

# Voices

## **What is "Voices?"**

It's an experience where you share or represent some of the "voices" in your school, helping to bring awareness and empathy to the diversity of your student body. Examples might include: a differently abled student, a BIPOC student, a teen parent, a first-generation student, LGBTQ+ student, a student struggling with their mental health or an overachieving student. Each of these different groups tend to have their own "culture" and they are often stereotyped by their peers instead of taking the time to find out who they really are.

## **What makes it effective?**

It can heighten student and staff awareness of the realities that exist in our schools (which are microcosms of the realities we face in society). As students become more empathetic and inclusive towards others, they may become better advocates and plan activities that reach out and involve all the populations in their schools and communities.

## **Here's how it works:**

1. Choose your Platform
  - a. Will you be doing this Virtually or in Person?
2. How much time do you have?
  - a. Determine how many "voices" you have time for.
3. Develop a list of all the amazing groups in your school and select which "voices" you'd like to highlight.
4. Assign a student to each "voice". This may be their own voice, or they can represent the identity.
  - a. Write a script for each voice (real student examples below).

## **SAMPLE 30 MIN VIRTUAL ASSEMBLY SCHEDULE:**

11:00 – Student Welcome and Introduction  
11:02 – Student Voice #1  
11:05 – Student Voice #2  
11:08 – Student Voice #3  
11:11 – If You Really Knew Me Video  
11:14 – Student Voice #4  
11:17 – Student Voice #5  
11:20 – Student Voice #6  
11:23 – Student Conclusion  
11:25 – "Sing-Along" - This is Me w/video

## **SAMPLE 45 MIN IN PERSON ASSEMBLY SCHEDULE:**

11:20 – Call to Attention by Admin and National Anthem  
11:22 – Student Introduction  
11:24 – Student Voice #1  
11:27 – Student Voice #2  
11:30 – If You Really Knew Me Video Part 1  
11:35 – Rainstorm Activity

11:40 – Student Voice #3  
11:43 – Student Voice #4  
11:46 – If You Really Knew Me Video Part 2  
11:50 – Student Voice #5  
11:53 – Student Voice #6  
11:56 – Glow Stick Activity  
12:00 – Sing-Along - This is Me w/video  
12:04 – Student Conclusion  
12:05 – Dismissal by Admin

### **Additional considerations:**

#### **If Virtual:**

1. Camera off / on?
2. Change names?
3. Prerecorded?
4. Counselors on hand, resources available?
5. Follow up communication?

#### **In Person:**

1. Curtain?
2. Open and Seen?
3. Counselors on hand?
4. Follow up lesson / communication?
5. Add-on activities depending on time:
6. If you Really Knew Me
7. Rainstorm activity
8. Glow stick closing
9. Sing a long

### **SAMPLE SCRIPT:**

#### **Introduction**

**VIRTUAL:** Today, you will hear the stories of your classmates . . . students who you used to walk the halls with and now may or may not see online. They will bravely tell their stories or represent the voice of another classmate – their truth. We often see their posts online, remember seeing them in the hallway at school – but do you truly notice them? Or have we judged them without ever getting to know them. If we were to stop and listen, what might those voices tell us?

Some of the stories will be hard to hear and if any of the testaments strike a chord with you, please know that our counselors and staff are here for you as well as the Youthline (Share Screen and show slide of how to connect with support and post in chat). We ask that you are present today and fully engage with the people in this space. I have always heard “it is hard to hate someone whose story you know.” Listen, truly listen. You may realize that you have more in common with your peers than you realize.

**IN PERSON:** Today, you will hear the stories of your classmates . . . students who walk the halls of this school with you every day and who are brave and vulnerable will tell their story, their classmates’ story, their truth. We go to class, eat lunch with friends, hang out in the hallways – people that we pass by or sit next to every day – and we never seem to notice them. Or we judge them without ever getting to know them. If we were to stop and listen, what might those voices tell us?

Some of the stories will be hard to hear and if any of the testaments strike a chord with you, please know that our counselors and staff are here for you. We ask that you are present today. Put your phones away and fully engage with the people in this space. I have always heard “it is hard to hate someone whose story you know.” Listen, truly listen. You may realize that you have more in common with your peers than you realize.

## **“VOICES” SAMPLE STORIES:**

### **Overachieving Student**

Most of you may know me as the teacher’s pet or overachiever. Yes, I have a 4.0 and I run track and am hoping to go to an Ivy League school next year but what you don’t see is the anxiety and worry that I have trying to keep straight A’s. I was really freaking out last semester because I thought I was going to get a B in calculus class, but with some extra late-night studying and some extra work – I pulled off the A. I’ve heard from my teachers and classmates that I’m too uptight about my grades and that I should relax a little and it’s not all about grades . . .but you don’t know my parents! The expectations they have of me are so high! Getting good grades is one way to get noticed by them, because although I run track, I am not the athlete my dad was hoping for. At least if I get good grades, they have something they can brag about.

I have quite a few friends, but I also have a lot of people who pretend to be my friend so they can copy my homework. I know they are just using me and that hurts.

I just want to escape the pressure sometimes – I don’t know how. I want to do well in school, but is this all there is to life? It’s exhausting and now with online schooling the little bit of social I had is now almost nonexistent. According to my parents – it takes more time to study and do better! When will it end?

HEAR MY VOICE!

### **First-Generation Student**

I moved to America when I was 8 years old. I started school late, and I didn’t know half of the English language I know today. I grew up with 2 brothers and 1 sister. I am the oldest son. You may walk by someone and know their name or see them smile, but do you really know them? A smile can often be a barrier. I smile 90% of the day – but I also hide a lot behind my smile. I smile when I hear myself or my family referred to as “illegal”. I smile when I don’t fully understand what someone is saying because I’m still learning English. I smile when I get called stupid or people speak louder to me versus slower. I smile because it’s easier to pretend I’m happy than feel the pain. My parents came here for a better life for me and my siblings. In Mexico, we were considered middle class and owned a taqueria, here in the US we are very poor. It wasn’t safe for my family to live in Mexico anymore as the cartels had taken over our town – my parents chose safety, education and a better life for us. We share a small house with another family; this is the only way we can afford rent. However, it’s been extra challenging with online school. It’s hard to find space to work let alone think. We didn’t have the internet the first four weeks of COVID. My teachers probably thought I was lazy, slacking off or didn’t care – that’s not the case at all. I wanted nothing more than to escape to school. The school district helped us get the internet, but we still all have to share a device and time so it’s still a challenge but better than it was. As the oldest son, I am expected to help my parents with business matters and help them translate since they do not speak English. We are a proud family and not afraid of hard work. My parents work six days a week and my brothers and sister and I help as much as we can. It is my dream to go to college someday and to buy a house for my parents. Some people think, just because we are Mexican, we are lazy, illegal and troublemakers – please don’t judge me this way. We are not here for charity – we want to work hard and make our dreams come true just like you.

HEAR MY VOICE!

## Social Anxiety Student

Like most everyone here I love hanging out with friends, going on adventures with family, and participating in school events! I strive to be fun loving and easy going, I work to say yes to any opportunity to see my friends whether it be football games or all sitting together at lunch! What makes me feel different from other students is my anxiety, more specifically how anxious I get in social situations. Like all us high school students I've gotten really good at hiding my anxiety - saying I'm busy when I'm just at home under the covers or when I say that the traffic was really bad when in reality I sat outside for 15 minutes willing myself to get out of the car, my anxiety likes to hold me back from the activities I want to love. What people don't see in people with anxiety is how terrible I feel after cancelling on my friends or the embarrassment of having to tell someone my mental health is so poor I can't go to the movies with them. When trying to hide my anxiety I can lose friends in the process which is heart-breaking because I know anxiety doesn't make me, or you, less of a person. Through normalizing honest mental health people like me can stay happy and healthy without having to lie or be embarrassed of their mental health. So what does this mean in high school? It means that sometimes I can't come hangout at lunch or volunteer to be in front of the student body with my friends. It means I might flake out on a football game and invite you to come meditate with me instead. Not every person or friendship is the same, I want to share my voice to tell you that it's okay to take time for yourself. It doesn't make me less of a high schooler that I missed an event, it makes me human just like every single person here today. I think that by telling my perspective it can bring understanding to those of us who sometimes need an extra minute before we dive into an adventure.

HEAR MY VOICE!

## Differently Abled Student

Believe it or not, I'm a normal 16-year-old male who enjoys computers, going to the movies, and hanging out with friends. It's just a bit more inconvenient because every place I go, I go in a wheelchair. It's not really that big of a deal, but it's also not much fun either at times. I see other guys, hangin' out together, havin' fun and telling jokes. Although people don't really make fun of me, they don't include me either. Sure, people say "hi" to me as I make my way through the crowded hallways, but I move slower than everyone else and they are all in such a hurry. I'd really like to have someone who enjoys my company and will hang with me. It's been extra lonely during COVID - the places I normally hang out like school and the movies aren't an option. I'd love to have friends to just go to the park with and be outside a little more.

And hey, guess what? Just because my legs don't work, doesn't mean my brain doesn't! I'm really quite smart! You don't have to talk louder or slower to me.

HEAR MY VOICE!

## Conclusion

You've heard the voices, now ask yourself . . . what can I do TODAY to make someone else's life a little brighter? We hope that you continue your day, week and months to come by practicing empathy for people who you may or may not know by putting yourself in someone else's shoes and honoring their walk-through life.

**VIRTUAL:** If you need to a place to share or talk after hearing today's presentation (insert slide with graphic) reach out to \_\_\_\_\_ (insert info for Lines for Life, Youthline, etc...)

**IN PERSON:** The counselors / wellness center will be available today if you need a place to talk.