HOW TO

HAVE AUTHENTIC STUDENT VOICE IN DECISION MAKING

OREGON STUDENT VOICE

OVERVIEW

1) Find power in self-advocacy
2) Speak your truth
3) Assess your needs
4) Include more than one student
5) Reciprocate respect and trust
6) Understand rules for engagement
7) Know your allies
8) Offer multiple opportunities to participate

OBJECTIVE

Student voice is the way in which all students have opportunities to participate in and influence education decisions that will shape our lives and the lives of our peers. The skills we gain in the classroom equip us to effectively communicate our opinions and engage in open discussions. Once provided a seat at the decision-making table, our ideas can lead to innovative education reforms.

However, it is not always easy for students to engage in education reform. To overcome challenges, Oregon Student Voice offers the following guide to promote authentic student voice in decision making.

1 FIND POWER IN SELF-ADVOCACY

We each have unique experiences and perspectives, and these shape your thoughts and ideas. No one has the same experiences, and certain issues that go unnoticed by some may be identified or resolved. Persevere to share your experiences in the face of fear or rejection, your voice is significant. Feel confident that there is no right or wrong experience, opinion, or idea in education reform.

2 SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

We may encounter external pressures from friends, parents, teachers, administrators, or community members to share specific opinions or ideas. It is important to consider these, but also ensure that your own experiences and perceptions are forming a strong part of your voice. Your passion and authenticity will be a driving force in achieving your goals.

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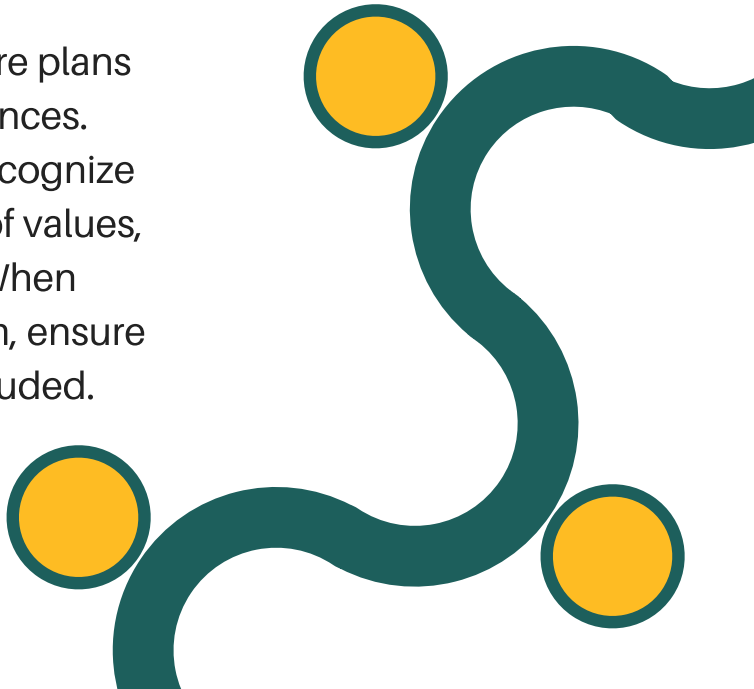
3 ASSESS YOUR NEEDS

There is limited time to engage with decision makers in education reform. It is important to clearly identify the issues that are most concerning to you and recognize ideas to resolve them. Conduct research on these issues and present decision makers with data around why it is important. You will also want to share personal stories about how the issue affects the community. At the close of meetings, work with decision makers to identify clear steps to resolve issues or implement new ideas.

4 INCLUDE MORE THAN ONE STUDENT

Be sure to include the perspectives of many students. Gender, race, ethnicity, grade, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, and future plans all shape our education experiences. Equity is only attainable if we recognize diversity, incorporate a variety of values, and hear multiple viewpoints. When you engage in education reform, ensure that other students are also included.



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5 RECIPROCATE RESPECT AND TRUST

Enter the room with the intent of facilitating mutual respect and trust among everyone. Strive to leave assumed power dynamics, such as those between adults and students, outside. Some people may have different opinions, and that is okay. We can disagree with each other respectfully and talk about our viewpoints. Work to understand why someone may have disagreed with your position and find ways to inform them why your point is valid.

6 UNDERSTAND RULES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Each environment will consist of diverse rules for engagement, which include time, location, and structures for decision making. Endeavor to learn these rules before entering the environment. Communicate with organizers if the rules limit your ability to engage, such as if meetings occur during classroom instruction. Ensure that you raise questions and concerns with decision makers during meetings.

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7 KNOW YOUR ALLIES

Identify individuals or organizations that will assist you in your efforts. These groups may be at the decision-making table with you, or may help prepare you to engage with other decision makers. While they may have their own agenda, they will be supportive in amplifying your voice.

8 OFFER MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Not all students can participate in decision making on every issue. Design ways where students can have their voice heard without it always being verbal or in person. These can include surveys, emails, letters, or anonymous feedback outlets (such as a recommendations box). You can also organize petitions, protests, walkouts, or marches. Ensure that any materials you utilize to engage students includes images and multiple languages to enable all students to participate.

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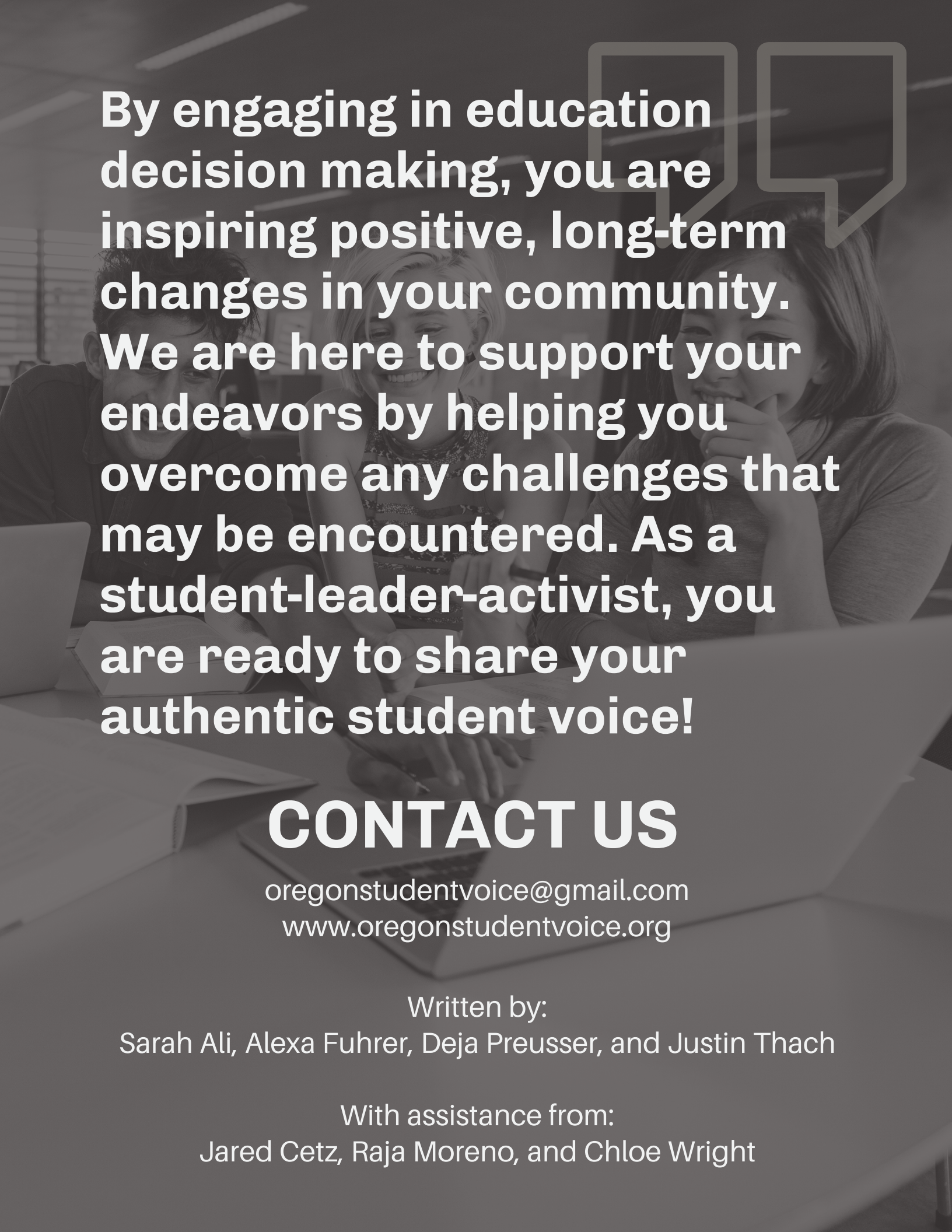

By engaging in education decision making, you are inspiring positive, long-term changes in your community. We are here to support your endeavors by helping you overcome any challenges that may be encountered. As a student-leader-activist, you are ready to share your authentic student voice!

CONTACT US

oregonstudentvoice@gmail.com
www.oregonstudentvoice.org

Written by:
Sarah Ali, Alexa Fuhrer, Deja Preusser, and Justin Thach

With assistance from:
Jared Cetz, Raja Moreno, and Chloe Wright

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