

ENGAGED JOURNALISM AND EDUCATION REPORTING:  
UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF  
NEWSROOM ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

by

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In the past 20 years, engaged journalism has risen to prominence in American newsrooms. To engage with students --one of the most underrepresented groups in scholastic communities-- journalists at the Seattle Times Ed Lab created an engagement journalism endeavor called the Student Voices project. Using a qualitative interview research design involving semi-structured conversations, this thesis explores the extent to which the Student Voices project aligns with engagement journalism practices, as well as the benefits and challenges the project encounters. This study finds that the project faces structural and practical challenges that, in some ways, prevent it from increasing – and maintaining– the degree to which young people are considered in education reporting. Still, this research highlights the benefits this project brings to the Education Lab’s coverage in the form of more diverse and representative stories. More broadly, it highlights the value that engaged journalism can bring to the contemporary education beat and expands upon the growing scientific knowledge around approaches to engagement journalism in today’s education beat coverage.

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## Introduction

On the first day of Teacher Appreciation Week 2021, Barrett Marson —CEO of a Public Relations firm— posted a tweet about Maria Polletta, an investigative reporter. Polletta had recently announced that she accepted an investigative position with the nonprofit Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting in Education. In Marson's tweet, he asked how much Polletta abhorred her previous newsroom to "Go from the premier beat at the state's largest paper to the education beat?" He answered his question by saying, "A LOT." Marson received a torrent of responses from reporters and community members alike who found his sentiments about the education beat appalling. Lily Altavena, an education reporter for the Detroit Free Press, said she was exhausted by the notion that education journalism is not investigative. She tweeted, "If you don't think this kind of journalism is important, you're part of the problem. And it's more than just saying you think education journalism is important. Invest in your education journalists" (Marson, 2021).

This encounter on Twitter highlights many of the most prevalent issues facing education reporting in the United States today. As Marson's comment suggests, education reporters often experience a lack of respect from other beats that garner more widespread reach. Their work is commonly seen as niche and limited in scope. Education-beat staffers at general-interest newspapers often lack the resources necessary to conduct in-depth reporting on issues in the American education system. Journalists who report on education are met with frequent roadblocks from government agencies and school districts. They may also encounter complex ethical challenges when reporting on the most marginalized communities within the education system. In

many cases, the demographics of education reporters on staff is not reflective of the school communities they are reporting on. Newsrooms, reporters and media organizations across the country—in a push to more efficiently, effectively and sustainably report on the public education system— have turned to the practices of engagement journalism.

In the context of education reporting, this engagement involves all players in an academic community, including policymakers, school leadership teachers, parents and students. This approach also focuses on those who have been historically suppressed by power inequities in journalism. There is a growing body of cases in which individual journalists and newsrooms alike have successfully incorporated engaged journalism practices into their education reporting. For many of these projects, the push for inclusivity in the education beat using tactics engagement has been particularly fruitful. The Latino Listening Project, started by Idaho Education News reporter Sami Edge and Idaho Statesman reporter Nicole Foy, centers around investigating inequities pithing Idaho schools. To engage with school communities, the project hosted a panel discussion with Latino students and the Governor of Idaho, Brad Little. This gave students an opportunity to share their stories and connect with a large audience, including leaders who are responsible for their education (Hellwarth and Kiley, 2022).

CALmatters education reporter Jessica Calefati used open reporting techniques to share the roadblocks she was facing with her readers so they could collaboratively bring school funding issues to light. She allowed readers to email, call, or tweet her about the issue. This increased transparency, "reachability," and collaboration gave the community agency and allowed for more accurate reporting (Mitchell, n.d.). Similarly,

Ed Williams—a staff writer at Searchlight New Mexico—used crowdsourcing to investigate the mistreatment of students in special education programs. Searchlight used text message surveys and collaboration with parents. Williams was able to highlight the issue of restraint and seclusion in the school district (Azaret, 2021).

These cases, and their positive results, have shown newsrooms the benefits of incorporating engagement practices in their education reporting. These education journalists acknowledged that scholastic communities are not simply consumers of news, but also deserving information-seekers and practitioners of education news. These success stories show that community engagement can give way to more accurate, truthful and effective reporting on the changes and inequities within the education system. By investigating real-world examples of engaged journalism in the education beat, we can better understand how this emerging journalistic methodology can foster more inclusive, responsive and valuable education reporting in America.

To contribute to this burgeoning conversation around engaged journalism in education reporting, this thesis sheds a light on ways newsrooms are employing practical applications of this phenomenon. More specifically, this thesis explores the method of co-production as one such application. It analyzes the benefits newsrooms derive from generating content *for* and *with* communities—and the roadblocks they may encounter in the process. This analysis is achieved through outlining the findings of a interview-driven case study of the Student Voices project, an engagement effort created as part of the Seattle Times Education Lab. The project, taking a “pass the mic” approach to engagement, uses the Education Lab’s platform to publish up to a dozen student-written essays each year (Smith, 2021).



Using a qualitative interview research design involving semi-structured conversations, carried out in April and May 2022, this research expands upon the growing scholarly knowledge around approaches to engagement journalism in today's education beat coverage.

## Literature Review

### The State of the Education Beat Today

Before elaborating on the details of the American education beat, it is important to define a few essential terms. A beat refers to the thematic specialization within journalism; for this research, education journalism refers to the reporting and coverage of the current landscape of education in America (Magin and Maurer, 2019). In their 2016 report “State of the Education Beat,” the Education Writers Association defined an education reporter as "anyone actively involved in producing education journalism or supervising the production of education journalism that appears in independent news outlets," (Education Writers Association, 2016). With these terms in mind, we can begin to investigate the beat itself and how it is changing.

Education journalists follow the same standards outlined by generalized news media. This specialized reporting demands that journalists have a deep knowledge of the school system and local government you are reporting on. They must be able to understand complex discussions and policies around topics like special education, federal funding and union activities. As on other beats, transparency is crucial in building trust and maintaining connections with those in school communities.

Today, education beat journalists are struggling under the weight of broader challenges facing American media organizations: diminishing resources, increasing public distrust in media, officials reluctant to collaborate, low pay, and shrinking staff sizes. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, K-12 education reporters have had to cover their beat without being able to step foot inside the schools they reported on. Without access to online school events, journalists struggled to find sources that weren't

public officials who were trying to package information positively. Some in the beat note that the pandemic did spark some positive momentum for community engagement with journalists. In a 2020 story from Poynter, education reporter Joe McLean noted,

One positive that I've seen is the trust in local news organizations is, in a way, flourishing with teachers and parents sending stuff to us. We've been getting messages, tips. It's exploded...I think it demonstrates a little bit of rebuilding of trust in giving us local journalists an opportunity to prove our integrity, our responsibility, trustworthiness, and thoroughness in reporting of these public institutions, (Castillo, 2020).

One survey highlights that while education-specific publications are growing, the opposite is true for general interest newspapers. Just 12% of journalists at general-interest papers saw growth in their education staff in the last two years, while 39% have seen their education team shrink. Over 65% of respondents in the same survey agreed that their biggest coverage challenge is being responsible for too many aspects of education and not having time for in-depth education journalism. (Education Writers Association, 2021). When local education reporters do have the capacity for in-depth reporting, approximately half is about teaching, learning, and school operations, while the information priorities for parents --particularly parents of color-- lie elsewhere (Holcomb et. al., 2022b, p. 6). For instance, "57% of Black parents and 53% of Hispanic parents view the media's avoidance of topics related to inequality as a 'moderate' or 'large' problem in education news," (Holcomb et. al., 2022a, p. 28).

This prefaces another challenge facing the education beat: the lack of demographic diversity among education reporters. A 2016 survey indicated that over 86% of education journalists were white. This percentage dropped slightly to 84% of white education reporters in 2021. Less than 42% of K-12 students in American public

schools are white. This means that education journalists are more likely to be white than the student communities they are reporting on. (EWA, 2021, p. 20). Some of the survey respondents emphasize that this mismatch of representation may cause white education journalists to miss stories or other important information “because they lack context they might have acquired through lived experience,” (EWA, 2016). Former education journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Nikole Hannah-Jones highlights that it’s crucial for education journalists to acknowledge this gap. She emphasizes that “understanding and contextualizing race in education stories is especially crucial for white reporters,” whether by studying it on their own time or pitching more stories about inequities in school systems (Hawkins, 2020).

Fostering connections with students, parents, teachers, professors, administrators, board members, business and political leaders, and ordinary people in the community allows journalists to keep a finger on the pulse of the districts they cover. Graves (2002) notes that “perhaps more than many beats, education writers need to have a wide variety of sources available to them to cover the broad range of topics and constituencies that fall within their beat’s expansive borders.” Still, a 2022 report highlights persistent gaps in who today’s education reporters turn to for source material. Official sources (e.g., school officials) appear most in local coverage, whereas the voices of teachers, parents, students, and community leaders show up in less than 15% of newspaper stories (Holcomb, 2022b, p. 6). The authors of the report emphasize that including these individuals in coverage is crucial “not just because their voices matter from a standpoint of representation. But also, their perspectives can help complicate

narratives about schools, and lead to a messier but more truthful story in the end,” (Holcomb et. al., 2022b, p. 23).

Sourcing challenges are due in part to the specific complications that education journalists face: because so much of the work deals with minors, it takes time to build relationships with school communities. School officials may be more accessible for one-off interviews, but this provides education reporters with only a narrow, top-down view of the communities they’re covering. When it comes to including *student* voices in education stories, journalists have additional hurdles—they must garner parental permission and consider the ethical implications of using minors as sources.

Media organizations across America have similar guidelines for interviewing students under the age of 18. Some organizations explicitly state that journalists should *always* seek express parental permission before interviewing children even if they have been given access by a school or teacher (Tompkins, 2002; Neason, 2018). The EWA suggests that journalists should use their discretion to decide whether they should require advance permission from a parent, guardian, or proxy, such as a teacher or school official (Carr, 2013). Tompkins outlines a slew of questions a journalist should consider before interviewing a juvenile, including, “how can you include a parent or guardian in the decision to interview a juvenile?” and “what effort has the journalist made to secure parental permission for the child to be included in a news story?” Organizations agree that journalists take great care to “deal with young people in interviews and stories as though they were [their] own children, siblings or members of our own family.” (Graves, 2002).

Djinis (2022) says that for students who do want to share their perspectives and experiences, it's important that they are fully prepared "for the reality of being named and quoted or even published in an outlet with a wide-reaching audience." Chalkbeat editor Gabrielle Birkner says that it's up to an editor to inform students of the implications of publishing personal writing that may be seen by college admissions officers or future employers (Djinis, 2022). Education reporting encompasses a wide range of topics that impact school communities, from federal and local policies to racial inequality and human rights. In cases where students are discussing more sensitive topics —violence, sex, drugs, crime, LGBTQ+ identity, death, poverty, school failure, and more— it may take several discussions to decide whether the student is comfortable with their perspective being shared publicly. With its student-focused column, *First Person*, Chalkbeat Media is among the growing number of organizations to actively — and carefully— publish student perspectives.

Initiatives for more "un-official" sourcing in education reporting goes together with efforts to diversify the demographics of these sources. Former education reporter Amber C. Walker (2020) points out that if education reporting is to become more diverse in its coverage, "a publisher writing a statement about the importance of diversity in coverage isn't enough, nor is hiring a flurry of journalists from underrepresented backgrounds." Walker argues that diversity must be a committed and critical effort by education reporters through concerted tracking of source demographics, social media callouts, and more. Anya Kamenetz, an education reporter at NPR, took to Twitter in August 2020 to acquire sources for a story about classroom teachers balancing their work and parenting responsibilities during COVID-19. Looking

to expand from the early New York City-focused early pandemic coverage, she called for “non-NYC and (in all ways) diverse voices,” (Kamenetz, 2020). She received over 400 retweets and more than 100 replies to a subsequent Google form she added to the thread. This sourcing reported in a story that featured teachers and students from around the country with a multitude of backgrounds, including U.S. immigrants and those with special needs (Walker, 2020). Kamenetz’s tactic, although necessitated by a pandemic, highlights growing initiative by education reporters to seek out diverse voices with the help of burgeoning internet capabilities.

American journalists are noticing the plethora of changes noted above. Many organizations are building projects and programs to adapt to this shifting education beat. Newsrooms are finding ways to rebuild news media as a source for trustworthy information by providing communities with raw information about what’s going on in schools (Alvarado, 2021). Legacy news organizations like The Seattle Times and the Fresno Bee have created education reporting labs with grants from fiscal partners (Obeng, 2022). Many journalists saw how scholastic communities would benefit from incorporating new modes of reporting, including narrative storytelling, so many newsrooms began publishing more community-written content—including student work (Holcomb et. al., 2022b). Social media has also become a powerful tool for garnering diverse and enthusiastic community sources. Scholars and journalists liken these efforts to other newsroom practices geared towards engaging with audiences: efforts that fall under the umbrella term “engaged journalism.” Before investigating the benefits and pitfalls of these engagement methods, we must first understand how the phenomena of engagement journalism came to be.

## **Understanding Engaged Journalism: Past and Present**

### *The Public Journalism Movement*

The tenets of engaged journalism are rooted in the public journalism movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Sensationalized media coverage during the 1988 presidential campaign –and public degradation of candidates George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis– left the American public asking more from journalists around the country. Critics felt that news media had become a mere political player, far removed from the actual American public they claimed to report for (Rosenberry & John, 2009). To separate themselves from this notion, American papers sought ways to immerse themselves in the communities they reported for, landing on the tenets of public journalism in the process.

Scholars and journalists largely agreed on the expectations of public journalism: the press should acknowledge its role in fostering public debate and community participation. Advocates for public journalism efforts argued that community dialogue and citizen participation would give way to a stronger, more solutions-oriented news media and a more engaged public (Glasser and Craft, 1996, p. 153). Rosen (1999) argued that this new format of journalism meant “addressing people in their capacity as citizens in the hope of strengthening that capacity.” (Rosen, 1999, p. 50, as quoted in Rosenberry & John, 2009).

Between the late 1980s and 2000s, hundreds of public journalism projects emerged in newsrooms around the country (Rosenberry & John, 2009, p. 39). Papers hosted town-hall style meetings and public forums. They used public polls and surveys to shape coverage. Some made space for community members to write their



own stories (Grimes, 1997, p. 10). News media worked to correct its public folly and establish itself as more than a source for information, background, and analysis. Public journalists wanted to show that the medium is a cornerstone of democratic community and modernity (Merritt, 1995; Rosenberry & John, 2009).

Critics of public journalism felt that newsrooms had overcorrected. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, newsrooms aligned their values with the progressive reform movement and established themselves as an authoritative source of detached and unbiased investigation (Fahy, 2018). Many saw the public journalism movement—with its newfound emphasis on removing the veil between journalists and their audience—as an affront to these earlier foundations of journalistic objectivity, neutrality and detachment (Min, 2020). Academics Theodore L. Glasser and Stephanie Craft (1996) argued that the movement deviated from the “proper separation between the press and its readers, viewers, or listeners” that had long been a facet of professional journalism. Still, Glasser and Grimes posit that journalists’ attempts to foster public dialogue was simply a different way to set the agenda of civic discourse. Papers had control over what news got covered, how it got covered and the sources corroborating the stories. Glasser and Craft felt this movement should have first called upon existing avenues for news transparency before building new ones, writing that “editorial pages have been for too long a lost opportunity to identify, explain, and defend a newspaper’s policies and priorities affecting news coverage,” (Glasser and Craft, 1996, p. 157).

Moreover, public journalism received criticism as a financial and reputational burden to newsrooms. Many critics claimed that “it drained newsroom resources, it was a marketing ploy, it was self-absorbed and self-righteous and even

bordered on propaganda,” (St. John, 2007, as cited in Rosenberry and Burton, 2009, p. 4). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the explosion of the internet prompted a decline in newspaper circulation and advertising revenues (Nielsen, 2015). Local media companies lost investments and funding for costly new projects and struggled to stay afloat at all. Regardless of the theoretical potential of public journalism, many wondered “whether even the most basic coverage of public affairs – government, politics, civic life – would survive in any meaningful form,” (Merritt, 2010, p. 27).

### *Public Journalism 2.0: Engagement in American Newsrooms*

Despite undergoing drastic changes in the last two decades, American news media did survive. So did the push for citizen-centered journalism. The Internet played a large role in continuing to chip away the long-standing notion that news media was an authority for information. The first online newspapers appeared in 1979, but the avenue gained significant traction in the 1990s when private journalism institutions sought new revenue streams. By mid-2001, more than 3,400 newspapers were online (Li, 2006, as cited in Bokesoy, 2008). The expansion of Web 2.0 capabilities like blogs, commenting, and social media platforms allowed the concept of citizen-centered journalism to flourish. Citizens could be valuable co-creators in news projects that enriched their sense of community. With growing online opportunities to connect, newsrooms could once more attempt to bridge the gap between “journalism’s democratic ideals and its daily functioning” (Konieczna et. al. 2018).

The 2016 election left journalists once again trying to redress the growing distrust in American media institutions. Journalists were reporting to “whole segments of the population [who] have dismissed all neutral authority on ‘truth’ and ‘facts’

as untrustworthy,” (Van Doorn, 2019). This “post-truth” era that ensued brought into question the journalistic ethics of detached reporting (Oxford Languages, 2020). George Floyd’s murder in 2020 prompted a similar reckoning in American newsrooms, where reporters were often disproportionately whiter than the communities they serve (Tameez, 2022). These events, and others, left American newsrooms searching for ways to put the theories of public journalism into practice. How could they report *for* and *with* their communities in ways that could rebuild media trust and strengthen citizen democratic engagement?

There are many names for these new methods of engagement. From “civic journalism,” “community journalism,” and “citizen-centered journalism,” to “participatory journalism,” “public-powered reporting,” and “reciprocal journalism,” a spectrum of engagement practices emerged (Das, 2017; Konieczna et. al., 2017; Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010; Outing, 2005). The term engagement journalism became a common denominator for many of these practices. For the purpose of this study, I will be using the term engaged journalism to describe these phenomena.

Given the many ways newsrooms are incorporating this phenomenon into their reporting practice, it can be hard to define “engaged journalism.” As a practice, engaged journalism is inclusive in nature and aims to prioritize “the information needs and wants of the community members it serves,” through collaboration and trust-building between the public and journalists (Green-Barber, 2018). Incorporating these practices means increasing – and maintaining – the degree to which audiences are considered in the journalistic and financial endeavors of a news organization (Das, 2017, p. 3).

Researchers at the Agora Journalism Center posit that “engagement” falls into two modes: transactional and relational. Transactional engagement describes subscription models, one-off audience interactions and other tools aimed at tracking online engagement with content (Lawrence et. al., 2019). Technological innovations have also helped newsrooms optimize these engagement efforts. Journalist-founded news engagement platforms like Hearken and GroundSource offer yearly subscriptions to participating newsrooms. These systems provide ways for newsrooms to directly interact with audiences, generate newsletters, monitor engagement, and create content according to audience input (Brandel, 2018).

Relational journalism describes the subset of practices focused on building long-lasting connections with audiences (Lawrence et. al., 2019). Lindsay Green-Barber (2018) describes the four tenets of this relational engaged journalism as: listening to audiences, collaborating with audiences, connecting with communities, and audiences interacting with and through content. These practices get the “people formerly known as the audience” involved in every step of the news-making process (Rosen, 2009, quoted in Lewis et. al. 2010). Some newsrooms utilize solutions-focused collaboration with community stakeholders to assess information needs, identify their target audience, and devise new reporting strategies (Alvarado, 2021). In other cases, crowdsourcing has been a crucial engagement tool for involving communities in the reporting process, from pitches to publication (Ignaczak, 2020). Crowdfunding has also become a common way for newsrooms to garner continued financial support from their audiences for grassroots engagement efforts (PRX, 2022). Many newsrooms have created interactive projects to immerse readers and amplify voices in marginalized communities

(USA Today, 2015). Public convenings and citizen-focused journalism training events also constitute engagement efforts (Das, 2017).

When it comes to measuring the success of engagement efforts, experts and journalists alike acknowledge a glaring lack of consistency. Green Barber (2018) points out that news organizations still rely on “old advertising metrics” like page views and “clicks” to answer questions about how growing engagement practices are “meeting communities’ information needs, building trust-based relationships, and contributing to organizational sustainability.” These antiquated metrics, according to Green-Barber, don’t answer any of those questions. Lawrence and colleagues (2019) constructed the Reflective Practice Guide (RPG), a 12-question survey that can be used to measure the strength and longevity of a specific engagement tactic. The survey ranges from questions about community building to distributing ownership and is geared towards raising as “many questions as it resolves and is meant to unearth the seemingly banal details that are actually at the core of community engaged journalism.”

### **Case Study Introduction: Student Voices Project**

In order to explore how engaged journalism practices are used to address ongoing challenges in education reporting, I looked for real-world examples in Pacific Northwest newsrooms. In my search for practical applications of engagement methods, I came across the Student Voices project, one of the Seattle Times Education Lab’s longest-running engagement efforts. Anika Anand—a former Ed Lab engagement editor—created the Student Voices project in the fall of 2015. This project takes a “pass the mic” approach to engagement: aiming to use the Education Lab’s platform to amplify the voices of Seattle students (Smith, 2021). Each year, a cohort of up to 12

young people are selected to write first-person essays about their experiences in the Washington public school system. These students work with Education Lab’s engagement editor to pitch, write, and publish an essay. The content of these essays ranges from calls for policy changes and commentary on how schools operate to the equity, accessibility, and social-emotional experience students face. In the last seven years of the existence of the project, almost 40 of these essays have been published in the Seattle Times —both in print and on the newspaper’s website.

In her Seattle Times announcement for the first year of the project, Anand highlighted the impetus for this engagement effort, saying “some of the most overlooked voices in debates about education are from those who sit in classrooms every day.” Each year, the Student Voices project unfolds in approximately the same way. The next five sections outline the basic structure and components of the project, from opening the application window to publishing the last student essay.

### *Recruitment*

At the start of each application round, the Education Lab’s engagement editor writes a short piece about the project that is published on the Seattle Times website and posted to the Education Lab’s Twitter feed. This effectively opens the application window for interested students. The engagement editor also sends this article and the application to journalism teachers across Washington, as well as organizations like the Washington Journalism Education Association coordinators. They also send this information to community agencies and designated specialists that deal with various aspects of student support (e.g., McKinney-Vento liaisons in Washington public school who provide services for homeless students). The engagement editor also sends the

information to individuals from the previous cohort, to see if they have peers interested in participating.

### *Application structure*

Students apply to the program by filling out an application form linked to the above article. The application explains the background of the Education Lab and the Student Voices Project, outlining: the project's history and goals. It highlights what kind of stories the project is looking for, who can apply, and how the student can benefit from the opportunity. The application also includes links for examples of past student essays and contact information for the engagement editor to whom the application can be sent. The form itself asks for voluntary demographic information about the student applicant, including name, pronouns, age, gender, and race. Applicants can also provide their current city, their grade level, and the school they attend. If the applicant is unenrolled, they are asked to explain why. They are also asked to provide their contact information, including their phone number, email, and social media handle if applicable.

Students must respond to a short prompt about why they want to participate. They are also given four prompts about their personal school experience and must choose one to briefly respond to. Finally, they must explain in, 250 words or fewer, their idea for an essay and if they envision including multimedia components in their piece (video, audio, illustrations, charts, animations, etc.). Applications for earlier years requested short examples of student's work (non-fiction writing). Now, students must only provide the name and contact information of a teacher or advisor who can act as a reference.

### *Finalizing the Cohort and Conducting Orientation*

This editor closed the application window approximately a month later, and from the pool of applications they received, selects up to 12 high school- and college-age applicants from around the state to write first-person essays about their experiences in the Washington education system. Students under the age of 18 must complete a parental consent form if they want to participate. Selected students for that year's cohort are invited to a day-long orientation workshop at the Seattle Times office in downtown Seattle. During these workshops, students learn about the project and about the newsroom's ethical and journalistic practices (e.g., AP style). They receive examples of past student essays and begin to plan their own using a provided pitch worksheet. They also meet Seattle Times columnists who volunteer to attend the orientation. These workshops look slightly different from year depending on student needs and how many Ed Lab staff can attend as guest columnists (e.g., the 2020 and 2021 workshops were virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

### *The Writing Process*

Once the student decides their topic, they begin to write their essays. This process typically several months over the course of the student's school year. Throughout the pitch, writing, and reporting process, the engagement editor is the students' first point of contact. Participants are encouraged to write about their challenges in public education, their perspectives on education policy, and more. The engagement editor meets with each student individually at least once with each, or more if students need continued support (in person, via phone, or video call). Deadlines and



meetings are adjusted to meet each student's academic and extracurricular schedules, commonly establishing two-week turnarounds.

During the writing process, some students conduct interviews and/or gather data for their essays. For students covering sensitive topics like gender identity, depression, homelessness, suicide, or bullying, the engagement editor may have one or more conversations with them about their essay, making sure they are comfortable with their work being published. Students occasionally receive some assistance from other beat reporters in the Seattle Times newsrooms covering topics that relate to their essays.

### *Finalizing and publishing essays*

The Education Lab editor works with the engagement editor to provide additional edits shortly before publication. When students are close to completing their work, the engagement editor formally announces the cohort in an article, with students' names, photos, and some biographical information (what school they attend, their grade, their career aspirations, etc.) The publication of each essay is staggered on a weekly schedule over the course of a few months. The engagement editor may follow up with students after their work has been published.

This structure has changed somewhat over seven years. The timing, as well as specific details of the process, are dependent on the number of students who apply each year, the kinds of stories prioritized that year, and the goals of the engagement editor in charge. The pandemic also altered the timeline of the project and the structure of the process. Still, the project can be examined in its entirety, to notice patterns in production, demographics, measurement of success, and more. Before delving into these topics, the findings from the conducted interviews with those —past and

present— involved, it is important to briefly “zoom-out” and note the project’s existence as part of a larger, solution-based journalistic initiative: The Seattle Times Education Lab.

### **Contextualizing the Education Lab**

The Education Lab started in October 2013 as a grant-funded project sponsored by the Seattle Foundation. The project, pioneered by publisher Frank Blethen, received over \$2.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation between October 2013 and September 2020. In addition to this continued fiscal partnership, the Ed Lab receives funding from a slew of companies and organizations, including the City University of Seattle, the Knight Foundation, Alaska Airlines, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Comcast Washington, and Amazon (Shelton, 2018; The Seattle Times, n.d.). Since the advent of the initiative, the Lab’s education journalists have geared their reporting toward building a “more robust, knowledgeable conversation about schools that connects teachers, parents, students, lawmakers, and others,” (Seattle Times, 2020).

According to Shelton (2018), there was skepticism in the Times newsroom regarding this access to outside funding, but the early successes of their solution-based storytelling gave the Lab traction within the Seattle Times to experiment with engagement efforts (Obeng, 2022). In the last nine years, Ed Lab editors and reporters have employed a variety of engagement efforts to connect with the Seattle community. Since its launch, the Lab has hosted community meetings with parents, students, teachers, and education advocates to gather ideas and input. Its reporters have worked to

feature community voices by including live chats, reader questionnaires, regular guest columns, and other opportunities for community-generated content. The Ed Lab team has also hosted large-scale public events. The Student Voices Project, one of the Lab's longest-running engagement efforts, has particularly benefited from the flexibility of this outside-funding model. Over seven years, editors have been able to experiment with the scope and versatility of the project. "It's very non-traditional," said Smith, hearkening back to the founding tenets of the Ed Lab. "We call ourselves an education lab, so let's give ourselves some latitude to experiment with storytelling."

## Research Design

### Summarizing Research Design

As the literature review section outlines, America's education beat is at a turning point. Limited resources, top-down sourcing, and ethical conundrums that arise in the search for more diverse voices make it harder for newsrooms to report on education news in relational ways and engage with the communities they cover. The number of instances in which education beats have adopted engaged journalism practices continues to soar, yet critical research around these cases lags behind. To contribute to this research, this study revolves around an explorative case study of The Student Voices project—a practical application of engagement practices created by the Seattle Times Education Lab. This study uses a qualitative interview design involving interviews with editors and a project participant, in addition to qualitative content analysis, which is outlined in the next section. The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** When benefits can newsrooms, community members, and students derive from collaborative engagement efforts?

**RQ2:** What problems arise when newsrooms employ collaborative engagement methods?

**RQ3:** What are existing barriers to this work?

### Methods

This study took place between 1 April and 1 May 2022. During this period, I conducted interviews with individuals involved in the project at some point during the

six years of its existence. Alongside the interviews, I read each of the 38 student essays from the past six years of the project’s existence. I also read accompanying Student Voices content published on the Seattle Times website and from their social media pages (e.g. Twitter) —from announcements about the project applications to “Meet Education Lab’s Student Voice contributors” pages.

In total, I interviewed six individuals involved with the project:

1. Jenn Smith (current engagement editor at Education Lab - began Oct. 2020)
2. Katherine Long (current Education Lab editor beginning Oct. 2020)
3. Joy Resmovits (former Education Lab editor - July 2018 to March 2021)
4. Anne Hillman (former engagement editor – Nov. 2019 to July 2020)
5. Scott Greenstone (former Project Homeless engagement editor and collaborator for 2018 cohort)
6. Mariah Valles (student contributor from the 2017 cohort)

These one-on-one interviews were carried out via online Zoom video calls.

Participants were contacted with an introductory email asking them to participate in the study, with follow-up requests by email. Each participant received an Institutional Review Board-approved consent form. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. With prior consent, each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed using the program Descript. The resulting audio and text files were analyzed for details about the project’s structure, successes, and challenges.

During the interviews, I relied on —but did not strictly follow— a set of 33 defined questions. I formulated another list of eight questions for former students who participated in the project. These questions cover the motivation behind the project, the

goals of the project, the process, the results, and hopes for future iterations of the project. Depending on the flow of conversation, I discussed various aspects of the project with the participants, ranging from logistical details about their involvement to glaring issues they took with the project. These questions can be found in Appendix 1.

I also compiled a table with the 38 Student Voices essays published between 2016 and 2021. This table contains the titles of each of these essays, students' names, students' short biographies, and the date the essays were originally published. All of this information was retrieved from published content on The Seattle Times website. This table can be found in Appendix 2.

## Findings

Returning once more to the Student Voices project, this next section of findings will go into detail about the project’s previously outlined structure and process. These findings consist of content pulled from published project content and perspectives from individuals involved.

### Demographics

#### *Motivations for Demographic Diversity*

Present and former Seattle Times staff members agreed that one of the strongest motivators for keeping the project going is that it allows young people to speak on their own experiences. Jenn Smith—the current engagement editor for the Education Lab—said that the project is intended to represent and highlight the “valid, well-informed thoughts and experiences” of a specific subset of Seattle’s demographic: young people. “We just weren’t including the voices of young people who are impacted by education decisions, and we wanted to open up that platform for them to be able to share their experiences with the education system in their own words,” she added, recalling the original goals of the project.

In 2014, the then-nascent Education Lab surveyed its readers to investigate brand awareness. Over 86% of the respondents were white. In this same survey, 1% of respondents identified as students. Details about more recent Ed Lab engagement demographics—if they exist—have not been published. Joy Resmovits, a former Education Lab Editor, still remembers her reaction to the results of a similar Ed Lab-specific survey from her first year at the Times. The survey included questions about

readers' trust in Ed Lab coverage and whether readers had shared the Lab's stories or discussed them in school settings. Resmovits remembered that the survey showed only a "very, very small amount of people under 18 were participating in Ed Lab," and for students who did respond, few were actively engaging with Ed Lab content. To her, the responses to this survey were a useful reminder of the project's value in diversifying newsroom engagement. Resmovits felt like she and her colleagues at the Ed Lab had "so much room for growth because we're not really including young people in our coverage. When ostensibly, everything we do is about the system that affects their lives."

Past and present editors involved in the project highlighted demographic diversity as a priority when looking through applications. Scott Greenstone, a former engagement editor for the Seattle Times Homeless initiative, worked with Education Lab engagement editor Dahlia Bazzaz to run the Student Voices project in 2018. Greenstone recalled that he and Bazzaz made it a goal to half of the cohort be students of color. "That was a big one," he said. "We really wanted students of color to be writing." Surveys from 2020-2021 show that in Seattle Public Schools, approximately 46% percent of students are white, while over 13% are Hispanic/Latino students, 13% are Asian, 15% are African American/Black, and approximately 12% are multi-racial. Almost a third of Seattle's student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch, and almost one-fifth come from a non-English speaking background. In 2018, there were a reported 40,000 students in K-12 districts across the state of Washington who were homeless or unstably housed. Over 13 percent of the student population is a part of school special education programs (Seattle Public Schools, 2021).



Smith pointed out that the young people participating in Student Voices often represent different demographics than the Seattle Times general readership. Each year, the Times conducts a general readership survey, capturing the scope of the newsroom's demographic reach. Surveys from recent years show that almost 60% of the Times online readers are older millennials between 25 and 39. In early 2022, the Times reached 81,000 digital subscribers and the average income of this online readership averages at \$110,700 (The Seattle Times, 2022). "I wish our readership was more diverse, but it's not. But we're bringing our readers some different voices that they might not have otherwise heard from," current Education Lab editor Katherine Long said of the disconnect in demographics.

Greenstone noted that the Times doesn't shy away from this information. To him, acknowledging that those who do read the Student Voices essay will most likely be older, more affluent white residents in the Seattle metropolitan area can serve as motivation for seeking diversity among student participants. According to Greenstone, student essays can portray the challenges of Washington students in more personal ways, perhaps changing readers' minds about certain issues.

Greenstone, when discussing the breakdown of Student Voices participants by academic interest, remembered more often receiving applications for students working in school newspapers. In 2017, most of the students in this cohort had previously written for their school newspaper. In an article about this cohort, former engagement editor Dahlia Bazzaz introduced the 11 student participants, including each student's career goals. All but four aspired to be in media, journalism, or broadcast news (Bazzaz, 2017). Four years later, two students in the 2021 cohort specified that they wanted to be

journalists, while the other seven students had varied career aspirations, from economics and cinema studies to law, education, and political science (Smith, 2021). One 2011 study found that 96% of U.S. public high schools provide some opportunity to participate in student media, whether that be a yearbook, a newspaper, a TV program, or a radio station (Goodman, Bowen, and Bobkowski, 2011).

When asked about the mismatched demographics of student participants and Seattle Times Readership, former engagement editor Anne Hillman questioned if the project's push for diversity could be construed as exploitative of students participating in the project. She noted that the Times may be interested in the project in part simply to highlight that it is committed to capturing diverse voices. Yet Hillman asserted that there is undeniable value in the project's diversity—especially in offsetting the limited demographics of the Seattle Times readership. "Hearing student perspectives that [readers are] not going to intersect within their life is important. You're only going to be willing to drive and push for change if you understand the personal reasons why change needs to happen," she said.

## **Application and Recruitment**

### *Application Parameters*

The application for the Student Voices project can be accessed directly on the "call-out" article that encourages students to apply. Students are asked to share some demographic information about themselves explain their reasons for applying and write about ideas they have for their essay. Student applicants do not need to meet GPA criteria. Smith noted that students are not required to complete the demographics

questions on the application but there is no clarification on the document stating so. “It’s more for our knowledge, so we understand what kind of representation we have in the group,” said Smith. She added that the Lab “internally” keeps track of patterns in these demographics to understand what it can do better to reach out to more young people from different backgrounds, regions, age groups, and genders. She also mentioned that the Education Lab pays attention to the number of applications it receives each year to determine if there is still interest in the program —and if there are still young Washingtonians who want to write the essays.

When constructing their 2018 application, Greenstone and Bazzaz decided to include gender in the demographics section, but not “gender identity” or “sexual orientation.” “We didn’t want to stop anyone from applying for any reason. We wanted them to apply no matter what,” added Greenstone. “I wondered if having to put in their gender identity or their orientation would discourage some [students] from applying.” Greenstone said they did make a concerted effort to ensure that participants were from varied racial and cultural backgrounds.

### *Attracting Specific Demographics*

When asked about how they sought out diverse demographics and varied student experiences for the Student Voices project, interview subjects often mentioned details of the application and recruitment process. In 2015, Anand wrote the first call-out for applicants, which outlined that the Student Voices section would “feature journalism from students across Washington state.” Applicants for the 2016 cohort were pulled from high school journalism classes and asked to share their “on-the-ground” stories

and experiences (Anand, 2015). Smith noted that in more recent years, she and her predecessors have changed the application's verbiage to specify what students they are looking for. They often use the initial call-out article as a platform for making specific requests request for certain student demographics (e.g. homeless students or students with learning disabilities). The list below gives a summary of the call outs from each year:

1. 2016 - High school journalism students were asked to write about education issues that mattered to them.
2. 2017 - Application expanded to high school *and* college students; same prompt (Bazzaz, 2016).
3. 2018 - Prioritized stories from "homeless students or youth who might be couch-surfing or don't have a reliable place to stay," (Bazzaz and Greenstone, 2018).
4. 2019 - Specifically prioritized stories from "special-education students and those whose needs are not being met in public education," (Kloub, 2019).
5. 2020 - Wanted to hear from high school and college students about their "ideas for achieving educational equity," specifically concerning gaps exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hillman, 2020).
6. 2021 - Specifically looking for "youth to write essays about how schools can do a better job of serving students," also noting gaps exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith, 2021).

As evident in the above list, Smith said she tried to change the target audience of the 2021 call-out from students to "young people." In previous years, editors had used terms like "high school and college students" and "writers and aspiring journalists," (Smith, 2021; Hillman, 2020; Bazzaz, 2016). Smith altered this to "any Washington teen or young person who is currently in school or has recently left the public education system for any reason," (Smith, 2021). In the article, she wrote, "we are looking for

youth to write essays about how schools can do a better job of serving students.” She hoped that this would make the application more inclusive to diverse voices:

We recognize that not everyone's going to have a traditional pathway. Some people —especially with the pandemic— may have become disengaged with the education system, and we didn't want to hinder anyone's voices or participation because of that. They still had some experience, and it may have been an adverse one that made them leave.... It's something that we hope to keep the door open...we just need to evolve with the times.

Editors have also expanded the age range for participants on the application. On the most recent application, current high school- and college-age students attending public schools or institutions, as well as those who have graduated in the last year are eligible. This application also specifies that “young writers” taking a gap year from public education or who have dropped out within the last year or are incarcerated may also apply.

### *Recruitment Tactics*

In addition to publishing an article call-out for applicants on The Seattle Times website, the engagement editors share the application on the Education Lab’s Twitter feed. They also try to connect with organizations, schools, and agencies that are directly in touch with students. One of their most common tactics is to reach out to students already involved or interested in reporting with the help of journalism education organizations. Hillman and Smith noted that organizations like the Washington Journalism Education Association have been consistent points of contact for recruiting students to participate in the project. Coordinators at WJEA are often willing to send out the application directly to advisors for student newsrooms around the state. Hillman

said that she tried to strengthen the Ed Lab’s partnerships with WJEA in hopes of finding Student Voices participants through the organization’s summer workshop program. Mariah Valles, a student from the 2017 cohort, heard about the project through the WJEA.

In looking for the student participants for the 2018 cohort, Greenstone and Bazzaz looked for homeless student participants by reaching out to hundreds of McKinney-Vento liaisons across Washington. Each school district in the state employs one liaison, who acts as the first point of contact for homeless students or students experiencing unstable housing in Washington school districts. Greenstone recalled sending them all an email, explaining the project and encouraging them to get their students to apply. He didn’t remember if any of the students in that year’s cohort applied as a result of this recruitment endeavor.

Smith noted that if she had more time and capacity, she would have reached out to more organizations that serve young people whose voices are not often heard in media. “I would have reached out better to programs that work with young people who've been in incarceration to some of our more multilingual organizations,” she said.

#### *Incentivizing Students to Apply*

In the “what can this opportunity do for me?” section of the application, it reads, “you’ll get your words and ideas published in a nationally recognized newspaper that receives more than 20 million views a month on its website and has a print circulation of more than 200,000. We’ll also coach you on the basics of researching and writing for a newspaper by Seattle Times journalists,” (Bazzaz, 2016; Bazzaz and Greenstone, 2018; Kloub, 2019, Hillman and Seattle Times Staff, 2020). Last year, Smith shifted

this section to include, “You’ll get your words and ideas published in a nationally recognized newspaper that reaches 2.1 million people a month in western Washington. That’s a great work sample to highlight in a college or job application,” (Smith, 2021). Mariah Valles, one of the members of the first year’s cohort, felt it was as much an opportunity to hone her journalism skills as it was to speak out as a Seattle student. “It seemed like a really cool opportunity, as someone who wanted to go into journalism professionally, to be able to connect and see inside of a newsroom at such an early age,” Valles said. She now works in broadcast journalism.

“We also know that a couple of our students have become very interested in journalism after this experience. And there’s at least one student we know of who went on and decided to major in journalism in college,” Long said. Smith said that interest could give way to other, more training-focused engagement efforts in the future. “Even though we don’t have a formal teen journalism program [for teens], we do get a lot of requests around that, a lot of our participants are interested in buffing up their skills and learning more about the reporting process,” she noted. “I feel like in the future there’s always opportunity to consider that, even though that’s not necessarily what the program is designed for. I can definitely tell there’s a palpable and ongoing interest in that.”

### **Students and the Writing Process**

Once the engagement editor selects up to 12 students for that year’s cohort, they begin the onboarding process. For project participants under the age of 18, their parents must complete parental consent forms. Participating students are then invited to an orientation workshop at the Seattle Times office. During this orientation, students

received support from the engagement editor in completing a form with pitch ideas for their essay. For these essays, students are asked to “share their experiences in Washington’s public-school systems,” in 1,000 words or fewer.

These student-generated pieces are described as “essays,” and there is no specified expectation for the style of writing students choose to use. Over the years, student work has ranged in structure: from first-person narratives, step-by-step advice pieces, calls-to-action, and even stories that adhere to more traditional journalistic reporting practices (i.e., with data, sources, and attributed quotes). When asked about the range of topics covered in years past, Resmovits recalled her earlier impression of the Student Voices project, saying, “it felt like a lot of high school kids writing policy pieces.” She stated that in 2019 —when the project specifically prioritized the voices of special education students and young people with perspectives on accessibility— she said she noticed a shift away from highlighting policy issues and more towards “identity and individual experiences that are told in only the way that those people could tell them.” Greenstone also mentioned this as a motivator for the focus on homelessness in 2018, saying he and Bazzaz wanted to provide a “fresher” take on the project for its third year of production. “There was maybe this feeling that it was getting a little stale,” he said, referencing the topic suggestions of the first two years. “I think this was a really good way to invigorate it.”

### *Filling Reporting Gaps*

When asked about how Student Voices essays align with the Ed Lab’s education coverage, editors involved with the project noted general overlap. Smith posited that rather than filling gaps in Ed Lab reporting, these student essays helped bolster and



substantiate the more traditional reporting being done. “Anytime you allow someone to write in first-person about their own personal experiences, it goes beyond what we can really do as reporters and journalists,” said Katherine Long, the current Ed Lab editor. “We may never get that level of detail and personal experience out of an interview.”

Greenstone commented that he particularly wanted to publish stories written by homeless youth because, in his view, this demographic doesn't normally get highlighted in homelessness coverage. In his work for Project Homeless, Greenstone had noticed that this push to include young voices in reporting about the unhoused in Washington often ended without success or with a limited number of sources over 18 speaking about past experiences. He felt that Student Voices could help bolster this gap in homelessness coverage. “When you're talking about an issue that is so personal and so intimate and really affects you in really traumatizing ways, I think it's so important to allow people to tell their stories in their own words,” he said.

### *Flexible Parameters*

Hillman and Smith in their respective 2020 and 2021 calls for applicants, invited young people to pitch short video pieces, audio stories, or artwork as alternatives to an essay, although they did not receive applications for these formats. According to Greenstone, the flexibility of the project creates space for more versatile and authentic storytelling. “There is room for all of that. If somebody wanted to do a story that was mostly reportage and very little personal stuff, we would have worked with them to do that too,” stated Greenstone. “I think that the point is its sort of more being flexible and kind of open to whatever stories they wanted to tell.”

### *Writing Style*

Students are encouraged to write in the first person for their essays. They are encouraged to write their drafts in Google Docs so the engagement editors can give feedback virtually. Smith said she is often giving students feedback about grammar and AP style, structure, ways to make the writing clearer and more concise, and opportunities to add reportage. Some students include data about the topic they are covering or interview individuals who are pertinent to their story. Hillman remembered that not all the participants have the capacity—or interest—in conducting reportage, recalling that one student dropped out of the program after she asked them to “do some actual reporting and research.”

Depending on a student’s needs or concerns, the editor might meet with them in person or over the phone to go over edits. Students are given latitude with their deadlines to accommodate their academic and extracurricular responsibilities. Long, referencing Smith’s work with Student Voices participants, said that one of the main downsides of the project is how long this editing process can take. “[Smith] works really hard with these students for many months. These are young people who are just starting to develop their own voices and their own style of writing, but it has to meet our standards, our ethics,” Long said, noting that there’s a distinction between student content and other content published by The Seattle Times.

Smith clarified that although the project leads participants through workshops around finding their writing style and how to conduct journalistic research, Student Voices participants should not be considered student journalists. “They’re not young reporters, it’s not a reporter training program,” she said. Greenstone described the

Student Voices project as its own engagement effort —rather than a journalistic training opportunity. “There is a definite difference between training young people to do reporting and training young people to write their own stories,” noted Greenstone. He said this distinction takes the pressure off the students participating and allows them to write what they know, “In school, you’re writing essays already about yourself, and it’s not a crazy leap to go from there to writing a first-person essay.”

Resmovits agreed that asking students to conduct more traditional journalistic work rather than first-person essays would stray from the intentions of the Student Voices project: a project aimed at highlighting personal narratives. “I don’t think that, within the scope of a program like this, it would be setting [students] up for success to expect them to deliver that kind of thing...I think, to say that they’re going to produce these ‘views from nowhere’ pieces of journalism would be a waste of their individual experiences.”

## **Staff Involvement**

### *Leadership*

In the seven years since the start of the project, the Student Voices project has always been spearheaded by the Ed Lab’s engagement editor. Greenstone described the role as, “half-a producer, half-a reporter and all sort of like focused towards doing new story formats and meeting new audiences.” The engagement editor is the students’ first point of contact. Resmovits articulated that this role is a lot of job functions rolled into one. Engagement editors are expected to solicit student applicants, make final decisions

about which applicants are selected, run the orientation, provide several rounds of edits for the students and meet with them at least once during the writing process.

#### *Additional Assistance from Seattle Times Staff*

Each engagement editor interviewed noted that they do receive some level of support throughout the production process, but that it's often up to them to garner assistance. Anand, the creator of the project, is still occasionally involved. Resmovits called in her on a contract basis to help train the 2019 cohort, and Smith thanked her for her announcement of the 2021 cohort for her help onboarding students. The Lab's editor reads each student's story later in the process to help with final changes before publishing. Resmovits and Long agreed: the Ed Lab editor gives the engagement editor feedback and advice but does not often interact with the students directly. When asked how many times she engaged with students throughout the process, Resmovits responded with, "Not enough, that's my answer."

Students occasionally interact with other newsroom staff as well. Sometimes, if students want to include visual components, they work with one of the newsroom's photo editors or illustration editors. Students also meet a few Seattle Times columnists who volunteer to speak during the project orientation. When Greenstone co-produced the project, he remembered that the columnists they brought in for the orientation were "whoever [they] could wrangle to come in on a Saturday." Resmovits also remembered connecting a few of the students with beat reporters covering similar topics. "We looked for those moments of synergy and tried to pick them up where we could," she said. Smith echoed this, stating that although it hasn't happened recently, she has connected students with reporters who often cover issues that closely align with the student's essay

subjects. She said that there are no formal guidelines for beat reporters who help the students and that she often asks reporters if they have the time and capacity to provide the students with some insights.

### *Commitment to Students*

Hillman reflected on her interactions with Student Voices participants, saying, “I enjoyed getting to spend one-on-one time with the students and really kind of working through some stuff,” said Hillman. She said this collaboration also meant adapting to student needs. Hillman met a participant at school more than once to work on her story, to accommodate for her learning disabilities. Greenstone said that helping run the Student Voices project was one of the most gratifying things he did as the engagement editor for Project Homeless. He recalled the time-consuming back-and-forth discussions he had with his editors around the publication of one anonymous student essay. The student had written an essay about her homelessness, relating specifically to her mother’s substance abuse and attempted suicide. Greenstone said he did “a lot of fact-checking” to make sure that the published article would be correct. “That was a lot of work, and it was good work and I'm glad we did it,” said Greenstone. “It’s one of the things I'm most proud of in my time at Project Homeless and at the Times.”

### *Time Commitment*

In the Ed Lab, the engagement editor's role is not simply to produce the Student Voices project. They are also producing other engagement efforts, generating new engagement ideas, and writing stories to be published in the Times. Hillman notes that expanding the project to allow for more variety in student work—from reporting pieces

to other styles of journalism, would add to the engagement editor's already full plate. "The engagement editor already has too much to do in some respects. It was time-consuming as it was, like in a good way. It was fun," she said. "But if you were really going to do more in-depth reporting, as opposed to opinion stuff, I think you'd really need to develop some stronger partnerships with some of the organizations around the state."

Smith similarly pointed out that it's sometimes hard to schedule meetings, support, and provide feedback for students who have a busy home and academic lives, especially when working in a deadline-driven industry during a global pandemic. According to her:

Sometimes, when we're in pandemic and breaking-news mode, we aren't able to prioritize giving their stories the next edit because we have to meet that daily news cycle," said Smith. "I would say that sometimes this is troubling when I don't get back to students as quickly as I would like to with their feedback, but I try really hard to still keep them a priority because I know it's a big deal for them. It's a big deal for us.

### **Essay Publication**

When cleared for publication by the engagement editor and the Ed Lab editor, essays written by Student Voices participants are published on the Education Lab page of the Seattle Times website. All the editors interviewed remembered at least one student who dropped the project at some point during the process for personal reasons. These students' stories were not published.

### *Location of Published Essays*

Each essay is published at least a week apart, depending on when students have completed their final drafts. The links to the essays are also shared on the Education Lab's Twitter page. Students can choose whether to send the engagement editor a photo to use for the thumbnail of the story. This photo also appears at the top of the essay. The student receives a byline for the story, but their contact information is not included anywhere on the page.

### *Layout and Verbiage*

A short biography about the student typically accompanies each essay. Above each essay, there is a description of the Seattle Times Education Lab, a link to their webpage, and a hyperlink to their Twitter page. Before each essay, there is also an editor's note that briefly describes the Student Voices Project and provides a hyperlink to the Student Voices column, a designated page on The Seattle Times website where readers can find essays from previous cohorts. This year, the note reads, "This essay is part of The Seattle Times' Student Voices program for youth writers. Meet the authors and read the other 2022 essays at [st.news/studentvoices2022](https://www.seattletimes.com/students/student-voices/2022/)" (Fredricks, 2022). The headline for every essay published as part of the project begins with "Student Voices:"

### *Publishing Sensitive Content*

When asked about roadblocks that come up in the publication process, Smith explained the process for supporting students who are writing about sensitive topics. These topics included but were not limited to critiques of the public education system, gender identity, depression, homelessness, drugs, suicide, and bullying. "Sometimes

[students] start getting nervous thinking about retaliation or some sort of pushback that they might receive,” noted Smith. “So we really tried to prepare them for that, and I try to hear their concerns.”

She also mentioned having very “upfront conversations” with these students to be sure that they want the story published at all. Smith said she asks the students questions about the strength of their support network, whether they are currently being bullied, and if they have concerns about what kind of responses they might get from their loved ones and community members if their essay is published. “I often ask those questions multiple times up until the publication date,” she said. Smith added that she thoroughly explains the “long tail of journalism” to student participants, emphasizing that, in the digital age, anything that they disclose as young people can follow them, even if their identity and perspectives change. She said that she wanted students to know that their future employer might see the essay in a Google search, and to think about whether they want this sensitive information to be publicly available.

Long said that the engagement editor also clues the parents of underaged participants into the essay subjects before and during publication, especially if the topic of the essay is what Long calls incendiary. “We just want to make sure that their parents know that these stories have been published in the newspaper and that these essays are going to be findable on the web for years to come,” she said. Greenstone remarked that receiving this consent for students writing about homelessness can be particularly challenging. “Usually, parents are finicky about their kids being published and their housing status being publicized,” he said.



### *Access and Compensation*

The Student Voice essays, like all other Education Lab content, are behind The Seattle Times paywall. With this paywall, non-subscribed readers have a limited number of free articles they can access. Those who do have a subscription can read any of the essays published by the project. Resmovits and Smith both remember sending PDF versions to student participants who wanted to read past content but who had reached the maximum number of free articles. Smith said that the Ed Lab has not experimented with removing the paywall for student essays. Greenstone expressed that he feels grant-funded content produced by the Education Lab and Project Homeless should be available for free “for accessibility-sake.” Hillman agreed, saying that in comparison to non-grant-funded newsroom content, this content should be free.

Resmovits pointed out that simply removing the paywall is complicated because newspapers still need revenue to exist. She said that in this case, the case of the Student Voices project, the paywall prevents the Education Lab from achieving its goals for a more diverse audience. When thinking of a more accessible alternative, Resmovits suggested that the Times could invest in zip code-based discounts, vouchers for subscriptions, or free access for students and community members at public libraries.

When it comes to monetary compensation, previous cohorts were not paid. Hillman said that “some people would probably argue that they really ought to be paid. It’s a lot of work and a lot of time, and just the honor of being in the Seattle Times shouldn’t be enough.” The 2021 cohort was the first group of students to receive compensation: a \$100 gift card for their completed work.

## **Measuring Success**

When asked how they measure the success of the project and its impact, editors said they look more often to qualitative measurement than quantitative.

### *Qualitative Measurements*

To protect student participants, the Ed Lab has turned off comments for Student Voices content. “We just don't need people trolling. It's stressful enough just to put your words out there for likely the first time and we just don't want to subject them to any of that,” said Smith. This means that community feedback on the stories is not readily available. Still, Smith and the editors say they take note of the anecdotal community impact of Student Voices stories. Long said she received an email from an individual in New York, writing to say that they came across one of the Student Voices essays—and thought it was wonderful. While Resmovits was Ed Lab's editor, one essayist wrote about her experience with bullying as a student with Down syndrome. Washington governor Jay Robert Inslee wrote to the Lab after reading this piece to ask for the student’s contact information. According to Resmovits, “He wanted to tell her that he was listening.”

### *Quantitative Measurement*

According to past and present editors, Education Lab content receives less traffic than other Seattle Times content. When asked about readership engagement with the Student Voices work, Smith said, “our education stuff is much less read than in general than, say a Russell Wilson football story. We’re just not even going to try to compete for those page views.” Hillman corroborated this statement, pointing out that

when she worked at the Times, “education stories weren't getting the same number of hits as other things, and that matters if you're in a business.”

Smith did note that the Ed Lab is trying to like to solicit more general interest and remind readers why they should pay attention to education coverage, although she did not specify the specifics of this solicitation. “I think that's like historically and nationally and globally been a hard battle,” Smith said of the education coverage beat.

There have been select Student Voices essays that received significant traffic on The Seattle Times website. “Some of our stories did better than others,” said Greenstone, although not recalling the specific number of page views these stories received. “If I remember correctly, there were at least three of them that I thought did really well, like really great numbers on the site.” He posited that personal essays tended to do better than pieces about education programs and policy that didn’t necessarily have a wide interest in the general public.

### *Feedback from Students*

Past and present editors echo the sentiment that it matters more what the students take from the experience than Seattle Times readers. “I think at the end of the day, Student Voices is more for [the] students than for [our] readership,” said Resmovits. Long noted that to her, the measure of success is simply if students feel good about their work. “If they come back to us and say, ‘I really appreciate that opportunity to express my voice in the newspaper.’ I mean, that's really powerful.” For Smith, success depends on whether the students feel like they accomplished what they wanted to in their piece, and if they felt like they were able to write something that gave readers a better understanding of their own experience.

## **Goals for the Future of the Project**

When asked about future goals for the Student Voices Project, editors shared a variety of suggestions. Resmovits suggested that Student Voices should build a support network for everyone who has been involved in the project. She noted that this “alumni group” could be a valuable way for students farther down the line in their educations and careers to support younger students and give them advice. With the help of this network, Resmovits argued that the Education Lab could become “so much more than something that runs in a newspaper and runs multimedia programs. It could be a valuable pipeline for creating a more diverse field of journalism.”

Hillman and Smith agreed that there was also room for improvement when it came to connecting students within a single cohort. “In my mind, a successful cohort would have continuous opportunities for the students to interact with each other and learn from each other,” Hillman said. She suggested restructuring the project into more of a writing course, in which students could do peer editing, receive peer reviews and learn from each other. “I think it's important for their peers to weigh in, said Smith. “I think in some ways it's almost more valuable for them to get that peer feedback.”

Smith said she wanted to see more young people who are disconnected from the education system share their perspectives through the Student Voices project. She also mentioned that in the wake of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ed Lab staff—though not committed to the idea—has considered the possibility of creating a project like Student Voices to highlight another underrepresented demographic in education coverage: teachers.

Even with room for improvement regarding the engagement editor's role in the project, Greenstone expressed worry that the investment in engagement positions in newsrooms is waning. He notes that when he arrived at the Times in 2016, the demand for engagement editors was higher. "Those jobs are not paying very well, and people don't see them. People don't value them," said Greenstone. "I think we still haven't even communicated why they're important and stuff. There's a lot of staffers who don't really know what I did when I was the engagement editor."

In reflecting on the value placed on this newsroom staff, Greenstone emphasized, "We have to be able to treat engagement editors and audience editors like they are as important, as important as copy editors and reporters. But unfortunately, I think a lot of leadership and newsrooms don't see them that way."

## Discussion

This thesis first explored the burgeoning body of literature around the theory and practice of engaged journalism. It also highlighted the state of the education beat today, and the qualities that make it a suitable --or challenging-- space to explore engagement endeavors. At first glance, the Student Voices project presents one practical application of engagement journalism effort: students and journalists collaborating to produce publicly available news content that highlights the experiences of an underrepresented demographic. Further investigation of the project, through qualitative interviews and close readings of project-generated content, revealed that while the Student Voices project is in many ways an engagement journalism method, the project faces several challenges that restrict its ability to effectively and sustainably foster engagement within the education beat. Moreover, when examined along the relational-transactional spectrum of engagement presented by Lawrence and colleagues, the project falls more closely within the bounds of transactional engagement. This is evident in the project's published content, its structure, and its perceived value as a facet of the Education Lab's coverage.

As Green-Barber (2018) described, sustainable engagement practices collaborating with audiences and connecting with them through content are two of the four tenets of engaged journalism practices. In the case of the Student Voices project, interview subjects verified that collaboration with students is a prominent feature of the project. Anecdotal examples from past and present editors indicate that community members – in this case, students— are actively involved in creating their work throughout the process. As evidenced by interview responses, the intentions of the

project have always been to connect with students in Washington. Past and present editors alike emphasized their desire to connect with a demographic that is chronically underrepresented in traditional education news, echoing the patterns of coverage Holcomb and colleagues highlighted in their 2022 report. Editors involved noted that one of the resulting benefits of the Student Voices project is its ability to highlight the voices of a diverse range of students: a diversity that is not reflected in the demographics of the Seattle Times readership. The project's flexible structure allows engagement editors to adapt the project to amplify the voices of these represented communities, like young people of color, homeless students, and special education students.

It is important to note that while diversity is prioritized in this project, interview responses indicate that the intention may be one of emphasizing the presence of diverse coverage rather than addressing the information needs of diverse audiences. Diverse students' stories are highlighted to bolster coverage when, in the end, the audiences consuming that coverage are still largely white and affluent. Usher (2021) noted that this gap between content and audience highlights a broader newsroom "survival strategy" of targeting audiences who can pay for subscriptions that keep them afloat. This is perhaps also evident in the presence of The Seattle Times paywall on Student Voices stories.

While the project initiates engagement through collaborative efforts, it does not incorporate practices to sustain this engagement. Knepple (2022) highlighted that a newsroom should consider its commitment to longevity when establishing relational engagement efforts. Without techniques for fostering collaboration or established

networks, the project struggles to sustain mutually beneficial connections with the young community members it aims to empower. Responses from the interview subject indicate that Education Lab engagement editors have worked to authentically collaborate with students throughout the essay-writing process, but this collaboration often stops when (or soon after) each student's work is published. Outside of the project's orientation, the project does not initiate lasting collaboration between participants, with the engagement largely occurring between the editor and the student. The project also lacks a formal method for staying connected with past participants. If those involved want to build more sustainable connections with Seattle youth through this project, it may benefit from the creation of an alumni network, more peer-to-peer collaboration throughout the process, or by seeking ways to "pass the mic" at multiple steps throughout the process. It's clear from interview responses that these ideas are already being discussed within the Education Lab and may be explored in the future.

Lawrence and colleagues (2019) noted that relational engagement efforts require different skills and practices than more traditional journalistic practices. Responses from interview participants suggest there may be tension between the project's effort to amplify the voices of young people through co-production and its adherence to traditional journalistic practices. Results from the interviews show that the explicit goal of the project has remained the same over seven years: empower students to tell their own stories. These findings are consistent with scholarly definitions of engaged journalism as a practice of empowering communities as communicators and collaborators (Das, 2017). However, the project often struggles to incorporate deep listening throughout the process, a tenet that Green-Barber (2018) and Lawrence and



colleagues (2019) delineate as a crucial facet of relational engagement practices. In this case, students choose what they write about, but engagement editors still have the final say in the essay topics –from the application callout to the publication period.

The project’s intentions for community empowerment may be overshadowed by some adherence to newsroom practices of authority. This limitation highlights an important distinction between *amplifying* underrepresented voices and *actively listening* to underrepresented voices. In this case, actively listening to the students’ information needs might mean letting go of the traditional role of authority that the editor holds in the project. If students wrote the prompt, what issues would they highlight in their own educational experiences? What would students want to hear from other students? The project may benefit from holding a panel discussion with Washington students or surveying students across the state about what they want to see discussed in these essays.

Interview responses highlight that adherence to journalistic authority in the case of student voice work may be a result of the ethical challenges that arise when working with young people. Editors involved with the project want to highlight student voices while also making sure students understand “the long tail of journalism.” Many of the practices within this project, like the removal of comments, the specific verbiage, and the careful consideration of student content is indented minimize harm to the students. In adhering to these journalistic ethics, the project sacrifices elements of more relational engagement practices, such as community feedback and placing trust in student participants (SPJ, 2014). This is not to say that I suggest a departure from these ethics,

but it is important to consider the tension that exists between journalistic authority and relational engagement in this case.

It is evident that the project's journalistic roots also hold some sway over what student voices get highlighted. Past and present editors who were interviewed did mention some efforts in connecting with a diverse array of students (e.g., social media callouts and tracking of student demographics), but this is not central to their recruitment process. The project's reliance on journalism education associations in the recruitment process may attract a demographic of young aspiring journalists who may not be reflective of Washington's general student population. I would propose that the project could either be restructured to more a more explicit training opportunity for aspiring journalists, or it could more concertedly seek out varied recruitment options. The former option would likely no longer be considered an engagement effort.

The results also illuminate the fact that other than interactions with the engagement editor, students may not be working as much with Ed Lab staff, and with each other, as could strengthen the project's engagement effort. This challenge stems from a broader challenge: limited newsroom resources. Interview respondents highlighted that the engagement editor's capacity to run the project may be limited, especially when they must also create other engagement efforts, report, and write pieces for the Education Lab. In the case of the Student Voices project, the scope of the project's success rests on the capacity of the editor running it. If these engagement roles are not being prioritized in newsrooms like they were five years ago, this could present challenges to a project that was created around the same, with the same priorities.

Responses from past and present editors revealed that the Student Voices project similarly struggles to measure its success. Those involved seem to rely mostly on anecdotal successes and—even after six years of running the project—the Education Lab **has is** no formal way to systematically review the impact of the project on the students involved or the Seattle Times readership. The only measurable metric past and present editors called upon were page views. In the already niche branch of education journalism, respondents noted that these page views would not garner the same numbers as other content. If this is the case, it might benefit the project to incorporate more qualitative metric analysis from those involved with the project. One possible way this could be done is by constructing an evaluation tool, such as the Reflective Practice Guide created by Lawrence and colleagues (2019) to measure the strength and longevity of the project. This guide could be adapted to garner student feedback and begin gathering student reflections on the project and possible improvements.

The challenges outlined above highlight some of the challenges the Student Voices project faces in its effort to address issues in education reporting. It is evident from this research that the project intends to increase the degree to which young people are considered in education reporting. Findings also indicate that the collaborative practices incorporated into the project harken back to some aspects of engagement journalism as a phenomenon. Still, structural elements of the project, its adherence to journalistic traditions, and its limited resources present challenges for its ability to address and sustainably empower young participants and address information needs. This case study highlights the value that engaged journalism can bring to the contemporary education beat, while also acknowledging the barriers to its success.

## Conclusion

As every study has its shortcomings, and this thesis is no exception. Ideally, I would have incorporated more interviews into my research, including other editors who have been directly involved in the project, and the students themselves. I chose to focus more on editors involved in the project because I wanted to understand the project from a journalistic perspective, not a student perspective. I wanted to explore how this project impacted the Ed Lab and journalists involved, rather than what the students thought about their participation. It was also difficult to get in touch with former students (one challenge the project faced without the benefit of an organized alumni network). Still, this would be an interesting opportunity for further research. I would be curious to understand how the dozens of student participants perceived this engagement effort and what their takeaways were.

Given the project's time constraints and the challenges accessing more sensitive Seattle Times information, I did not have the chance to explore the demographic breakdown of project participants, past page view statistics for Student Voices work, or other quantitative measures of success. I think this would be incredibly interesting to look further into the data behind education reporting content, and how that may impact the success of an engagement effort geared towards coverage in the education beat.

In this thesis I set out to contribute to the growing discussion around engaged journalism in education reporting, this research highlights how one newsroom employed a practical application of this phenomenon in the form of co-production. Using a qualitative interview research design, I conducted a case study of the Student

Voices project, an engagement effort created as part of the Seattle Times Education Lab. Findings from this case study revealed that while the Student Voices project aligns with some guidelines for engagement journalism, structural and practical challenges limit its success as an engagement effort within education coverage. In my findings, I present suggestions for ways that the project can expand its existing practices to accommodate for more relational engagement practices, in the strive for more diverse and authentic education reporting.

## Appendix 1

Reasoning/motivation behind the project:

1. What is/was your role in the Student Voices Project?
2. What gaps in your education reporting infrastructure did you feel the project could address?
3. How is this project like and unlike other engagement efforts at the Seattle Times Education Lab?
4. Does the project prioritize the Seattle community's information needs?
5. If so, how? If not, how do you feel it could be adapted to do so?
6. Why did you want to highlight students as micro-storytellers in the Seattle area?

Goals and Expectations for the project:

7. What did you expect from the project in its ideal state (if everything went right?)
8. How did you build the structure of the project?
9. How and why did you decide to include demographics on the application form, and what do you do with this information?
10. How many students did you aim for to be in each cohort?
11. Who was the intended/target audience for these essays?
12. What were your recruitment tactics/outreach (engagement tools, incentives)?
13. How did you outline expectations/hopes for students and the Ed Lab staff?

Co-production and Community Storytelling:

14. How did you decide on coproduction as your method for engagement in this process? Why?
15. What are the steps of the process? Tell me about the application process, the pitch worksheet etc.
16. What previous work in engaged journalism/coproduction guided the project?
17. What issues arose during the process and how did you address them?

18. Were students and journalists receptive to the process?
19. Results:
20. How have students' essays exposed gaps/points of exploration in your education reporting
21. How are you measuring the success of the project? (Likes via social media, page views responses, etc.)
22. Based on these metrics, how successful do you feel the project is?
23. Have you shifted your Ed Lab reporting to address these needs?
24. How did you/have you adjusted the process if you didn't get the breath you wanted?
25. How has the project inspired new engagement ideas?
26. Do you think your target audience is consuming/benefiting from this content?
27. Are the demographics of the students in the cohorts reflective of your reader demographic? If not, how are you accommodating for this?
28. What are some of the key patterns you're noticing in Ed Lab stories?
29. What are some of the key patterns you're noticing in the student essays?
30. What have you adapted/added/taken away after six years of conducting the project?
31. Are these results what the newsroom anticipated/ envisioned?

Looking Forward:

32. What are your goals/hopes for the future of the project?
33. What are the biggest barriers to the project's success?
34. How can/are you using the material and information collected over six years to adapt your education reporting and address community information needs?

For journalists involved in the project:

35. Why did you want to be involved in the project? (Could you opt in or out?)
36. What gaps did you see in education reporting in your community?

37. Do you have previous experience with co-production or other methods of engaged journalism?
38. What were your thoughts on the writing process?
39. How did you feel about working with a student to create their work?
40. What did you like about the experience?
41. Do you think the project is a beneficial facet of the Seattle Times Education lab? Why/why not?
42. What suggestions do you have for the future of the project?

For student participants over the age of 18:

43. Why did you want to participate in the project?
44. How did you come up with the idea for your opinion piece?
45. What gaps did you see in education reporting in your community?
46. What were your thoughts on the writing process and how did you feel about working with a journalist to create your work?
47. What did you like about the experience?
48. What did you feel could be improved in the Education Lab's communication/support?
49. Do you think the project is a beneficial facet of the Seattle Times Education lab? Why/why not?
50. What suggestions do you have for the future of the project?



## Appendix 2

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>About the Essayist</b>	<b>Date published</b>
The future is hybrid in higher education	Lovina Andersen	A freshman at Brigham Young University.	June 20, 2021
My STEM education won't matter if it's not inclusive	Sarah Fenton	In her last year at North Seattle College (biochemistry major)	June 13, 2021
It is time we stop pay-to-win testing within the public education system	Cedric Brinkmann	Senior at Eastlake High School (French and German and moved to US in 2016)	June 6, 2021
Why Black faculty matter on university campuses	Mawahib Ismail	Sophomore at the University of Washington (political science major), born and raised in Seattle.	May 23, 2021
Washington promised me financial literacy but failed to deliver	Leah Scott	a dual-enrolled senior at Roosevelt High School and North Seattle College.	May 16, 2021
Virtual schooling has been a challenge. But that doesn't mean we can't learn anything from it.	Akila Rajan	Akila is a senior at Henry M. Jackson High School in Mill Creek and will be attending the University of Washington College of Engineering next year.	May 9, 2021
Don't forget about the in-betweens	Charlie Nunes	Charlotte "Charlie" Nunes is a junior at Woodinville High School and is enrolled in the Running Start program at Cascadia college. As an aspiring journalist, she's grateful for every opportunity to tell personal stories through writing. She hopes that one day we can get back to "normal" and continue to improve responses to mental health crises in the workplace, with or without a pandemic.	May 2, 2021
Project-based learning is how we teach critical thinking	Jules Shusterman	Homeschooled for most of life. Jules Shusterman is an aspiring teacher. He holds an associate degree from Highline College and will be transferring to Rowan University's Leadership & Social Innovation program.	April 25, 2021
We know how to say our names; you should, too.	Oluyemisi Bolonduro	Oluyemisi Bolonduro is a current sophomore at Pomona	April 17, 2021

		College majoring in Africana Studies. Her current aspiration is to become a journalist, but she's concluded that any situation that allows her to write and connect with people on a global scale will bring her joy!	
Racism in the Bellevue School District has thrived for too long	By Lauren Kirkpatrick	A Newport High School student	December 6, 2020
Lower the flag for George Floyd and every Black person killed by police, two fifth-grade students in Seattle say, 'but please do not stop there.'	Lawton Elementary fourth-grade teacher Anne Leache, fifth graders Naomi Haddad and Talia Wilson.		October 5, 2020
Adults bully me because of my disability. Education could solve that.	Amelia Rasp	She wants to become a special-education teacher or pediatric nurse. As a special-education teacher, she says, she could help students find their voices. She is "a fighter, a good solver of puzzles and a friend to all. She is passionate about advocating for people with disabilities, animals and human rights. She also likes music, dancing, cheerleading, art, writing and reading. She is a second-year student at the Bellevue School District's Evergreen Transition Program."	February 17, 2020
In Nepal she couldn't go to school because she was blind. In Washington she found a culture of inclusion.	Ritika Khanal	a sophomore at Mountlake Terrace High School. She serves as the op-ed editor of The Hawkeye, her school's publication. She is also visually impaired. In addition to writing, she loves immersing herself in books and seeing the world from others' perspectives. Her goal is to give voices to her community and to work toward a more inclusive environment wherever she goes.	February 3, 2020

<p>Why Washington state should make dual-enrollment programs free for all</p>	<p>Mysti Willmon</p>	<p>Mysti Willmon is a first-generation college student pursuing majors in creative writing and journalism at Western Washington University. Her love of reading and writing pushes her toward the career of editor or magazine writer. She believes both positions help create the stories that need to be told. Her writing has appeared in "The Western Front" and "Bellingham Alive!"</p>	<p>December 30, 2019</p>
<p>Schools need to make learning materials universally accessible</p>	<p>Natalie Rand</p>	<p>Natalie Rand is an intended double major in geography and community, environment and planning (CEP) at the UW. Straying from her family's traditional career path in health care, she wants to go into urban planning to help contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future. When she's not writing for UW's The Daily, she's collecting CDs, playing with her dog, or attempting to play piano.</p>	<p>November 17, 2019</p>
<p>Why people should start believing in students at low-income schools like mine</p>	<p>Jordan Cahoon</p>	<p>Jordan Cahoon is a senior at Kent-Meridian High School who enjoys sharing her love of learning and curiosity with others. She is inspired by diversity and hopes to advocate for universal education. Even as an aspiring engineer, she finds it important to be tied to the community to hear the voices of those affected by science. Now works for her school's student publication.</p>	<p>October 16, 2019</p>
<p>Clear Sky gave me the Native community I lacked — now the program needs to be saved</p>	<p>Ravi Smith</p>	<p>Ravi Smith Ravi Smith is an enrolled member of the Makah tribe and is a rising sophomore at Stanford University, where he serves as programming chair for the Stanford American Indian Organization, organizes the</p>	<p>June 26, 2019</p>

		annual Stanford Powwow and writes for the Stanford Daily.	
There is power in seeing yourself at the front of a classroom	Grace Madigan	is a junior at the University of Washington studying political science, journalism and diversity. As an adoptee she is very interested in how culture and identity intersect with food and the way we eat.	March 29, 2019
‘How many more of my classmates had this secret?’ A Renton teen’s message on homelessness	Isabella Fredrickson		February 25, 2019
Why all kids need to learn computer science	Hallie Chen	Hallie Chen is a student at Liberty High School in Issaquah who says her peers could all benefit from learning to code, no matter their career path.	February 1, 2019
Student Voices: The stories missing from our history books and textbooks	Aleenah Ansari	Aleenah Ansari is currently a student in the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering at the University of Washington. (Courtesy of Aleenah Ansari) Aleenah Ansari is a writer, mural enthusiast and proud Seattleite.	January 22, 2019
We need to talk about race in school, and we need to do it before college	Danielle Derrickson	graduated from UW Tacoma in 2018 with a degree in communication, which she hopes will help her affect change in her community as both a journalist and citizen.	December 21, 2018
I hid my homelessness in high school. My counselor helped me speak out.	Anonymous		December 7, 2018,
We shouldn’t eliminate gifted classrooms. We should make them equitable.	Millan Philipose	Millan Philipose is a sophomore at Garfield High School in Seattle. A longtime member of the gifted program, he hopes for a future in which advanced classes throughout Seattle’s K-12 education system become more diverse — both racially and economically — without a sacrifice in rigor.	November 30, 2018

I had to learn how to take care of my father at 13, when we both became homeless	Anna Ferguson		September 21, 2018
Colleges, please don't look at freshman-year grades	Amad Ross	Amad Ross is a recent graduate of Chief Sealth High School in Seattle. This fall, he will start college at Columbia University. He hopes to become an attorney	August 11, 2018
We dated in high school — but when I went to college, he became homeless	Emma Scher	Emma Scher is a junior this fall at the University of Washington in Seattle. She is a sociology and journalism double major, a staff writer for the UW Daily, a sociological-research intern and part of the Greek community on her campus. Originally from San Diego, California, she's learned to bring the sun to Seattle.	August 2, 2018
We need to invest more in future business leaders of color	Abel Berhan	Abel Berhan is a senior at Evergreen High School in Highline School District. He is the proud son of Ethiopian immigrants and has four siblings that mean a lot to him. He aspires to have a future that positively impacts the underserved communities he's grown up in.	January 29, 2018
The college admissions process was dizzying for me, so I decided to research why.	Haley Keizur	Haley Keizur is a senior at Puyallup High School and will begin studying journalism next year. She enjoys reading, writing, playing the ukulele and drinking coffee.	December 27, 2017
Why the UW should consider adding a Somali studies program	Ahlaam Ibraahim	Ahlaam Ibraahim is a student at University of Washington who enjoys writing and hopes to become a voice for the voiceless. Ahlaam is a proud Somali-American and loves helping her community strive for the better — which is why she runs two initiatives: Global Islamophobia Awareness day and Educating the Horn.	August 3, 2017

<p>My family wanted me to go to college, but I felt guilty. Here's why.</p>	<p>Christy Pham</p>	<p>Christy Pham is a recent graduate of the University of Washington where she studied Informatics-Human Computer Interaction. She hopes to connect people from deep corners of the world through technology and digital storytelling.</p>	<p>July 20, 2017</p>
<p>I'm one of the first in my family to attend college. Here's how I got there.</p>	<p>Ronnie Estoque</p>	<p>Ronnie Estoque is a recent graduate of Cleveland High School, where he was editor of its student-run media group, Cleveland Publications. He will be attending Gonzaga University in fall 2017, and is planning on double majoring in political science and communication studies. Through his writing, Estoque hopes to shed light on critical issues that marginalized communities face.</p>	<p>August 2, 2017</p>
<p>Don't take a diversity course for my sake, do it for your own</p>	<p>Mayowa Aina</p>	<p>Mayowa Aina is a senior graduating this spring from the University of Washington with degrees in International Studies (B.A.) and Informatics (B.S.), and minors in Music and Comparative History of Ideas. She hopes to become an influential leader in the field of digital media as a content strategist, writer, designer, and producer.</p>	<p>May 31, 2017</p>
<p>I wanted a high-quality education, and I found it at a South Seattle public school</p>	<p>Rhea Panela</p>	<p>Rhea Panela is majoring in journalism, and minoring in English and diversity at the University of Washington. She is pursuing a career in broadcast journalism to shed light on the issues and success stories in communities of color.</p>	<p>May 15, 2017</p>
<p>I asked my teachers why I didn't feel challenged, and their answers surprised me</p>		<p>Macy Quinn-Sears is a rising junior at Walla Walla High School in Walla Walla, Washington. She wants to pursue her passion for writing through working in</p>	<p>June 23, 2016</p>

		journalism, and writing free-verse poetry.	
Student Voices: Why I'm unsure project-based learning prepares students for college	Ronnie Estoque	Ronnie Estoque is a junior at Seattle's Cleveland High. He is a staff writer for Cleveland Publications, an intern at The Seattle Globalist and is interested in pursuing a career in journalism.	June 9, 2016
Traditional school didn't work for me, so I enrolled in an online school	Rahima Ali	Student at Insight School of Washington and Shoreline Community College.	May 19, 2016

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