

Holyoke Public Schools is committed to elevating student voices at every grade level. With students at the center of everything we do, we strive daily to make school a joyful place of discovery, support, and belonging. We know that trusting relationships lead to successful partnerships, and that teaching and learning are best when students and staff hold high expectations for themselves and each other. This year, we elevated these commitments through Student Summit experiences for high school students beginning with the inaugural Summit event in December 2024. This was our first student-facilitated event intended to elevate their voices around one central topic: Belonging. The video was shared widely on the district website, social media, and the district's e-newsletter. It will continue to be shown throughout the school year on our Comcast Education channel (<https://www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/page/channel-12>). The target audience for this video includes students and staff of Holyoke High School's North Campus, as well as district administrators, community members, district partners from The Barr Foundation and The Learning Agenda, as well as other stakeholders who regularly visit the district's website and social media pages to learn more about school programs, learning, and student achievements. By capturing students from diverse backgrounds leading and participating in a wide range of student-led discussions, the video provided a first-hand look at student engagement, teamwork, and openness to discuss what it would take to better foster a sense of student belonging at school. The video was first showcased in a news article that was published on the district's website on January 13, 2025. (<https://www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/article/1961065>) It's been several months since students participated in the first of the two Student Summit activities-and today, students and staff say they can feel many positive changes throughout the building as a result. For example, during the district's School Committee meeting on March 10, a group of seven Student Summit participants and three staff members presented a student showcase where they talked about their experiences and the changes they're seeing at school. Thanks to the impact of the Student Summit, students and staff are now describing an elevated vibe and brighter moods throughout the school, with improved student and teacher engagement, more motivating learning opportunities, and improved relationships. Teachers and staff also report improvements in both learning and engagement at

school-and they expect these changes to continue to evolve now that the Summit is evolving into a monthly opportunity for students to provide on-going feedback and to brainstorm alongside school staff. (<https://www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/article/2086429>) From the beginning, the Student Summit was built on the framework that belonging leads to academic success. As Principal Lori McKenna reported: "We have been leaning into this, knowing that kids need to feel like they belong before they are able to achieve academic success. We have agreed that it is the adults' job to work intentionally so that students feel like they belong."