

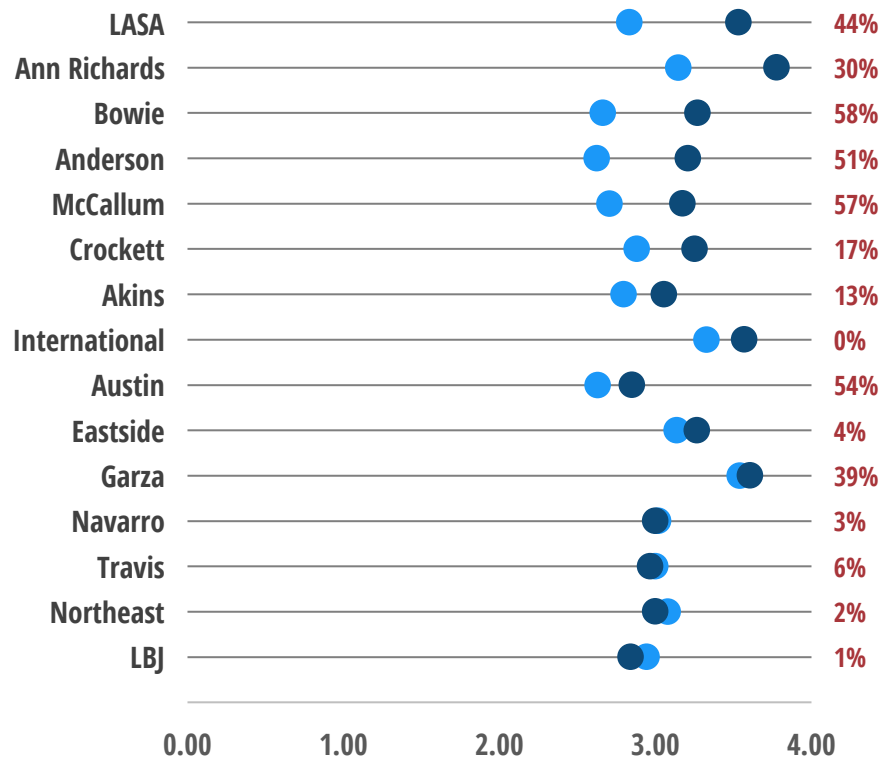
Perceptions of Student Voice at AISD High Schools

AISD high school students were less likely than high school staff to believe that students influence school policies, according to findings from the 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey and the 2021 AISD Multi-Program Survey.

When presented with the statement “Students’ ideas and opinions directly influence policies at my school,” high school students responded less favorably ($x = 2.82, s = .83, n = 5347$) than did high school staff ($x = 3.16, s = .74, n = 795$).

Figure 1.

The difference between **students’** and **staff’s** perceptions of student agency was greater at high schools with a higher **percentage of white students**.



Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey and 2021 AISD Multi-Program Survey

Note. Percentages in red represent the proportion of white students enrolled at each school. Schools are ordered by the size of the difference between students’ and staff’s perceptions. See sidebar on page 2 for response options and scales.

As displayed in Figure 1, differences between students and staff were largest at high schools with a greater percentage of White students and smallest at high schools with a greater percentage of Hispanic and Black students. In addition, school size was inversely related to students’ perceptions of influencing school policies, such that students at larger high schools were less likely than were students at smaller high schools to report that their ideas and opinions influenced policies.

Given the aforementioned differences, it should be of little surprise that students' perceptions of influencing school policies significantly differed by race. Hispanic students were the most likely to report that students' ideas and opinions influenced school policies ($x = 2.91, s = .82, n = 2539$), followed by Black students ($x = 2.88, s = .88, n = 256$), Asian students ($x = 2.85, s = .79, n = 329$), students who identify as two or more races ($x = 2.79, s = .88, n = 217$), and White students ($x = 2.70, s = .83, n = 1986$). The differences between Hispanic and White students and between Black and White students were statistically meaningful (Cohen's $d > .2, p < .01$).

More research is needed to explain why these differences existed. Cultural differences in survey response biases (i.e., social desirability or acquiescence) may be one factor (Johnson & Van de Vijver, 2003). It is also possible that White students felt more entitled to influence their school experience, and thus perceived they had comparatively less influence. This is supported by the fact that staff's perceptions of student influence were relatively stable across high schools, regardless of the racial composition of the student body. It is also possible that Hispanic and Black students were influencing policy at their schools to a greater extent than were White students.

Despite the positive impact student agency can have on classroom engagement and academic performance (Anderson et al., 2019), structural inequities in school environments continue to result in the discouragement of agency, particularly for students of color (Vaughn, 2019). As part of AISD's commitment to elevate student voice and foster equitable learning spaces, the district-wide Student Equity Council (SEC) was created in 2020. The goal of the SEC is to cultivate student leaders who can identify systemic inequities and advocate for change through ongoing communication with campus and district leadership. The SEC aims to establish a campus coalition at every AISD high school in 2021–2022.

References

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- Johnson, T.P., & Van de Vijver, F.J. (2003). Social desirability in cross-cultural research. *Cross-Cultural Survey Methods, 325*, 195–204.
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The Student Equity Council is funded in part by the St. David's Foundation.

Student Climate Survey

AISD students in grades 3 through 11 take this voluntary survey every spring. High school students were asked to respond to the statement "Students' ideas and opinions directly influence policies at my school" using the following response options: *a lot of the time* (4), *sometimes* (3), *a little of the time* (2), *never* (1), and *don't know / I prefer not to answer* (excluded from analysis).

Multi-Program Survey

AISD staff are asked to take this survey every spring. In 2020–2021, campus staff were asked to respond to the statement "Students' ideas and opinions directly influence policies at my school" using the following response options: *strongly agree* (4), *somewhat agree* (3), *somewhat disagree* (2), and *strongly disagree* (1).

