
STUDENT MEMBERS ON SCHOOL BOARDS



A Toolkit for Schools and Districts

a project of
**REACHING
HIGHER NH**



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With the passage of House Bill 1381 in 2022, New Hampshire schools have a unique opportunity to ensure that our young people are an integral part of decision making in our schools and in our communities. This new law ensures that every school district that operates a high school has at least one student member from each high school on its school board, and it is a critical step forward in ensuring that our public schools are rigorous, engaging, and inclusive.

When the law is implemented well, students in New Hampshire will be guaranteed a voice and an opportunity to shape the decisions and institutions that affect their lives and their futures.

Doing this work authentically and meaningfully will take time and effort. But it's crucial to ensure that our schools and systems are centered around youth and that we are building systems and experiences that support them in their learning journeys and creating spaces where they can grow, learn, and thrive. We know that students flourish and excel when they are valued members of their community.

Recognizing the importance of this opportunity and of the new law, the Reaching Higher NH team developed this toolkit to help school leaders and school boards engage with youth and embrace the new requirements. It includes information on how to promote meaningful engagement of students, resources for implementation, and practical guides for students, administrators, school boards, and communities on how to build relationships, cultivate trust, and encourage student voice on school boards and in the classroom.

I would like to thank Mia Richter, the co-author of this document, for all of her work and dedication to this project. Mia has first-hand experience with the issue as one of the student representatives on her local school board in Hopkinton, New Hampshire, in 2020. Her experience with and commitment to student voice shaped this work. I would also like to thank the many people who contributed to this toolkit, including the many school leaders, school board members, and community leaders who have given their time and expertise to advancing student voice.

NICOLE HEIMARCK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in January 2023, every school board in New Hampshire must have at least one student member from each of the high schools maintained by the district. This requirement is a critical step toward ensuring that students have authentic, meaningful, and direct input in the decisions that will affect their future.

This toolkit is designed to inform the New Hampshire public about the state's new student representation requirement and provide resources and recommendations for elevating student voice in school and district governance. It is intended for:

- Student board members
- School boards
- Administrators and superintendents
- Educators at all levels
- Students
- Community members

About Reaching Higher NH:

Reaching Higher NH is a nonpartisan 501c3. Our mission is to provide all New Hampshire children with the opportunity to prepare for college, for immediate careers, and for the challenges and opportunities of life in 21st century NH, by serving as a public education policy and community engagement resource for New Hampshire families, educators, and elected officials.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Have a Student Board Member?	3
Promoting Diversity and Inclusion	5
Policy and Practice	7
Preparing for a Student Board Member	
Key Points	
Brief Roadmap	12
Selection/Election Process	13
Orientation and Training	14
Student Board Member Role	15
Relationship-Building	18
Meeting Accessibility and Equity	19
Evaluating Student Voice on Boards	20
Your Role	
For Prospective Student Board Members.....	21
For School Board Members	24
For Administrators	26
For School Staff	28
For Student Bodies	31
For Community Members	35
Taking Student Voice Further	36
Recommendations for Policy Development	42
Frequently Asked Questions	43
Annotated Resource List	45
Acknowledgements	49
Readiness Checklists	50

WHY HAVE A STUDENT BOARD MEMBER?

Student membership on school boards is fundamentally democratic because it elevates a traditionally underrepresented point of view in education governance. It can be a learning experience for every person involved, including the student, the adult board members, and community members, and provides a real-life lesson in civics.



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- **Representation and Diversity:** Data shows that, on a variety of measures, only about half of students nationwide feel they have a voice in their school. For example, only 48.3% agree that adults at their school listen to students' suggestions, and 45.7% agree that "students have a voice in decision making at school," according to the [Quaglia Institute](#). Giving students explicit membership on the school board could improve this statistic. Having at least one student on a school board can also increase the diversity of the board. Additionally, it may open the door to even greater student involvement in decision-making.

- **Insight:** A student member provides a unique perspective on what's going on in schools, which can help inform board conversations.
- **Empowerment and Leadership Experience:** Being a student board member is a valuable and empowering leadership experience for the student and increases motivation and engagement (Schultz and Lutz, 2018). It also offers a real-life civics lesson and proves young people's capacity and competence, which can lead to additional student voice efforts district-wide (Benner, Brown and Jeffrey, 2019).
- **Better Learning Outcomes:** When students feel their voices are heard, they perform better in school (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).
- **Improved Efficiency:** Student representation on school boards improves the functioning of schools.

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PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

School boards should strive to engage with as many members of the community as possible, including students. A student school board member can help ensure youth voices are represented, especially when adults take steps to promote authentic and meaningful engagement.

- **Encourage Diversity:** Having a student on a school board will increase the diversity of the board, but one student board member cannot represent the wide variety of student perspectives and experiences in a school. School boards should strive to authentically engage as many students as possible, including students of color, students with disabilities, students navigating poverty, LGBTQ+ students, and multilingual students for whom English is not their primary language, as much as possible, suggests Bill Preble, Director of the Center for School Climate and Learning in Manchester. To reach more students, school boards may consider:
 - Creating an ongoing student advisory council that works with the student board member and ensuring diverse membership on that body.



- Selecting temporary student advisory groups to consult on specific issues.
- Working with existing student government bodies.
- **Promote Inclusion:** Schools should encourage a wide variety of students to run for student board member, not just “high-achievers,” or those students who are regularly tapped for representation or other leadership opportunities. Measures like GPA, school attendance, and existing leadership experience may limit the candidate pool, warns Phil Gore, Director of Board Services for the Vermont School Boards Association. Consider the wider range of student experiences and seek out qualities like thoughtfulness and dedication.
- **Cultivate Trust:** Leading research on student voice stresses the importance of building trusting relationships between students and adults in order to reduce the inherent power imbalance between them.
- **Address ‘Adultism’:** Adultism is defined as “bias against youth leadership development opportunities.” It stems from the belief that young people are inherently less capable than adults and undermines efforts to reduce power hierarchies and create meaningful youth-adult partnerships. Whenever possible, treat student board members as equal to adults. This includes providing them with the same materials, seats at the table, and expectations. Encourage student members to contribute on all items, not just those that “students would be interested in.”

Learn more about student voice and other factors that influence learning at <https://reachinghighernh.org/school-culture/>.

POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Law

Beginning January 1, 2023:

- All NH school boards must include at least one student member of each public high school the district operates.
- School boards can opt to have more than one student member from each high school that their districts operate.
- Student board members do not have voting power, and cannot participate in non-public sessions, including collective bargaining discussions, individual student and faculty decisions, and other sensitive topics and confidential items described in NH RSA 91-A.

Read the full bill text
at bit.ly/HB1381

“

I believe that the recently passed law that requires student membership on boards is important because it guarantees that students have a say in the policy process that most directly impacts them. Having a seat at the table from issues ranging from school meal contracts to technology in schools is extremely important, as the student representative is the only person who can directly attest to the quality of policies.

”

**Prescott Herzog, former Claremont
student board member**

Student Board Member Role Under the New Law:

Student board members:

- Will have all the same rights as adult board members except voting rights.
- Will be elected by a simple majority vote of the high school student body. The student government will establish procedures for nomination and election of student board members, and for students to petition the student member to bring proposals and opinions to the board.
- Will serve one-year terms, set by the board. Students who will graduate during the term may neither run nor vote for the student board member. The student government will create procedures for filling student board member vacancies.

Student Board Member Responsibilities Under the New Law:

- Attending all board meetings except non-public sessions.
- Representing all public high school students in the district.
- Presenting opinions and proposals to the board when petitioned by students; placing proposals on the board agenda when appropriate.
- Acting as a liaison between students, the principal, faculty, student government advisors, and appropriate outside agencies.
- Informing the student body about school board activity.

The majority of public school districts in New Hampshire already have some form of student membership or representation on school boards, according to the New Hampshire School Boards Association.

- The Oyster River School Board has had a student representative from Oyster River High School since 1987. This student has a non-binding vote and is democratically elected by the student body. The practice "works superbly," said Superintendent Dr. Jim Morse.
- The Concord School Board has two student board members who usually serve for two years, staggered from each other; one junior and one senior almost always serve on the board at the same time. These students work on meaningful projects. One former student member, Alice Richards, worked with the student body and a committee to create a student-teacher relations policy.

Democracy in the Granite State

New Hampshire has a strong tradition of democratic participation. Towns and school districts hold annual meetings, where residents vote directly on budgets and other matters, one of the few examples of direct democracy in the United States. Since 2008, NH has consistently had the third highest voter turnout in presidential elections in the country, according to data from the NH Department of State.

Manchester Students Make Their Voices Heard

In the 1980s, a group of students from Manchester organized to advocate for student representation on school boards, according to the Manchester non-profit Granite State Organizing Project. Their efforts were successful: In 1983, the state legislature passed NH RSA 189:1-c, officially allowing (but not requiring) schools boards to add student members, according to the Granite State Organizing Project.

Throughout the 2010s, the Student Voice Campaign advocated for student representation on the Manchester School Board, seeking better support for students of color, particularly women. They eventually succeeded at getting the question on a ballot, and after a concerted campaign, the measure passed with 77% support. In 2019, the Manchester School Board added a student member. In 2022, student representative Kellan Barbee's successful challenge to the district's dress code policy was featured on NHPR, demonstrating the power of student voice.



Student Representation Around the Country

Student membership on school boards is a common practice nationwide. California appointed the first student to its state board of education in 1969. In 2020, 31 states reported to the National School Boards Association that student board membership was a local option, and two reported that it was required. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia also have students on the state board of education.

PREPARING FOR A STUDENT BOARD MEMBER

The following section is intended to be a practical guide tailored to each group involved in student membership on school boards. Pair the "Key Points" section with the relevant user section(s):

- For Prospective Student Board Members: page 21
- For School Board Members: page 24
- For Administrators: page 26
- For School Staff: page 28
- For Student Bodies: page 31
- For Community Members: page 35

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KEY POINTS

Brief Roadmap



Student government establishes a process for electing student members and advertises the position in conjunction with school staff.



Student members run and are elected. Student board members receive some form of orientation prior to attending meetings in order to understand their role and how school boards operate.



The board creates a welcoming environment for students, makes meetings accessible, and actively builds professional relationships with student board members.



Student board members contribute a student perspective during board meetings, and the board establishes a protocol for including and valuing student input.



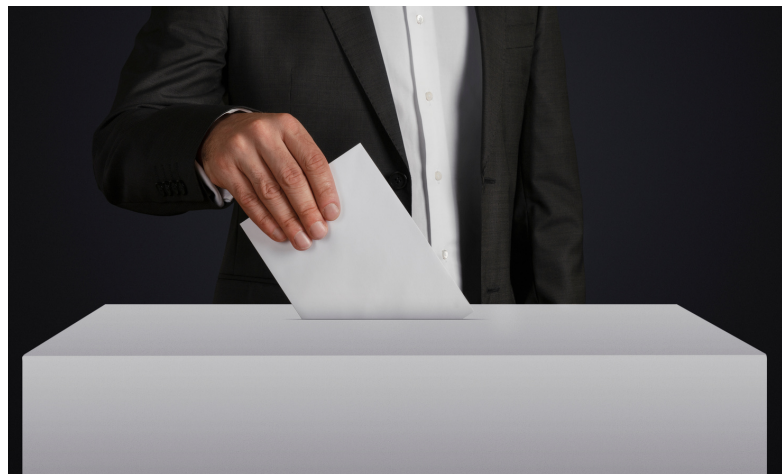
The board and student members periodically reflect on the experience and work to improve student representation on the board.



The board adopts official student representation and student voice policies and mission statements at the board and school levels.

Selection/Election Process

- **Selection:** Democratic selection by the student body is required by NH RSA 194:23-f.
 - A democratic election process increases student body awareness of the position, making it more effectively representative.
- **Election Process:** Within the election process, NH RSA 194:23-f states that student governments are responsible for implementing procedures for nomination, primary elections, and campaigning.
- **Representation:** The student government and building administration should make efforts to open the election to as many students from as many backgrounds as possible.
 - Seek out candidates who are, for example:
 - Approachable and accessible to students
 - Calm, thoughtful, and articulate speakers
 - Willing to dedicate time and effort to the position
 - It is critical not to limit the candidate pool by criteria such as GPA or previous leadership experience, in order to ensure diverse access to the position, explains Phil Gore of the Vermont School Boards Association.
- **Terms:** Recommended terms run from July 1 to June 30 to align with the most common national practice.
 - The National Student Board Member Association discourages setting a limit on the number of terms a student board member may serve.



Orientation and Training

All members of the school board – student and adult members alike – should make sure they understand the roles and responsibilities of a school board. Students may also benefit from training on topics such as leadership, youth rights, conducting research, interacting with adults in power, and goal setting.

Recommended Resources:

- “Spotlight on school boards: Why they matter, what they do, and how to get involved” – podcast from Reaching Higher NH (transcript included): <https://bit.ly/rhnhschoolboards>
- Resources from NH School Boards Association:
 - Roles & Responsibilities for New Hampshire School Boards – an in-depth look at the purpose and operations of a school board: <https://bit.ly/nhsbaguide>
 - School District Budgeting – explains the budgeting process for a school board: <https://bit.ly/nhsbabudgeting>
 - Training and Events – NHSBA offers a variety of training options, webinars, and events that could be useful to student and adult board members alike: nhsba.org/training-events/

To the fullest extent possible, treat [student board members] as regular board members... It’s [the administration’s] job to work most closely with the student and train them.

**Steve Chamberlin, former
Hopkinton Superintendent**

Student Board Member Role

It is important to communicate clear expectations to the student member about their responsibilities in the role. Research shows that successful youth-adult partnerships involve explicit roles for participants, while unsuccessful partnerships often have unclear roles. Additionally, when student voice efforts are poorly defined, students and adults may fall into a traditional power hierarchy in which students are subordinate to adults (Mitra, 2009).



- **Common Activities:**
 - Acting as a liaison between the student body and school board – communication in both directions.
 - Being available to students to discuss board activity and student concerns and surveying the student body for input on board items.
 - Reporting board activities to the student body.
 - Giving a report on student activities and concerns during a specific slot in each meeting.
 - Contributing to discussions throughout board meetings on all board items except those that are confidential.
 - *Optional:* joining committees or subcommittees of the board
 - This is recommended because it allows students to be more deeply involved in the policy-making process.

- **Effective Communication:** The student board member should act as a bridge of communication between the student body and the board, informing both groups about the other's concerns and opinions. This means being visible and available to students, studying board issues, collecting student opinions, and reporting them to the board.
 - Collection of data through surveying
 - Collection of data through conversations with students
 - During lunch
 - Focus groups
 - Periodic town hall-style meetings
 - Communication via social media
 - Communication via morning announcements
 - Communication via mass email (provide the student board member with a listserv for this purpose)
 - An easily accessible email for the student member
 - Creation of and collaboration with a student advisory council
 - NH RSA 194:23-f requires that students may petition their student board members to bring proposals to the school board.



- **Privacy:** The student board member should have a special board email address, and it should be available on the district website.
- **Voting Rights:** Currently, the New Hampshire statute does not permit students to have binding voting rights. Student voice activists advocate strongly for as full voting rights as possible for student board members because they add legitimacy and power to the position. In New Hampshire, the best option currently is preferential voting rights, in which students' votes are recorded in the minutes but not binding toward the final decision.

Paving the Way

Anne Arundel County, Maryland, is the only district in the country where students have full voting rights. The community has been supportive and appreciative, reports former student board member Drake Smith, who helped codify LGBTQ inclusion and Black Lives Matter policies in the district.

Power in Numbers

Some student board members work closely with a student advisory council to collect information from students, plan and implement programs, and mobilize around specific issues. "My advisory council took the lead on surveying our peers and petitioning my Board colleagues around the presence of School Resource Officers in schools, and also provided testimony to the Prince George's County House Delegation in support of legislation that would expand [student members'] authority to vote on matters relating to collective bargaining, capital and operating budgets, school closings, reopenings, and boundaries," said Ninah Jackson, a former student board member from Maryland.

Relationship Building

Research stresses the importance of building trust and respect between young people and adults in order to reduce the inherent power imbalance between them and promote successful youth-adult partnership.



Additionally, research finds that “successful [youth-adult partnership] groups reported valuing process as a goal” – in other words, they focus on relationship-building as a goal in and of itself, instead of a means to better outcomes (Mitra, 2009).

Best practices to establish strong relationships with student board members include:

- The board and student members get to know each other through casual conversation and social events planned for this purpose.
- Student members may be included in annual board retreats.
- The board shows it values student input by asking thoughtful questions and actively listening.
- All members should make sure to speak up when they have questions to ensure a learning experience for all.

Meeting Accessibility and Equity

School board meetings should be accessible to student board members. This includes:

- Seating the student at the table or on the platform with the adult board members and giving the student board member the same name plate/identification as the rest of the board.
- Providing the student board member with the same materials (for example, the board packet) and in the same manner as the adult board members.
- Choosing a meeting time and location that is convenient for the student board member (for example, not during the school day and reasonably close to the school building).
- Being mindful of the meeting length in order to respect the student's (and all members') time and other responsibilities.

Why is student member attendance important? All student board members should attend as many meetings as possible. This allows the student member to develop relationships with other board members, the administration, and the public, and builds their leadership experience. It is also critical that student members are present so they can continuously participate in board decision-making and discussion. If there are multiple student board members, they should be encouraged to attend meetings together/at the same time.



Evaluating Student Voice on Boards

Self-assessment Questions:

- Do you understand your role and responsibilities on the school board?
- Do you feel your opinion is valued by the other members of the board?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing opinions and asking questions during meetings?
- Do you have a supportive relationship with one or more other members of the board?
- How can you grow or improve in your position?
- How can others support you more?

Goal Setting:

- At the beginning of the year, both student board members and adult board members should set goals for their terms and for their relationships with each other.
- Periodically assess these goals throughout the year in individual and group settings.
- Discuss what steps can be taken to improve based on the assessment of the goals.

Resources:

- UP for Learning [Youth-Adult Partnership Reflective Tool](https://bit.ly/partnershiptool):
<https://bit.ly/partnershiptool>
and [Best Practices & Self-Assessment Tool](https://bit.ly/bestpracticestool):
<https://bit.ly/bestpracticestool>



FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENT BOARD MEMBERS

Why Serve as a Student Board Member?

- Personal growth: You will develop leadership skills through public speaking and working with adults in positions of power.
- Underrepresented points of view: As a student, you have a unique perspective on what happens in schools that is often not heard at the board level.
- Civics education: Serving on a school board is a great way to learn about local government.

What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Attend all meetings and read all materials beforehand.
- Gather information and opinions from the student body and report them to the board.
- Report on board activity to the student body and be accessible for input.
- Offer opinions and ask questions during board meetings.
- Build working relationships with board members and administrators.
- Respect the perspectives and experiences of board members.



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Key Tips for Success

- **Preparation:** Always attend meetings prepared, whether that includes reading over the board packet ahead of time, meeting with a mentor/assigned board member, or coming prepared to ask questions and contribute thoughts. Preparedness ensures you can actively participate and collaborate.
- **Communication with the Student Body:** Make students aware of the board activities and solicit their opinions. (It may be useful to collaborate on this with a principal or teacher):
 - Make morning announcements after board meetings.
 - Send out surveys asking questions about relevant issues.
 - Talk to students at lunchtimes.
 - Hold periodic town hall-style meetings for students to express opinions.
- **Running for Student Board Member:**
 - Speak with a teacher or principal to learn about how to run for student board member. Acquire any necessary nominations and/or signatures, and fill out any application materials.
 - Talk to students about why you want to be a student board member.
 - Focus on the policies you want to advocate for or change as a student member. As much as possible, make the election about policy and not popularity.
- **Making Change as a Student Board Member:** Think about the aspects of your school experience that could be improved, and talk to other students about their concerns. Bring the issues to the board and work with the board to find potential solutions. Consider joining a committee to get involved with policy making.



Advice from Former Student Board Members

“Leverage the fact that you’re the youngest person in the room... Don’t be afraid to lean into the fact that you’re a student.” - Ninah Jackson, MD

“Don’t be afraid to speak up or even to question the system that’s set up for you as the student rep.” - Alice Richards, NH

“Speak your opinion [even though] it can be intimidating.” - Juliet Chehade, NH

“Find one member who is always willing to hear your ideas out, to work with you, and to answer your questions when they come up.” - Sean Simonini, MA

“Reach out to individual members of the board and get to know them as people. A lot of the time, the board members admired the dedication of student board members, and getting to know them personally will make a huge difference in the board’s treatment towards you!” - Prescott Herzog, NH

Additional Resources

- Student Board Member Readiness Checklist: page 50

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Value of a Student Board Member

- The student member will provide a student perspective of school activities, culture, and issues to inform your decisions.
- Mutual learning: You and the student member(s) will both learn from each other during this process.

What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Solicit input from your student member(s) by asking specific questions at intervals during every meeting.
- Include student members in the formal “board comment and discussion” section of every meeting.
- Develop rapport with the student member by including them in board team-building and social activities, such as the annual board retreat.

- Assign a board member to mentor the student member and develop expectations for that mentor.



- Develop district policy around the roles and responsibilities of the student member.
- Treat the student board member with the same respect as any other board member.
- Respect the perspectives and unique experiences of the student board member.

Key Tips for Success

- Allow student board members an equal opportunity to comment during the discussion phase of motions and agenda items before the school board. For example, actively solicit student opinion frequently during meetings. Ask specific questions to elicit specific feedback.
- Ask student members to comment on more than the activities taking place at schools; involve them equally in questions of policy.
- Make board meetings accessible.

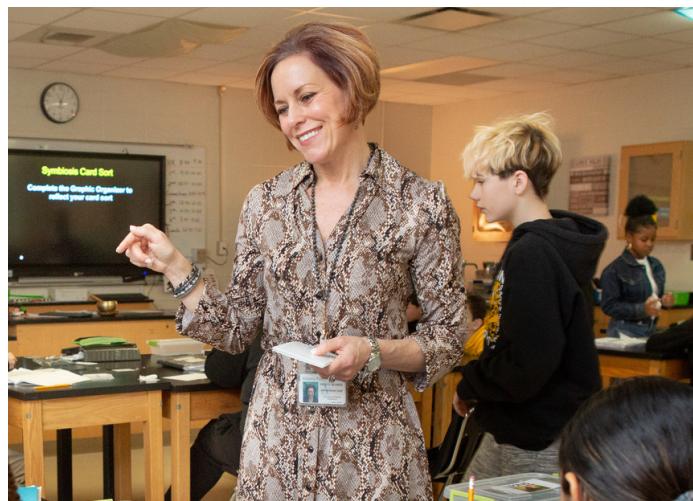
Additional Resources

- School Board Member Readiness Checklist: page 51
- School Reform Initiative Protocols:
Schoolreforminitiative.org/protocols/

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Value of a Student Board Member

- Student members help make sure the board understands what it's like in the school building from a student perspective, which administrators may be removed from.
- Students should be involved in education decision-making as the primary stakeholders of the school system.



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What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Superintendents:
 - Work with the board chair to make sure the board is committed to listening to the student board member(s).
 - Meet with student member(s) prior to their first meeting and periodically during the year.

“Take time to get to know the student rep before the first meeting.”

Jim Morse, Oyster River Superintendent

“Make [student board members] feel welcome, included, and valued.”

Jerry Frew, former Kearsarge Superintendent

- Principals:
 - Support student government in establishing election procedures (per NH RSA 194:23-f).
 - Support student board members in communication with the student body. This could include:
 - Facilitating mass emails
 - Helping the student organize town hall-style meetings and focus groups
 - Supporting the creation of a student advisory council
 - Periodically meet with student members during the year to discuss questions and concerns. Suggestion: at least once per month

Key Tips for Success

- Meet with student members at least monthly throughout the year.
- Respect student members' simultaneous working relationships with you and the members of the board.
- Respect the perspectives and unique experiences of the school board members, student and adult alike.

Additional Resources

- Administrator Readiness Checklist: page 51



FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Value of a Student Board Member

The student board member has a unique perspective as an individual who is in the school every day. They can communicate the on-the-ground reality of the school and classroom to the school board.



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What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Identify potential student board member candidates and encourage them to run for the position, especially those whose voices are underrepresented in student government.
- Ensure equal access to candidacy and elections; be open to holding student board member elections during class time to promote high voter turnout.
- Work with student member candidates and their families to ensure access to the position, including time and transportation.
- Keep up with board meetings and activity.

- Respect the perspectives and unique experiences of the student board members.
- Encourage student voice at the classroom and building levels.
 - Examples: focus groups, class-level feedback, student-designed learning
- Humanities/social studies teachers: Teach about the role of the school board.
 - Invite the student member to speak to your class.
- Advisers to student government or other civically-oriented clubs: Coordinate with the student board member to bring school board business to the student body.
 - Ensure equity throughout the student government election process.
 - Encourage the student government to listen to diverse/underrepresented student perspectives.
- Teachers with student board members in their class: Check in with the student board member about their experience in the role.




Key Tips for Success

- Promote equity both in the election process and in access to the position, including transportation and time.
- Encourage students to run for student board member.
- Check in with student board members about their experience.
- Communicate with families.

Additional Resources

- Quaglia Institute Guide to Focus Groups: <https://bit.ly/quagliaguide>
- Youth Participatory Action Research Hub: yparhub.berkeley.edu



Encouraging Student Voice in Classrooms

Allow students to have a say in their learning. This may include:

- *Giving feedback on lessons and teachers (e.g. through anonymous surveys).*
- *Making decisions about their own assignments and assessments.*
- *Engaging in student-centered learning and/or personalized learning.*
- *Participating in democratic classroom practices: Students and teachers develop norms and make decisions together.*

FOR STUDENT BODIES



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Value of a Student Board Member

- As a student, your opinion matters and should be represented on the school board. You have unique experiences because you are in the school building every day. Your student member can help get your opinions and concerns heard!
- Beyond the student board member, you also have the right to go to a school board meeting yourself and provide public comment. In fact, doing so strengthens student voice across the board and shows your support for the student board member position.

What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Individual Students:
 - Keep up with board meetings and activity.
 - Communicate questions, concerns, or opinions to your representative: Report to student member activities of interest, academic successes, school performances, sports scores, club activities, community service, etc.
 - Attend board meetings and provide public comment.

- Student Government: Per NH RSA 194:23-f, the student government of the high school shall establish procedures for the nomination and election of candidates for student board member.
 - The student government should create an official process for electing the student board member and advertise it to the student body. These procedures might include:
 - Nomination by students and/or teachers
 - Establishment of guidelines for campaigns, including:
 - Platforms
 - Debates/Q&A sessions
 - Spending limits, if applicable
 - Coordination between different high school buildings, if applicable
 - Selection of an election day and procedures for election, including:
 - Ballot form: paper or electronic?
 - Time of day: synchronous or asynchronous for the entire school?
 - Location: in a specific class, auditorium, or lunch room?

- The student government should create and publicize an official process for students to petition the student board member and present proposals and opinions to the school board, in accordance with NH RSA 194:23-f.
- Student voice in student government: The student government should be engaged on substantive policy issues, not just activities and events. They should strive to engage diverse members of the student body so that all perspectives are represented.

Key Tips for Success

- Attend any meetings the student board member holds and contribute your opinions.
- Ask the student board member to bring your concerns to the board.

Ensuring Effective, Diverse Leadership

The student government should make efforts to open the election to as many students from as many backgrounds as possible. Seek out candidates who are, for example:



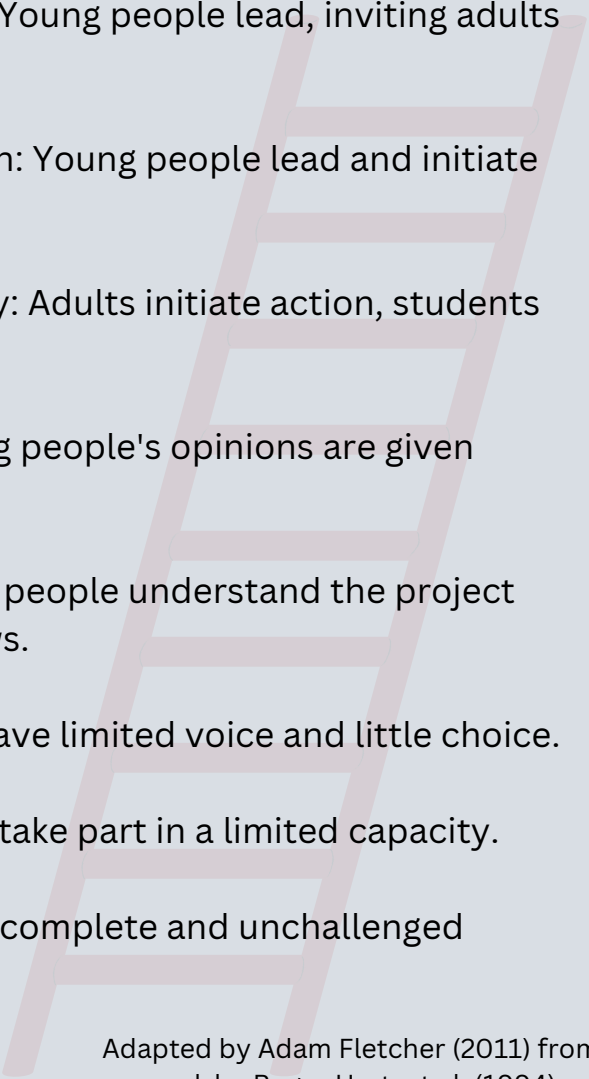
- Approachable and accessible to students
- Calm, thoughtful, and articulate
- Willing to dedicate time and effort to the position
- Willing to listen to and represent all students' opinions

To promote access to the position, don't limit the candidate pool by criteria such as GPA or previous leadership experience.

Additional Resources

- Student Voice: [Student Voice Ladder](#)
- [Center for American Progress Continuum of Student Voice](#)
- [Hart's Ladder](#)
- Youth Participatory Action Research Hub:
yparhub.berkeley.edu

Student Voice Ladder

- 
8. Student and Adult Equity: Young people lead, inviting adults to share in decision making.
 7. Completely Student-Driven: Young people lead and initiate action.
 6. Student and Adult Equality: Adults initiate action, students share in decision making.
 5. Students Consulted: Young people's opinions are given weight.
 4. Students Informed: Young people understand the project and adults respect their views.
 3. Tokenism: Young people have limited voice and little choice.
 2. Decoration: Young people take part in a limited capacity.
 1. Manipulation: Adults have complete and unchallenged authority.

Adapted by Adam Fletcher (2011) from work by Roger Hart, et al. (1994)

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Value of a Student Board Member

- The student voice is under-represented in school board meetings. If you don't have a student at the high school, the student member can help keep you informed.

What Are Your Responsibilities?

- Keep up with school board meetings and activity.
- Communicate questions, concerns, or opinions to the board.

Key Tips for Success

- Attend school board meetings.
- Respect the perspective and unique experience of the student board member. At meetings, treat the student board member with the same respect as other board members.
- Support student voice in your community.



Allison Shelley/the Verbatim Agency for EDUImages

Additional Resources

- Hart's Ladder: <https://bit.ly/hartsladderg>
- Center for American Progress Continuum of Student Voice: <https://bit.ly/svcontinuum>

TAKING STUDENT VOICE FURTHER



Allison Shelley/the Verbatim Agency for EDUImages

Having a student on the school board is an important step in elevating student voice, and many schools find that it leads to additional channels for student involvement. Here are some ideas for further amplifying student voice.

Create mission statements: Develop a district mission statement for student voice, including the student member of the board and any other student voice efforts (e.g. an advisory council). Use this mission statement to guide and assess student voice in the district.

Facilitate Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Youth Participatory Action Research is a process by which students conduct their own original research. Students are usually trained in conducting research and then go through an authentic data

collection process, eventually making policy recommendations. The process is usually guided by an adult. YPAR could be implemented in parallel with student membership on school boards, either involving the student member or not. It could help bring authentic, student-driven data, opinions, and recommendations to the board level, and could engage a much broader and more diverse group of students than a single position on the board.

- Useful resources:
 - UC Berkeley YPAR Hub, <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>
 - The Center for School Climate and Learning (CSCL)

Elect two student board members instead of one

- Variation: if the student members serve multiple one-year terms in a row, they can be staggered to always have one student member with one year of experience on the board at

the same time as a new student member. This creates a mechanism through which ongoing institutional knowledge among students is created and preserved.

In my experience, having two school board members provides a less intimidating environment for sharing ideas and expressing opinions. It's nice to have someone by your side, whether it be to work through thoughts together, bounce ideas off of one another, or just feel more comfortable having another student in the room.

**Juliet Chehade, former
Hopkinton student school
board member**

Create a student advisory council at the school level: More students can be involved in decision-making through student advisory councils. These can take a variety of forms.

- **Student board member advisory group:** The student board member plays a role in constructing an advisory group that they will work with directly. This is particularly useful in large districts (e.g. multiple high schools) where the student board member does not have day-to-day experience in every school.
- **Site council or student advisory council:** A council that is independent from the student member exists at the school level to make decisions. For example, such a body might include students, teachers, and community members and might make decisions on issues such as dress code and student discipline. These bodies often have a majority made up of students.

Regardless of the format, advisory councils should represent students with a wide range of lived experiences. Strive to authentically engage as many students as possible, including students of color, students with disabilities, students navigating poverty, LGBTQ+ students, and multilingual students for whom English is not their primary language, as much as possible.



Advisory Councils in Action

- Hanover High School (NH) created the Hanover High Council in 1971. This body includes students, faculty, community members, and one school board member. It has a well developed leadership structure and a wide range of responsibilities including allocating money for student activities and making recommendations on curriculum and personnel issues. For example, since 2012, the Council has been working to implement restorative justice practices at Hanover High School.
- The Pittsfield Site Council (NH) was created at the Pittsfield Middle High School in 2010. It is made up of students, faculty, and community members, and makes decisions on issues such as dress code, grading, and discipline. The school principal does have veto power over these decisions, but vetoes can be overruled by a two-thirds majority of the body.

Promote networking among student board members: Encouraging student board members from around the state and country to communicate with each other creates a meaningful opportunity for collaboration and learning. There is currently no known formal network in New Hampshire, but interested students could form a network and/or collaborate with each other informally by reaching out to other student board members.

- The National Student Board Member Association (NSBMA) is a recently formed group of students working to create a national network of student board members. Student members in NH can join the NSBMA by filling out this [Google form](https://bit.ly/nsbmasignup):
<https://bit.ly/nsbmasignup>

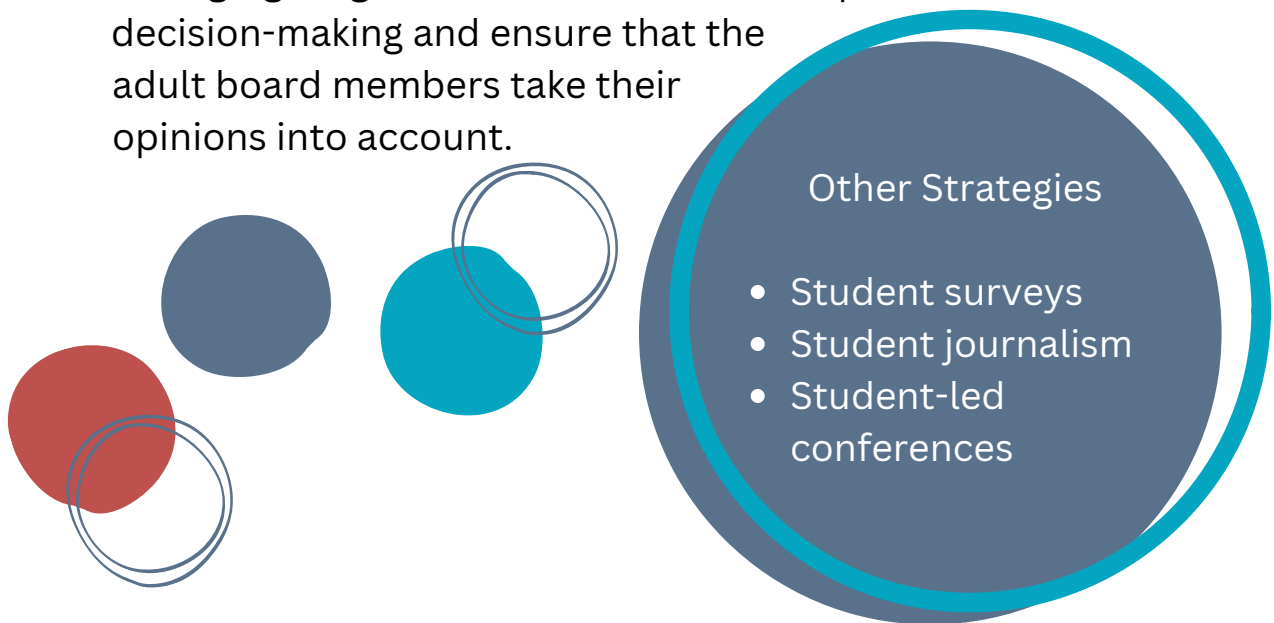
- **Student Voice:** Student Voice is a national organization run entirely by students that uses student voice to work for education equity. Students can join programs that range from organizing and journalism fellowships to one-time Learning Lab training events.

Expand voting rights: Student voice advocates argue strongly for voting rights for student board members. Current New Hampshire statute would need to be amended to allow student board members to hold binding voting rights. There are several types of voting rights:



- **Preferential/advisory voting rights:** In some districts, such as the Oyster River School District, student board members may vote on board items, and their votes are recorded in the minutes; however, their vote is not counted toward the actual total. When offering preferential voting rights, it's a good idea to let student board members vote before the rest of the board, giving the adult board members the chance to take the student's vote into consideration.

- **Partial voting rights:** Student board members may vote on many, but not all, board items, and their votes are counted. Restrictions may include budget, personnel, student discipline and legal items. (New Hampshire law prohibits student board members from any form of participation on confidential items).
 - Ideal implementation: Allow the student board member to vote on as many items as possible. Codify in policy the issues on which the student board member may vote.
- **Full voting rights:** Student board members may vote on all the same items as the adult board members. This is not statutorily allowed in New Hampshire, because NH RSA 194:23-c excludes student board members from voting and from participating on confidential items. However, if New Hampshire statute changed, boards could in theory extend voting rights to student board members.
- **Considerations:**
 - Voting rights put greater responsibility and time commitment on student members.
 - Voting rights give student members real power in education decision-making and ensure that the adult board members take their opinions into account.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Elements to Include

- Student safety
- Social-emotional health
- Authentic engagement of student voice

Potential Model Policies

- NHSBA existing model policies:
 - BBBF: Student-Members of the School Board:
<https://bit.ly/bbbfstudentsonboards>
 - JIB: Student Involvement in Decision-Making:
<https://bit.ly/studentdecisions>
- Example Policies in NH:
 - Oyster River Cooperative School District:
 - Student-Representatives to the School Board :
[_https://bit.ly/orstudentreps](https://bit.ly/orstudentreps)
 - Student-Representatives to the School Board Procedure:
<https://bit.ly/orstudentboardelection>
- Partnership for the Future of Learning/Georgia Youth Justice model policy: <https://bit.ly/pflmodelpolicy>
- Michigan Association of School Boards: Students on Boards Toolkit (model policy: pages 7-8): <https://bit.ly/michigantoolkit>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can students contribute to school board governance?

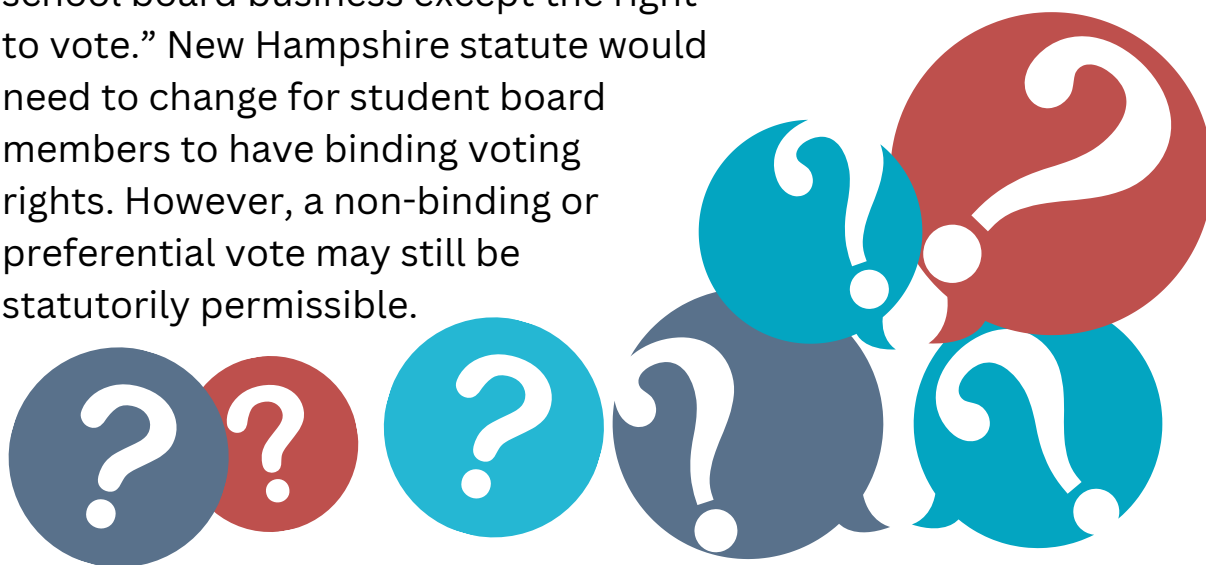
Youth have critical perspectives to share with school governance bodies and are capable of taking the role seriously. Being a student board member is a great opportunity for active civic participation.

Can student board members propose new policy?

Yes! Student board members may add items to the agenda and should be made aware of the procedure for doing so (for example, through the superintendent). They may also join committees of the board and work with adult board members to create policy.

Can student board members vote on policy?

Not currently. NH RSA 194:23-f says, “A student member shall have all the rights of a regular school board member regarding school board business except the right to vote.” New Hampshire statute would need to change for student board members to have binding voting rights. However, a non-binding or preferential vote may still be statutorily permissible.



How can a district protect the privacy and safety of a student board member?

Student board members should be given special board email addresses to use for board business. This email address can be made publicly available instead of the student's personal or school email. In the event the student member is singled out, harassed, or otherwise targeted by members of the public, the board and/or administration should be prepared to speak up on behalf of the student, and/or allow the student to address the situation in an appropriate manner. Policies should be developed to protect and support student board members who are subject to harassment or targeted attacks.

Are student board members elected?

Yes — by the student body. NH RSA 194:23-f requires student board members to be elected by a simple majority of the high school student body. As such, they speak for an underrepresented constituency: students. They are not elected by the voter population of the school district.

Do student board members have terms?

Yes. NH RSA 194:23-f states that student board members shall serve one-year terms. However, it does not limit the number of terms a student may serve. It is recommended that student board member terms run from July 1- June 30 to align with the most common national practice.

ANNOTATED RESOURCE LIST

Student Board Member Toolkits:

- [Vermont School Boards Association: Guide to Student Voice in Education Governance \(2021\)](#) *Adapted from the Alaska Association of School Boards Report, this is another way of outlining the entire process.*
- [Association of Alaska School Boards: Youth on Boards \(2018\)](#) *This is another way of outlining the process.*
- [Michigan Association of School Boards: Students on Boards](#) *Includes resources from SoundOut and a sample student board member policy.*
- [SoundOut Guide to Students on School Boards \(2014\)](#) *Overviews information about the entire process of having students on school boards.*

Orientation and Training Materials:

- [National Student Board Member Association Student Board Member Training](#) *The National Student Board Member Association is a new organization, by and for student board members. This is their guide to the topics that need to be covered in training.*
- [MA Association of Student Representatives Student Rep Handbook](#) *Massachusetts is one of the only states with an existing student board member organization. This organization, MASR, created a handbook for student board members to get ready for the position.*
- [NH School Boards Association: These are the NH School Boards Association's onboarding materials for adult school board members. These are highly applicable to training for incoming student board members.](#)
 - [Roles and Responsibilities of NH School Boards](#)
 - [School District Budgeting](#)
 - [Role of a School Board Member](#)
- [VSBA New School Board Member Toolkit](#)

Assessing Student Voice/Student Membership:

- [UP for Learning Youth-Adult Partnership reflection tool](#): *A resource with rubrics and guided questions to help youth-adult partnerships consider their success on three dimensions: communication and collaboration, shared decisions, and shared responsibility.*

Visualizing Student Voice:

- [Student Voice: Student Voice Ladder Adapted by Adam Fletcher from Roger Hart \(1994\) and SoundOut Ladder article](#)
- [Center for American Progress Continuum of Student Voice Adapted from Toshalis and Nakkula \(2012\) and Mitra and Gross \(2009\)](#)
- [Hart's Ladder Another adaptation of Hart et al \(1994\) by the Youth-Based Health Alliance — includes examples of each level](#)

Other:

- National Student Board Member Association (NSBMA) *A new organization aiming to bring student board members together across the country, and ultimately provide training materials and other resources*
- [Student Board Member Policy Recommendations](#)
- [Google form to join slack network](#)
- [Oregon Student Voice: importance of student voice in K-12 education A student voice group in Oregon that has published policy briefs about students in education governance](#)
 - [Student Voices in District Decision Making](#)
- [RH Student Voice Toolkit](#)
- [YATST Youth-Adult Partnership Best Practices and Self-Assessment Tool From UP for Learning](#)
- [Building Public Understanding: Participatory Action Research Toolkit A guide to YPAR from the group Building Public Understanding](#)
- [Quaglia Institute Guide to Focus Groups](#)
- [School Reform Initiative: Protocols for meetings/conversations Useful protocols for conducting productive conversations](#)
- [Center for American Progress Elevating Student Voice in Education report An extensive research report about different forms of student voice in education](#)

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READINESS CHECKLISTS

Readiness Checklist for Student Board Members

- Am I aware of my job description and what the board expects of me?
- Am I aware of the roles this board plays?
- Has the board communicated the specific objectives they have for me as a youth member?
- Have I identified or been assigned a mentor for my role on the board?
- Do I have the abilities, and knowledge necessary to make ongoing contributions to the board?
- Do I work to know individual board members outside of board meetings?
- Am I aware of the written and unwritten agenda and flow of the board's meetings?
- Am I willing to learn through open and positive conversations about my performance?
- Am I aware of the needs, public positions, and opinions of the youth I represent?
- Do I have the abilities and knowledge to correspond about my governance activities with my community and the group(s) I represent?
- Do I have the abilities, and knowledge to take leadership roles on committees and/or the board?
- Am I willing to reflect on what I want to get out of this experience and am willing to share it with the rest of the board?
- Am I willing to ask questions that give me a better understanding of board activities?
- When receiving feedback, information, and answers to questions, do I recognize the expertise and experience of the adults on my board?
- Am I willing to give my time and attention to all board issues rather than just the ones that affect me and those I represent?
- Do the adult members of the board hold any stereotypes about young people?
- Do I hold any stereotypes about adult board members?
- Have the adult board members received training that allows them to consider their assumptions about "kids these days?"
- Does the board show its appreciation for the good work that I am doing and have done?
- Am I mentoring other potential youth representatives who may replace me?

Readiness Checklist for School Boards and Administrators

- How can the board ensure that it has the time and resources to make a commitment to effective and meaningful youth participation/representation?
- What are the by-laws and policies that the board has, or needs, to ensure that young people are meaningfully and effectively represented?
- What are the board's vision and goals for youth participation?
- How can the board reflect on its current climate and identify ways to make board participation more inclusive to youth?
- Has the board defined a selection process? If appropriate, has the board outlined recruitment criteria for new representatives? (e.g., motivation, diversity, competence, quality of past experiences, etc.)
- Is there a mentor or coaching system in place?
- Does the board have a system in place for youth representatives to train new youth representatives?
- Are young people included in all decisions, not just those affecting their age group?
- Does the board's culture promote open discussion?
Is there time for all representatives (including youth) to speak at meetings?
- Are young people's terms of office consistent with those of adults?
- Can your youth representative substantially influence governance of the organization?
- Do young people have access to the resources and technology needed to participate in your board's work?
- Is there informal time to network and build relationships with other representatives?
- Are young people encouraged to keep in touch with their peers about their governance role?
- Is there a place where young people can voice their concerns outside the meeting environment?
- Do adults ask the youth representative(s) how they can better work together and take these recommendations seriously?
- If youth are confused about an issue, how does the board respond and guide them to the information they need?
- Is equal weight given to youth representative opinions?
- Do board representatives take the initiative to get to know all the representatives (including youth) of your board on a personal level?

- Does the board provide support for young people on speaking up in adult groups?
- Do you offer training for young people and adults in governance skills and board work?
- Are youth representatives briefed ahead of time on how to read financial statements?
- Are meetings accessible to students (time, location, seat at the table, etc.)?
- Are there adequate precautions and protocols to ensure that student board members are safe and protected at all times?