



40 Ways Students Can Change Schools

By Adam Fletcher

With all the talk about how schools need to change and all the different actions students can take to change schools, figuring out where to start can be hard! The following list of actions students can take to change schools includes all sorts of different ways students can help schools become better places to attend and to learn.

1. **Have a real conversation with a teacher or administrator.** Ask a teacher or principal what they want to see happen to make schools better places. Have real, frank, open, and honest conversations with other adults, too, each focused on what they want to see happen. Find out if they see any role for students in making those things happen.
2. **Propose a student-adult partnership program in your school.** Offer a group of students who are willing to talk openly with teachers and administrators about how they think schools should change, and hold dialogue opportunities for students and adults to talk together.
3. **Lead other students in taking action.** Create a formal or informal group for students who want to make your school a better place. Meet regularly, make plans, and take action.
4. **Share the change as it happens.** Hold a movie night and discussion for students and adults either at your school or in your community.
5. **Start a resource library.** Gather materials from across the Internet that will help you develop a successful campaign to change your school, and inspire you to do more. Share those links with your friends, parents, teachers, and others. Include books, websites, and organizations working on school improvement, student organizing and activism, and youth power.
6. **Get listed.** Create a listing of all opportunities for involvement in your school and community.
7. **Conduct a "teach-in" about school reform for students and adults.** Teaching students, parents, and community members what school reform is and how it happens is an important way to get more voices at the table.
8. **Write a curriculum.** Do you know a better way to teach something? Propose to a teacher to write and test a lesson plan or even a week-long curriculum and ask if they can try it in their class.
9. **Work inside or outside the school.** Work in your school to change your school whenever possible, but work out-of-school to change your school if you must. Find a local nonprofit that will host your gatherings and provide you with assistance, if you want it.
10. **Go citywide.** Have a town meeting or school forum for everyone at your school. Invite parents and community members.
11. **Be a connector.** Are a lot of teachers in your school building from neighborhoods outside of your school's immediate community? Offer to teachers to serve as a neighborhood connector by introducing them to the resources you use locally, especially after school program staff and nonprofit leaders.
12. **Connect the dots.** Connect with students in your city or state who want to involve students meaningfully, both in your school and others, and around the community.
13. **Engage voters.** Support political candidates for local, state, and national office who make listening and working with students in schools a priority.
14. **Follow some leaders.** Serve in a community-based campaign that is led by other students and community leaders.
15. **Get some money.** Raise funds for a student-led organization focusing on school issues.
16. **Look to the community.** Actively support youth-led organizations in your community, and encourage them to address education reform.
17. **Talk to legislators.** State legislators are responsible for making education laws in every state, including setting funding priorities and academic achievement goals. These elected officials need to know students are concerned, too.

18. **Join school boards or student advisory boards when possible.** Today, an increasing number of students have roles, and you can share this information with your local board, too. If that's not possible, simply try to meet with the school board.
19. **Conduct research studies.** Use participatory action research in your school to identify what needs to change and how it can happen, as well as who should be involved.
20. **Find the truth.** Survey students and adults and parents in your school and present the results to the community, including the school board and others.
21. **Be an advocate for student voice at any school meeting.** Advertise any public meeting to students, and encourage adults to make sure students are at the table whenever your school is making choices about students.
22. **Post your concerns.** Make students concerns visible in your school by posting them in your classroom, sharing them at meetings where adults are, and posting them on the Internet.
23. **Write letters of concern.** Work with other students to develop a letter writing campaign that informs principals, district and state school board members, the newspaper, and elected officials about student concerns regarding education.
24. **Be real.** Be consistent and clear about your expectations of adults in your school, including how they treat students and what the outcomes should be.
25. **Have a call-in.** Arrange for a radio station to sponsor a call-in show led by students that allows them to talk about their concerns about school.
26. **Get artistic.** Meet with students in your school who are particularly artistic, and develop a proposal with them for your building's leader to create art around the building focused on school reform. This might include icons painted on hallways throughout the building, or a mural summarizing students' visions for schools.
27. **See the future.** Create a school-wide vision for student involvement and voice that includes adults and students.
28. **Host all kinds of action.** Create student-led experiences throughout your school.
29. **Spread the word.** Create a newsletter, website, or Facebook group to share students' concerns about their school and education.
30. **Be an advocate.** Call for student involvement and student/adult partnerships throughout the education system.
31. **Be a friend.** Be a real, active, and engaged friend to adults in schools. They need allies too.
32. **Give yourself some feedback.** Have students self-evaluate themselves, their classes, and their teachers, and provide those results to teachers.
33. **Push for reality.** When teachers assign you tasks to create imaginary situations or participate in "mock" activities like government law-making or elections, take on assignment topics that address real school issues. Do legitimate work and apply your classroom learning to real-life scenarios that affect you everyday.
34. **Create a student-led school reform group.** Work with your peers to identify, define, focus, and organize a student-led school reform campaign for your school or in schools across your community. Use traditional protest tactics to demand meaningful student involvement throughout schools, and the types of reforms students think should happen.
35. **Share the wealth.** Arrange resources for students who would not otherwise be able to participate in school activities, including transportation, permission, and childcare.
36. **Call for new roles.** Encourage your school to involve students as advisers to the principal, classroom consultants, interns, apprentices, and activities staff.
37. **Become an interviewer.** Call for schools to include students in hiring adults at your school, including staff, teachers, and administrators.
38. **Self-monitor behavior.** Encourage your school building leadership to consider adopting a student-led conflict resolution program such as a peer leaders, a restorative justice program, or a student court.
39. **Create expectations.** Ask your teachers to co-create group expectations and norms for classroom behavior and action.
40. **Build the Web.** Connect with students in places beyond your town... or even country! With the power of the internet, you can share experiences and make contact with students in Australia, the UK, and other countries across the world. Link to them, share their work, and share with them as much as you can.