

**R** AISING  
**S** TUDENT  
**V** OICE AND  
**P** ARTICIPATION

## **Student Leaders Partnering for School Improvement**

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Washington Association of Student Councils  
Association of Washington School Principals

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## RSVP: Raising Student Voice & Participation

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### Overview:

*Raising Student Voice & Participation (RSVP)* is a new student engagement program sponsored by the National Association of Student Councils that can be easily integrated into student council programs. RSVP has been developed as a means to involve and empower students to identify issues in their schools and communities and to take steps to address and resolve them. In RSVP, student council leaders are involved from the initial phase of planning and facilitating student summits that engage entire student bodies, to assembling student action teams that will carry out plans for resolving those concerns identified in the summits.

The RSVP program is anchored in the vision and beliefs of the National Association of Student Councils. It also supports the NASSP report *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* by providing principals with a way to utilize the leadership of their student councils. Students trained to run the RSVP program in their schools will use NASC-identified leadership skills necessary to successfully facilitate student summits and manage civic action initiatives.

### Purpose:

The RSVP program will give student council leaders the training and resources to:

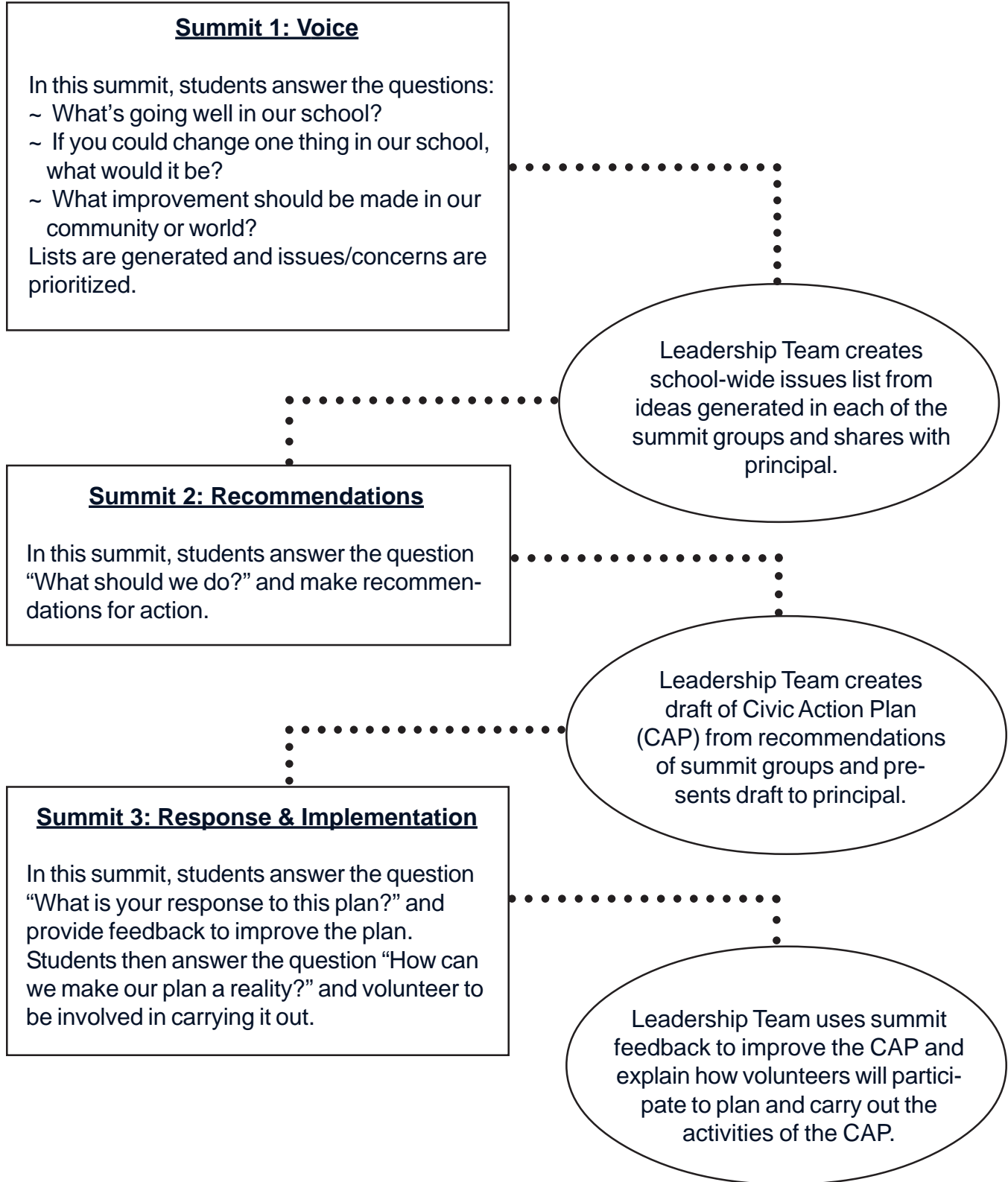
- Reach out and engage all student populations in civic-based activities
- Facilitate student summits that will identify significant issues that students wish to address through dialogue and civic action
- Extend leadership opportunities and positions to non-elected students on student council-led initiatives
- Establish a process and framework for developing and implementing student-led action projects to address issues
- Assist principals in identifying and recruiting non-elected students to serve on various school committees

### At-A-Glance:

The RSVP process begins with student leaders being trained as facilitators. They then host a series of student summits where any member of the student body can speak up and share issues and concerns about school and community. Through the summits, the student body identifies its three top issues that the leadership team uses to form civic action plans. Those plans are presented to the school administration for approval and then finalized for presentation to the student body. From there, student leaders recruit interested students to assist in implementing the civic action plans. Throughout the process students learn about the power of voice and the skills necessary to plan and work together towards making a positive change.

# RAISING STUDENT VOICE & PARTICIPATION

Schoolwide summits, conducted with and facilitated by students, lie at the heart of RSVP. The student council organizes an RSVP Leadership Team that is diverse, representative and capable of listening to and honoring student voice.



# RAISING STUDENT VOICE AND PARTICIPATION

A program of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)  
and the National Association of Student Councils (NASC)



**Through September 2, 2008, 88 high schools in Washington have been trained!**

Anacortes High  
Auburn Riverside High  
Ballard High  
Black Hills High  
Bothell High  
Capital High  
Cascade High (Everett)  
Central Valley High  
Cle-Elum Roslyn High  
Cleveland High  
Columbia River High  
East Valley High  
Easton High  
Eatonville High  
Edmonds-Woodway High  
Eisenhower High  
Ellensburg High  
Emerald Ridge High  
Evergreen High  
Ferris High  
Graham-Kapowsin High  
Grandview High  
Granite Falls  
Granger High  
Hazen High  
Heritage High  
Hudson's Bay High  
Ilwaco High  
Ilwaco Alternative High  
Inglesmoor High

John Rogers (Spokane)  
Kalama High  
Kamiak High  
Kamiakin High  
Kiona-Benton High  
Kittitas High  
Klahowya Secondary  
La Conner High  
Lewis & Clark  
Lindbergh High  
Lynnwood High  
Mabton High  
Manson Secondary  
Mariner High  
Marysville Pilchuck  
Meadowdale High  
Monroe High  
Moses Lake High  
Mount Si High  
Mount Vernon High  
Mountain View High  
Mountlake Terrace High  
Nathan Hale High  
Oroville High  
Othello High  
Pateros Jr/Sr High  
Port Townsend High  
Prairie High  
Prosser High  
Quincy High

Richland High  
Ridgefield High  
Roosevelt High  
Sedro-Woolley High  
Selah High  
Shorecrest High  
Skyview High  
Snohomish High  
South Bend High  
Squalicum High  
Stadium High  
Stanwood High  
Stevenson High  
Sumner High  
Sunnyside High  
Tacoma School of the Arts  
Thorp High  
Tenino High  
Timberline High  
Toppenish High  
Tumwater High  
University High  
Washington High  
Waterville Jr/Sr High  
Wenatchee High  
West Seattle High  
West Valley High (Yakima)  
Woodinville High

## RSVP Commitments

1. Get support and commitment from principal
2. Attend a 4-hour RSVP training
  - Recommend team of 4-5 per school with 1-2 being adults
  - Training cost approximately \$150 per team
3. Implement RSVP (should complete the entire process in 4 weeks)
  - Select and train facilitators at the school level
  - Hold Summits and develop action plans
4. Implement Action Plans

## RSVP Supports *Breaking Ranks* Recommendations, Achievement, and Existing School Initiatives

- Breaking Ranks reform initiatives focus on the critical areas of student engagement and personalization for each student. RSVP helps schools engage each and every student in a school by offering each student ownership in the ideas and the solution: a clearly defined process for suggestions, a vote, and a way to become involved in volunteer opportunities.
- RSVP can help get “hard-to-reach” students involved.
- In addition to generally fostering student engagement and personalization, RSVP addresses 6 of 30 *Breaking Ranks II* recommendations related to student voice, student leadership, and service:
  - Promote service programs and student activities as integral to education, providing opportunities for all students that support/extend academic learning
  - Connect the curriculum to real-life applications of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future
  - Accord meaningful roles in decision-making to students...in order to promote student learning and an atmosphere of participation, responsibility and ownership
  - Advocate and model a set of core values essential in a democratic and civil society
  - Promote policies and practices that recognize diversity in accord with the core values of a democratic and civil society
  - Develop political and financial relationships with individuals, organizations and businesses to support and supplement educational programs
- Excellent ties to existing school curriculum initiatives including: government/civics/social studies curriculum; service learning and community service initiatives; leadership classes, public speaking and presentation; organizational management, etc.
- Demonstrates that democracy is a participatory sport: Democracy is more than just the freedom and ability to express oneself; it is also about the responsibility to act responsibly in bringing about a positive outcome.

“Students who learn about democracy in social studies courses but who fail to see it practiced in the classroom or school are given the message that democracy is a lofty ideal, but it is not for the real world. What is needed then is an approach to citizenship education that will not only prepare students for democratic participation but help them to appreciate the value of democratic institutions”. (Power 1993, p190)
- We cannot expect students to cherish that which they have never been a part of—or to become a responsible part of society without having been able to practice what that means. We are not talking here about letting students dictate the curriculum—we are talking about letting them have a voice—and then giving them the responsibility to make a **productive** use of that voice. With voice comes responsibility—and serving others is fundamental to what our democracy is all about. NASSP and NASC want students to learn that lesson before they leave high school—otherwise it is a lesson that may be lost, as these soon-to-be adults understand well the voice component but perhaps not the responsibility component.
- If we really want students to own their own learning, then we need to give them opportunities and the responsibility to be involved in decisions that affect them.



*“Engaged student councils can be a principal’s best ally. They can help push reforms that will benefit students; they can develop strategies in answer to student concerns that will help improve school climate. Let them be one of your partners.” —NASSP*

## **Raising Student Voice & Participation: Why the Nation’s Principals and Student Council Advisers Support RSVP**

### **What is RSVP?**

- Student engagement program sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Student Councils (NASC). Washington was selected as one of 11 states to pilot this program in 2006-07.
- It is easily integrated into existing student council programs. Student council leaders plan and facilitate a series of summits that engage the student body in dialogues and assemble student action teams to carry out plans for resolving concerns identified in the summits.
- RSVP asks students what they care about, what proposals they have for community and school improvement, and what actions can be taken, in cooperation with adults, to implement their ideas for positive change.

### **Challenges Addressed by RSVP**

- Provides principals with a way to utilize the leadership of their student councils to engage students more and personalize their school experience.
- Involves *all* students and student populations—specifically giving those students who are typically not involved an opportunity to share their voices and participate in civic-based activities.
- Establishes a process and framework for developing and implementing student-directed projects.
- Brings abstract learning to life: “Students who learn about democracy in social studies courses but who fail to see it practiced in the classroom or school are given the message that democracy is a lofty ideal, but it is not for the real world. What is needed then is an approach to citizenship education that will not only prepare students for democratic participation but help them to appreciate the value of democratic institutions”. (Power 1993, p190) Visit [www.nasc.us](http://www.nasc.us) to learn how RSVP can be tied to state content standards; also find on the site creative curriculum activities.
- Extends an opportunity for leadership and involvement to non-elected students.

### **RSVP Supports School Reform Advocated by the Nation’s Principals**

In the widely recognized high school reform publication, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, six of the 31 recommendations relate to student voice and leadership. RSVP provides your school with a systematic and comprehensive way to begin to address each:

- Promote service programs and student activities as integral to education, providing opportunities for all students that support and extend academic learning.
- Accord meaningful roles in decision making to students...in order to promote student learning and an atmosphere of participation, responsibility and ownership (One specific strategy mentioned to accomplish this: “Provide student government...with opportunities to be included in decisions of substantive issues.”)
- Advocate and model a set of core values essential in a democratic and civil society.
- Connect the curriculum to real-life applications of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future.
- Promote policies and practices that recognize diversity in accord with the core values of a democratic and civil society.
- Develop political and financial relationships with individuals, organization, and businesses to support and supplement educational programs and policies.



*“The United States is experiencing a decline in civic participation, with high levels of apathy, distrust, and disengagement among young people... Schools offer a unique opportunity to reach a large number of young people at a time in their lives when they are developing their core views about public life and civic engagement. This program gives students a chance to talk to each other about things that matter to them and to come up with new approaches to school and community improvement.”*

—RSVP School Implementation Guide

### **How is the Principal Involved in RSVP?**

Principal support is crucial. As with most school-based activities programs, NASSP believes that principals have the responsibility to review and approve activities. The principal can also help influence and guide the RSVP process as well as get buy-in from the faculty for the project. In addition, the principal can:

- Be a resource for students by helping students understand community resources available to them.
- Check in regularly with the RSVP Leadership team to hear how the process is working and to learn about any potential issues.
- Help sustain the support of local policy-makers and community leaders for the student initiatives as well as invite various community leaders in to serve as consultants to the students.
- Encourage parents to get involved.
- Help students celebrate successful initiatives.

### **How is the Student Council Adviser Involved in RSVP?**

The role of the student council adviser is vitally important. The student council adviser (or another interested faculty member, e.g., a government teacher) oversees all of RSVP's processes and products and serves as the primary point of contact in the school. The student council or RSVP adviser is also the individual who sets the tone for youth-adult partnerships at the heart of this initiative. Since the project is student-focused and driven, it is important that this individual be prepared to guide the work, not direct it. She or he is wonderfully positioned to ensure that the process gives students both the confidence and skills to develop effective decision-making. The adviser will be the person most able to ensure the contributions of all students, not just a subset of student council or some other segment of the student body.

The student council or RSVP advisers' responsibilities include:

- Attending a state or regional training and helping familiarize the school community with the resources, training, and information received there.
- Working with the Leadership Team to launch RSVP and introduce it to the school and community.
- Guiding the work of the school's RSVP Leadership Team.
- Assisting students on the Leadership Team with the Student Facilitator training.
- Keeping the rest of the faculty informed about the project and arranging the necessary space and time for student summits.
- Organizing—with the Leadership Team—the presentation of the Civic Action Plan and any end-of-year celebration conducted in the school.

The Washington Association of Student Councils (WASC) in conjunction with the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) is currently providing training and support for RSVP. Contact Susan Fortin, AWSP director of student leadership, at 360.497.5323 or email [susanf@awsp.org](mailto:susanf@awsp.org) for more information.