

STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER TOOLKIT



Preparing for a School Board Member: Key Points

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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
- For School Board Members
- For Administrators
- For School Staff
- For Student Bodies
- For Community Members

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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.



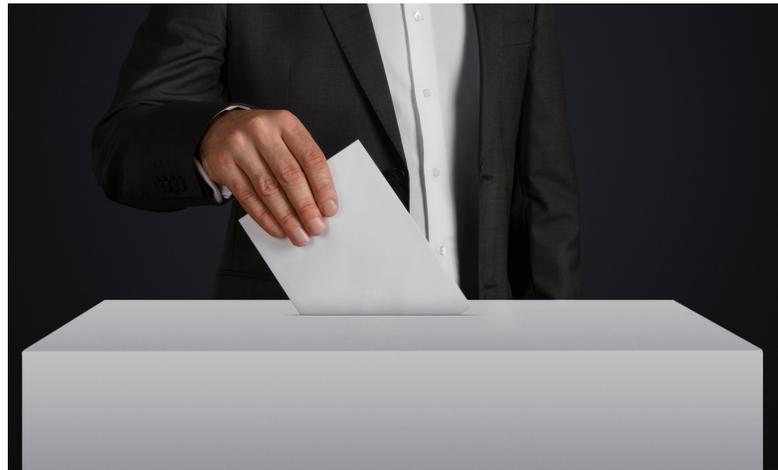
The board and student members periodically reflect on the experience and work to improve student representation on the board.



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>

