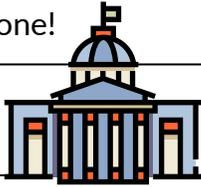


## Why Your Voice Matters

Students are the direct recipients of education policy decisions. Because you have the first hand experience of what it means to be a public school student in New Hampshire, it is important that your voices are heard--it makes for more informed policy and more informed civilians... and it makes schools and communities better places for everyone!



## Who Makes Decisions



### Federal Level

Includes the US Congress (Senators and Representatives), the Office of the President of the United States, and the United States Department of Education. Senators and Representatives are usually based in Washington, DC, but have offices throughout the state, where staffers meet with constituents, participate in local events, and more. If you're looking to get more information on a federal initiative, or have a question or concern, their staff is usually the best place to start.

Federal education law is typically broad: The federal government gives a lot of flexibility to each state to implement its own policies, spending, and decisions. Examples of federal education policy include: federal funding; rights for students with disabilities, and nondiscrimination laws and rules (like Title IX).

### State Level

Includes the Office of the Governor, the Executive Council, the New Hampshire State Senate, and the New Hampshire House of Representatives. These lawmakers make state-level laws, and while they meet in Concord, NH, they usually live in the towns they represent.

New Hampshire has the fourth-largest legislature in the English-speaking world, with 400 Representatives and 24 Senators. Our lawmakers are famously easy to contact and are (usually) eager to speak with you. New Hampshire, unlike many other states, provides a lot of flexibility to each town and district to implement its own policies. Examples of state education policy include: state funding, the minimum programs/subjects that schools are required to offer, and the types of state tests that are given.

### Local Level

Includes school boards, superintendents, school principals, and other school administrators. A lot of people are involved in making sure that a school operates smoothly, follows all state and federal laws, and is responsive to its students, families, and communities. Some school boards have student members, and some schools have student councils to help school administrators make decisions.

The "details" of school are decided at the local level. These include class offerings, extracurricular activities (and their cost), school staffing decisions, the school calendar, school-wide tests, grading and homework policies, and restorative justice policies.



# How To Get Involved

**Write a Letter to the Editor.** An “LTE” is a way to publicly share your views with your wider community, specific to topics that are affecting your community, through your local newspaper publications-- both print and electronic. They can be about any topic. Try to keep the LTE under 300 words, stay focused and clear, check your spelling and grammar, and include facts to support your point. If you’re writing about a general topic, you can submit the same letter to as many news outlets as you want. Once you submit it, share it! Even if it’s not published, you can share it on social media -- and if it is published, be sure to link to the article! The [Alliance for Quality Education](#) has a comprehensive toolkit for writing an LTE.

**Testify at a committee meeting** (school board, town meeting, state committee meeting, etc.). Decision makers want and need to hear from their constituents. Your voice has value and you deserve a place at the table. At all committees -- whether a state committee or local school board meeting -- you have the option to speak in person or submit written testimony.

For state-level testimony, your public comment must be relevant to the bill being discussed. If speaking in person, there are specific public hearing times that are published on the state’s General Court website. You can submit written testimony to the Chair of the committee.

For local-level testimony, you can express concerns or ask questions at any meeting. Your comments do not have to pertain to the board’s agenda -- you can speak on whatever topic matters to you. However, that does not guarantee that the board will respond. It’s important to follow up with board members if it is an issue that is important to you, that they are not considering.

All testimony is public information, and anything you say and/or write will be a part of the public record. Because what you say is a part of the public record, news outlets, organizations, and others do not need your permission to publish what you say.

Check out Reaching Higher NH’s [“Tips for Testifying at a Legislative Committee.”](#) Remember to keep your remarks brief and relevant, be on time, and be respectful of others in the room.

**Vote!** You may not be eligible to vote just yet, but you can start preparing now. Talk to the adults in your life about how they plan to vote and why. Encourage conversations among your peers about voting. Learn where your local polling location is, what kind of identification you need, and [how to register](#).

If you are old enough to vote, you can be a valuable resource for those who are awaiting their turn at the ballot box, as well as your fellow voters. You can share your experience with your peers who aren’t yet able to vote. You can encourage others, such as your family members and neighbors, to join you when you vote.

If you have a valid driver's license and access to a vehicle, you can provide transportation to the polls for people in your community. Services like [Carpool Vote](#) and [Drive The Vote](#) help match volunteer drivers with folks who need rides to the polls.

You can also volunteer at your polling place. [The United States Election Assistance Commission](#) has a compendium of state-by-state election worker laws and statutes. [The NH Secretary of State website](#) can help you contact your polling place.

# More Ways to Get Involved

**Run for public office!** The New Hampshire Secretary of State website offers [guidelines](#) for those wishing to run for office. To be a NH State Representative or County Officer, you must be 18 years of age, a registered voter in New Hampshire, and reside in the county, municipality, or ward you wish to represent.

**Ask for help!** Don't hesitate to ask your trusted adults for help in accessing this process. Having a trusted adult partner with you in this effort can help you navigate what can sometimes be a very confusing-- even frustrating-- process.

**Organize.** Find other students who share your viewpoints, and mobilize them to participate in these avenues of civic engagement. Your school community offers great opportunities to work with your friends and neighbors on issues that affect you everyday, and you can organize around the issues that matter most to you.

We recommend visiting the Partners for Each and Every Child's "[Engage for Education Equity Tool Kit](#)" for helpful details on how to effectively organize in your own school community.



When you participate in the legislative process, you're directly influencing the issues that matter the most to you. The time and energy it takes to participate can feel daunting, but start small.

Any step forward in participating in the democratic process is a step in the right direction. Your voice has value and deserves to be heard.

## Additional Resources

[Tips for Testifying at a Legislative Committee](#),  
from Reaching Higher NH

[Educating for American Democracy](#)

[#FundNYSchools Education Funding Toolkit](#),

from Alliance for Quality Education

[Students Take Action on ESSA! Toolkit](#),

from the Partners for Each and Every Child

[A Dozen Things Every Citizen Should Know About Town Meetings](#), from the NH Municipal Association

[Student Advocacy Toolkit for CARES Act](#)

[Funding](#), from Swipe Out Hunger

[Student Voice Learning Lab](#)

[MoveSchoolForward](#)

