

RELATED FOUNDATIONS:

- Curriculum, Teaching & Learning
- School & Classroom Leadership
- Social & Physical Environments
- Home, School & Community Partnership

RESOURCES:

- [Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health-Youth Engagement](#)
- [RNAO Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions Initiative: Hart's Ladder](#)

Student Engagement

ACTIVITY GOAL: To create opportunities for youth to engage in youth-initiated and youth-led activities and play a key role in decision making.

Background: Students are arguably the most important stakeholders in the education system and thus student engagement should be at the heart of a healthy school. Student engagement is “the extent to which students identify with and value their learning; feel a sense of belonging at school; and are informed about, engaged with and empowered to participate in and lead academic and non-academic activities” (Foundations for a Healthy School). To learn more about Youth Engagement, explore the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health Youth Engagement Toolkit <http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php/resources/youth-engagement>.

Benefits of Youth Engagement: When students are given the opportunity to contribute to their learning, they derive a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community and gain feelings of competence and satisfaction. Other positive outcomes include lower rates of substance use and depression, reduced dropout rates in school, higher academic performance and lower rates of conflict with the law (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2007). The illustration below is Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation. When working with youth, the goal is to work at the top of the ladder.

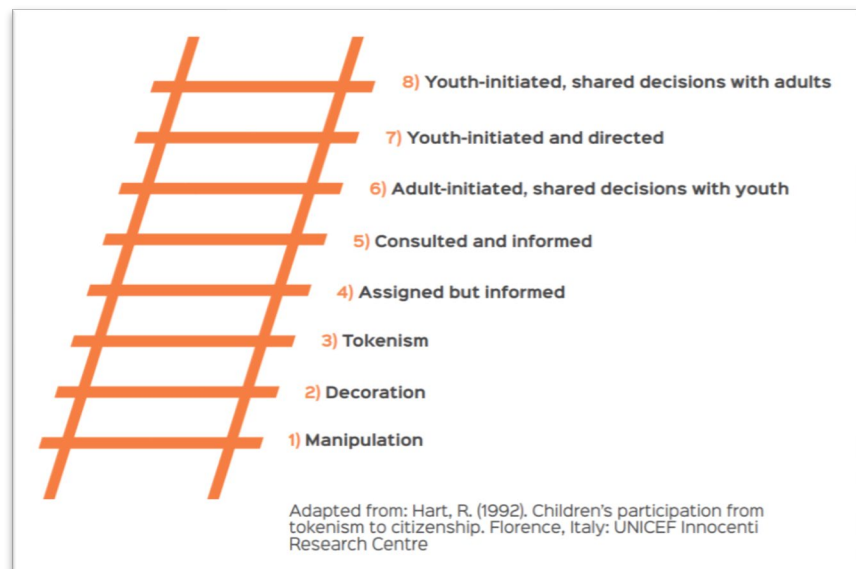
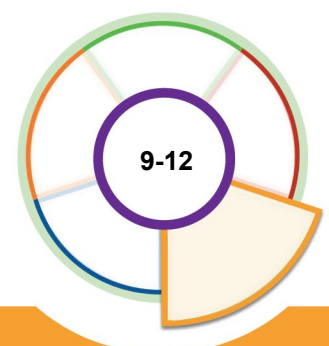


Image source:

<https://ymhac.mao.ca/sites/default/files/2016-10/Harts%20Ladder.pdf>



ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- Establish a school committee involving students, school staff, public health nurse and/or parent representatives (e.g., Healthy School/Wellness/Safe School Committee, etc.), or Leadership class.
- Define the purpose of the committee. Emphasize the importance of student voice and the development of leadership skills as an integral part of the success of the committee.
- Review roles of committee members that align with youth engagement.
 - **Adult Role:**
 - Value youth as an asset in the school, empower students, and give them the skills and confidence to contribute equally to decisions
 - Encourage students to plan activities that align with their identified goal. For example, if the goal is to ‘reduce substance use’, all of the activities planned during the school year should target this and build on each other. Refer to the activities in this resource for ideas.
 - Recognize student contributions as school leaders and celebrate accomplishments.
 - Build trusting and authentic relationships
 - **Student Role:**
 - The role of the youth is to take initiative and be actively involved in making decisions. This may include, scheduling and leading meetings as well as organizing and implementing activities.
 - Be confident in expressing your thoughts and ideas.

