

Identifying Existing Knowledge and Information (What Do We Already Know?)

Objective: To look at our knowledge about our school system
To see what knowledge gaps we have.
To understand how the school works.

Time: 40 minutes

How Many: Whole Group

Materials: Information about your school, and school district.
Sets of Signs on Regular Paper that say: Students, Student Government, Teachers, Counselors, Dean, Principal, Assistant Principal, School Site Council, Parents, Community Members, the School District, the State Government, the Federal government. (Make enough signs so that each group of 5 students will have a set).
2-3 blank cards.

Source: Adapted from the YELL Curriculum

Enroll: When you were in elementary school, what things did you decide for yourself? What things were decided for you?
In middle school, what things did you decide for yourself? What was decided for you?
In high school, what things do you decide for yourself? What is decided for you?

Do/Experience: Post up reports, school district information or any other information about your school and school community. Each youth should take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the center of it, to create two columns. Look carefully at the information around the room. In the first column, list the kind of information you see. In the second column write down your impression about what you see (Did you know that? Is it surprising?)

Process: Discuss their impressions of what they saw.
What information is there?
What is excluded from this information?
If you were making decisions about this school, based on only this information what would be missing from your knowledge?

Label: Before we start any research initiative, it is important to see what has already been done. Previous work won't determine what we do, but it is a factor.

Demonstrate:

How are decisions made and by whom?

As a group, brainstorm a list of decisions that get made at school. Get youth in groups of 5. Give each group a set of cards. Read each decision and have each group decide who is the main group(s) that tends to make this decision. Clarify any confusion.

For any situation, ask: “If a group does not have decision-making power, how can they influence this decision or make their opinion known?”

(If you have one, distribute an organizational chart of the school and/or school district.)

Possible decisions include:

- Where to have prom
- What classes you take
- What grade you get
- What after-school sports are offered
- What after-school activities are offered
- What food is in the cafeteria
- What the dress code is for students, for teachers
- What classes are offered
- What happens in class each day
- Who can be hired as a teacher
- How much money the school gets
- How much money the district gets
- How many counselors there are at this school
- How many minutes of health ed must be taught

Review: What do we have the decision-making power for?
What decisions can we influence?
Why is it important to know who makes the decision?

Celebrate: As a large group, share what influence you want to have on a decision-maker in your life.