MEASUREMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN K-12 EDUCATION

Your Education, Your Voice: Platforms and Methods for Engagement

THE GOVLAB - OCTOBER 2021

Whether it is deciding what to assess, deciding how to do those assessments or how to make assessments more useful to communities, there is a need for more engagement with communities at every stage of assessment design and implementation to help build the case for new measures. Through a series of rapid, online, public engagements in the spring of 2021, the GovLab engaged a diverse population of students, parents and caregivers to better understand the focus, role, and process of measurement and accountability in our schools.

The GovLab asked questions relating to defining school and student success, setting the direction for assessments reform and community participation in the process of creating and governing assessments

The GovLab ran three consultations that included selected and self-selected forms of participation. The GovLab was able to take advantage of the expertise and passion of self-selected participants and the legitimacy that comes from asking a representative sample of participants. Using multiple methods also enabled us to showcase alternatives for how education leaders can engage with a diverse public on a range of issues efficiently.
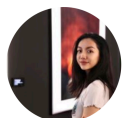
OUR APPROACH: RAPID ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

To provide communities, including traditionally underrepresented communities, an opportunity to inform education policymaking and philanthropic funding relating to assessment, the GovLab organized:

1. **THE STUDENT COUNCIL**

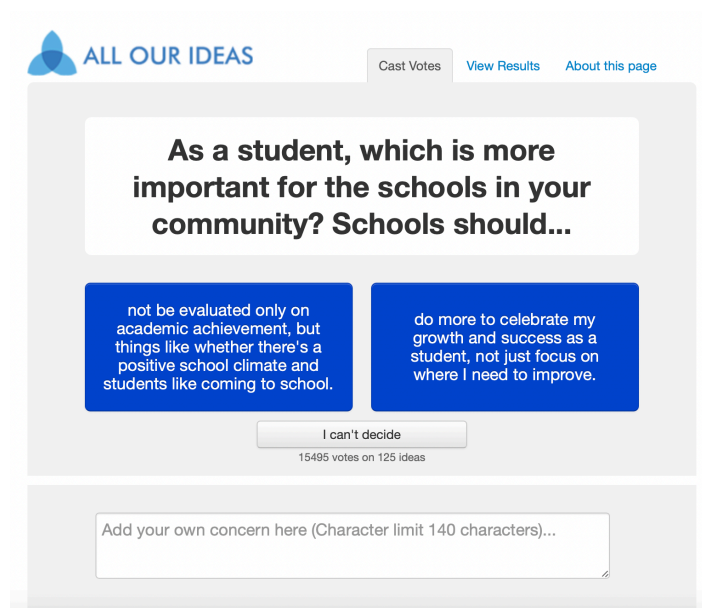|							
Itunuoluwa Adejare Longwood High School, New York	**Melody Chen** University of Southern California, Illinois	**Eleanor Clemans-Cope** Richard Montgomery High School, Maryland	**Malena Coan** Jefferson High School, Illinois	**Rachel Kim** Brown University, Georgia	**Katrina Leslie** Texas A&M University- College Station, Texas	**Ashley Lin** Union High School, Washington	**George Martinez** Bennett Day School, Illinois
Darren Dunn Kennesaw State University, Georgia	**Claire Gerson** New York University, California	**Gabbie Gonzáles** Piedra Vista High School, New Mexico	**Jocelynn Hunter Dow** Freehold Township, New Jersey	**Maya Muwanga** New York University Abu Dhabi, Colorado	**Sofia Novoa** Boone High School, Florida	**Joshua Obas** Northeast Independent Preparatory Academy, Alabama	**Isabella Ramjit** United Nations International School, New York
			Jimmy Rodgers George Westinghouse College Prep, Illinois	**Depa Saha** Bronx High School of Science, New York	**Amina Salahou** William Nottingham High school, New York	**Camara Stevenson** Burnsville High School, Minnesota	

Two dozen high school and college students from across the United States met online via Zoom every other week to codesign this research project. Students applied in a competitive application process and were then selected both based on the passion and energy of their applications and selected for geographic and demographic representation. We oversampled for students coming from school districts with high populations of free school lunch. The Student Council is an example of what some might call a Citizen Jury, a relatively small, representative sample of public participants who help to provide oversight, governance, accountability and decision making. We co-designed the project with the advice and input of the Student Council, who were paid for their participation. While students ran their own meetings, the Student Council demanded time-intensive coaching and support to facilitate biweekly deliberations. (December-May)

2. **ALL YOUR IDEAS**

In partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education and dozens of education stakeholders, the GovLab ran a three week online consultation with 18,000+ participants (students, caregivers and educators) using a "Wiki Survey'' called All Our Ideas to understand what participants saw as the biggest problems and opportunities. Developed by researchers at Princeton University All Our Ideas can be used to help a community identify and prioritize problems. Rather than give respondents a lengthy and time-consuming survey, the wiki survey presents participants with two randomly selected answer choices and asks them to select the one which is of greater concern or importance to them. Thus, the GovLab asked: "As a student/ caregiver/educator, which is more important for the schools in your community? Schools should…" The GovLab prepared 116 statements in response such as "help students learn how to find help and self-advocate when they're having a hard time personally" and "help prepare students to solve major global problems like climate change, public health issues, and inequality." Respondents self-selected to participate in response to an invitation via social media or the newsletter of one of hundreds of organizations who received an invitation. They answered as many or as few randomized pairings as they wanted. They can also choose to pick "I can't decide." Respondents are also allowed to submit their own answer choice. The

platform made it easy to gain insight at scale but required upfront investment of effort to write the statements. Also while anonymity accelerated participation, it limited the level of insight and the diversity of participants. (March)

3. **THE ASSEMBLY**
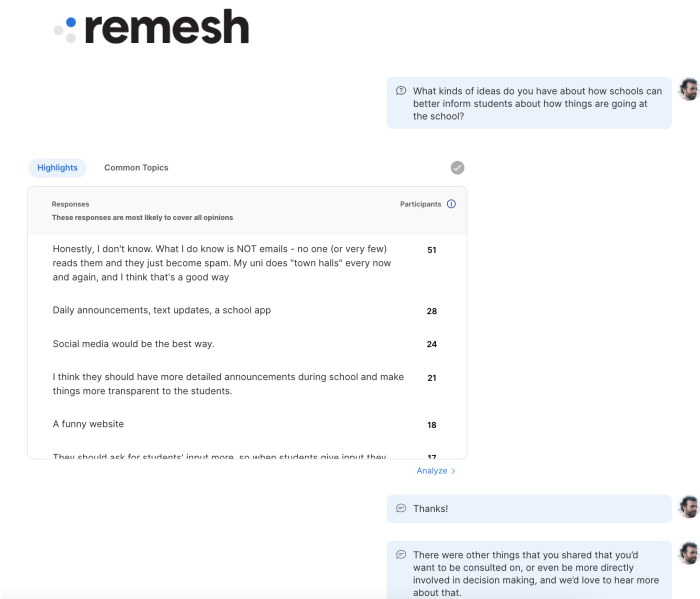
A representative sample of 440 caregivers and students convened during two, 90-minute online focus groups, using AI-enabled software called Remesh to dynamically adjust questions based on feedback. Remesh is a private platform that can be used in real-time to measure the opinion of a large group in a synchronous conversation. Remesh worked with a research panel provider to recruit a representative sample that was over 50% students and caregivers of color. This AI-based tool allows the organization to launch a topic, pose a question, such as asking about the problem, and get people to offer responses, such as suggestions of what the problems are. The system "feeds" participants the responses submitted by others in response to the moderator's questions and asks them to vote on how they feel about those responses, indicating whether they agree or disagree with other participants' responses. The AI analyzes those responses and shows the facilitator in real time a dashboard grouping the responses and how participants felt about the responses. Moderators can chat freely with participants, pose open-ended conversations, ask poll questions, and display media. Artificial intelligence helps to organize the content efficiently. The moderator of the conversation receives highly visual analytics in real-time explaining where sentiment is on the issue and how people clustered in response. Conversations can include up to 1,000 participants and typically cover 25-50 questions asked in an hour-long conversation. The platform afforded an enormous granularity of insight by virtue of linking responses to participant demographics but was very expensive to organize because of the costs of recruiting a diverse sample. (April)

Representative forms of engagement like Remesh or the Student Council help to yield insights and build legitimacy by engaging a broad spectrum of participants. Non-representative forms of engagement like All Our Ideas help to yield insight and know-how from those passionate about the topic. Each approach offers unique advantages:

REPRESENTATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The benefits of representative engagement include:

▸ **Legitimacy -** Representative sampling that reflects the demographics of the community will, arguably, better reflect the diversity of viewpoints within a community.

▸ **Equity and inclusion -** Representation or over-representation of low-income and communities of color makes it possible to foster equitable engagement.

▸ **Quality and validity of data -** As participants in a representative exercise are not anonymous and are being paid to participate, there may be a greater incentive for participants to answer questions honestly and completely, which helps to avoid the risk of fraudulent responses or incomplete responses.

NON-REPRESENTATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The benefits of non-representative engagement include:

▸ **Online engagement can be faster and less burdensome -** Providing engagement opportunities through online platforms further reduces barriers to participation. A representative sample requires gathering a great deal of demographic data that participants can also find intrusive and a barrier to engagement whereas self-selected forms of participation can also include anonymous participation.

▸ **Interest produces better quality engagement -** Allowing participants to self-select to participate on the basis of what interests a participant can lead to more robust and sustained participation.

▸ **Flexible types of participation -** Self selection allows for more flexible forms of engagement, whereby people participate in ways that speak to their interests and expertise, including robust forms of codesign and collaboration that might be more time consuming.

▸ **Build trust with communities -** Sustained and meaningful opportunities are key to building trust between the institutions and the communities they serve. Because of the relative ease and speed with which non-representative forms of engagement can be undertaken, it can help decrease the reluctance to engage.

▸ **Facilitating Engagement** at Every Stage of the Problem Solving Process

- ▸ **Problem Identification -** Getting diverse input from those with lived experience and from those with credentialed expertise helps policymakers and other decision makers learn about how the public experiences problems.

- ▸ **Solution Identification -** Online tools can enable experts and community members to contribute ideas to solve problems and to evaluate, support, or augment the ideas of others.

- ▸ **Social Auditing and Sentiment Analysis -** There are also a number of "community listening" tools that enable institutions to better understand community sentiment - opinions, preferences, concerns - around a given topic.

Combining the two approaches and using three different platforms enabled us to take advantage of the affordances of each tool and ensure robust, well-rounded and actionable insights.