengthens their sense of belonging and inspires their participation. *SpeakUp* provides Ontario students with opportunities to share their ideas.

**Purpose**

This *SpeakUp* Forum was held for the purpose of gathering information and input on what changes need to be made in Ontario to help strengthen our education in all aspects. The forum is student planned, student run, and fully represents the students. This report is being brought to *Barrie Central* and the *Simcoe County District School Board* staff, as well as to the *Ministry of Education* so as to inform you – the educators/staff – on how the students see education and what solutions they have to offer. The report is to the benefit of every single staff and student in the Ontario Education System. This forum will be an addition to the work being done to move Ontario into the next phase of education.

**Findings**

Below, you will find the full report of the answers students gave to each question as well as a summary of the findings after each question.

1. *What does it look like when you are engaged in your learning?*
* “I will take home the info and be very focused; if it’s interesting or applicable, I will take it home and share it with my family and friends. I’m a hand- on learner and believe that we should do more labs. Some teachers will not answer your questions no matter what they are, and make you feel like they don’t care if you pass. When I’m engaged, I feel successful and good.”
* “I can understand and explain concepts. Some teachers just touch on the topic and move on, they don’t explain where it came from. I believe that if they went in-depth on all subjects more people would succeed.”
* “Asking questions, sharing ideas, and giving opinions.”
* “Actually paying attention; writing, participating.”
* “Class goes by quickly because it’s actually engaging and interesting.”
* “When I can actually apply what I’ve learnt to my own life.”
* “When I take learning outside the classroom.”
* “When I am involved in informal learning; outside the classroom: joining clubs/teams, and helping out the community.

Summary

Students find that they are most engaged in their learning when they are taking what they’ve learnt and bringing it outside the classroom – to family, friends, work, etc. If what they are learning is most applicable to their life, they will replay the information and be able to build on it. The students genuinely feel successful and proud of what they are accomplishing and feel like they are actively learning. An engaged student is one who: asks questions, listens, watches, shares, and applies. Furthermore, many students noted that daily use of SPARK actually makes them feel engaged.

1. *What holds you back from being engaged in your learning?*

Summary

Students are held back by countless reasons. Uninterested teachers, mental health problems, stress, anxiety, and a long list of items are attributes. Students often feel intimidated to speak up either during class or alone to a teacher. Furthermore, students indicated a lack of interest in the current curriculum due to lack of real life applications involved; noting that there is need for new ways. Also, the students pointed out that the current way of school mainly targets linguistic and mathematic learners, or people who are more “book” smart. This is a barrier to many students, especially because there are seven different learning styles.

1. What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
* “Teachers can have respect for students and listen to them. Recognize that there is more the student than what is at face value. Keep in mind that mental health, stress, and anxiety affect far too many students.”
* “Teachers can communicate with each other to set due-dates that don’t overlap too much.”
* “Offer positive feedback and constructive criticism as opposed to negativity.”
* “Communication; between teachers, between parents and teachers, between everyone.”
* “Address issues with students in a more proactive manner.
* “Parents and teachers need to be active in education. Encourage open conversation. Try to come to the same level of the student.”
* “Have real guidance.”
* “Don’t ostracize, demean, or belittle students.”
* “Offer alternative assignments or IEP’s and allow for more creativity and expression. Allow for flexible due dates. Allow for re-tests. Try not to assign weekend homework, and assign manageable workloads.”
* “Be more approachable.”
* “Often, there is one student in group work that gets stuck with everything. Recognize that as often as possible.”
* “Mark anonymously.”
* “Suspensions out of school don’t work. Be more proactive with punishment and discipline.”

Summary

Students wish to see a more open line of communication: teachers and students, teachers and teachers, teachers and parents. Students often deal with many things outside of the walls of the one classroom and this must be recognized and addressed – through updated guidance, mental health strategies, lighter workloads and independent plans. Students would like to see more involvement from teachers wherever possible. Students need for teachers to be approachable and on the same level as the student.

1. What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?
* “Be involved inside and outside the classroom. Enjoy school more.”
* “Engage yourself in class, pay attentions, and take action.”
* “Create study groups. Tutor each other and mentor the younger grades or struggling people.”
* “Get to know the staff at your school.”
* “Actually take some sort of note; review. Do homework or at least make a real attempt.”
* “Do things you actually enjoy; don’t ‘go with the flow’ to fit in.”
* “Control your behaviour. Respect teachers and students.”
* “Keep an open line of communication with your parents and teachers.”

Summary

Students should be more involved wherever applicable and possible. They need to take action, keep engaged, be active in class, and strive for more communication. They need to work on strategies to maintain their well-being and as well as their academics. They need to support, tutor, and respect on another and create an overall better atmosphere.

**Barrie Central and SCDSB/Ontario Specific**

Students were asked near the end of the forum to list two different suggestions: for Barrie Central, and for the Simcoe County District School Board. This information will be an instrumental asset to moving forward in our education.

1. Central
* “Have a group of teachers - on from each subject/department - that stay after school to offer help to students (similar to Math Help).”
* “Updated washrooms (i.e. co-ed or gender neutral) and updated drinking fountains.”
* “Mental Health Awareness.”
* “Nap area/stress relief area.”
* “Take learning outside the classroom more (i.e. more field trips).”
* “Take into account that we are humans too. We have other classes, jobs, families, and other things that we must balance on top of school.”
* “Work harder to get Grade Nines involved, especially in extra-curricular.”
* “More student lead events – aside from just student council. We should make the change too.”
* “Teachers more involved and outgoing with students; improve student-teacher relations.”
* “Central needs to have the library open after school to allow student a quiet environment to work – especially for those who can’t at home.”
* “Lighter work load – academically.”
* “Stop every few minutes to make sure that everyone in the class is following along and understanding it.”
* “More student led student meetings – like this forum.”
* “Gain more funding for Central…”
* “Reach the needs of as many students as possible; learn new teaching styles to accommodate everyone’s learning style.”
* “Meet with teachers and discuss issues and work towards a positive way of changing them.”
* “Be more interactive and hands on.”
* “Regularly update students on how they’re doing.”
* “Elaborate more and offer deeper explanations in class.”
* “Allocate one catch-up day/period a week for all students to work on assignments and work.”

Summary

Students wish to see a more open line of communication. Recognize and addressed the issues that affect students outside the one classroom. Students would like to see more involvement from teachers and staff. Students need for teachers to be approachable and on the same level as the student. There is a need for more mental health initiative at Central. Students need more afterschool help in all areas as well as to be able to have access to the library. Students would like to see more modernization in our school. Furthermore, recognize that there are different ways in which students learn and do your best to meet those needs.

1. SCDSB/Ontario
* “More schools specific to learning styles.”
* “More elective or alternative courses.”
* “An unbiased, non-sexist, dress code.”
* “Lighter workload; limit homework allowed. Less stress on academics.”
* “More Mental Health Awareness, Poverty and Homelessness Awareness.”
* “Actually see the learning that’s happening. Have people come in and see, talking face-to-face with students. More communication and interaction with schools.”
* “Modernize curriculum; adapt to electronics, change with the times. Have a more adaptable/flexible curriculum. Update.”
* “Recognize different learning styles more.”
* “Make SPARK board/province wide.”
* “Have all classes have the same lessons/plans so as to allow for students to transition easily.”
* “More hands on/more active programs.”
* “Pay staff/reward them for involvement and commitment to extracurricular activity.”
* “Don’t always blame students or look at what they did wrong; have diverse perspective.”
* “Improve on grammar and linguistics. Enforce small reading periods.”
* “Change punishments (suspensions). Making a student leave the school is teaching them NOTHING. In-school suspensions are slightly more effective.

Summary

Alter curriculum: more modern, inclusive, and more flexible. Offer more alternative courses and learning paths for students. Highlight mental health, poverty, and diversity. Communicate more effectively; get out and see the schools, students, and teachers. Reward staff for their commitment to students and activities outside the classroom. Change disciplinary action to be more proactive – ride of out-of-school suspensions.

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