



# Bringing Student Representatives to the School Board Table



## Why Include Youth on Your School Board?

*Nothing about us without us.* This slogan has been used by participants in causes to accentuate their need for participation in leadership decisions directly impacting their lives. At the school board level, when youth representation is intentional and supported, school boards benefit from student members' points of view, creative thinking, inquiring natures, and open-mindedness. Fully engaged youth leaders are essential to building a positive school climate, learning about student concerns, and making good decisions as a school board. Student board representatives can meaningfully participate in the governance process of their district, learn essential democratic skills, and represent and advocate for their peers.

A youth presence can result in new energy, an increased commitment to the work of the board, and a stronger sense of connection to the community. Often board members are more aware of the responsibility to model ideal board behaviors and processes, while also elevating student perspectives on education policy decisions that they may not have otherwise considered. We all benefit by having young people engaged in the institutions of a democratic society.

## What Can Student Board Representatives Do?

**Student board representatives can:**

- Attend open meetings.
- Receive all open session materials.
- Openly express opinions and advocate.
- Be appointed to subcommittees.
- Attend other functions of the board.

**Student board representatives cannot:**

- Participate in or receive closed session material.
- Attend executive session meetings.
- Formally vote.





## Is There a Policy that Covers Student Representation to the Board?

The Illinois School Code allows a board to appoint a student to the board to serve in an advisory capacity for a term the board determines (105 ILCS 5/10-10). The student may not vote or attend any closed or “executive” session of the board. A board that desires to include a policy to appoint a student member may refer to **PRESS** (Policy Reference Education Subscription Service) sample policy 2:40, *Board Member Qualifications*, and its footnotes.

## Are We Ready?

### Readiness Assessment

*(Adapted from “14 Points” from Youth on Board)*

School boards can use this checklist to assess the board’s ability to have meaningful youth representation. This tool can help everyone involved comprehend the necessary adjustments and measure their commitment to these changes. Though certainly not necessary to meet all these criteria, boards are encouraged to take the following into consideration.

- ☐ Does the board have the time and resources to make a commitment to effective youth representation?
- ☐ Has the board created policies stating that young people will be a permanent part of its governance structure?
- ☐ Is the board clear about why it is involving young people in governance?
- ☐ Is the board willing to adjust its culture to make meetings youth friendly?
- ☐ Has the board defined a selection process?
- ☐ Is there an adult liaison/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 issues, not just those affecting their age group?
- ☐ Does the board’s culture promote open discussion?
- ☐ Is there time for all representatives (including young people) to speak at meetings?
- ☐ Do young people have access to the resources and technology needed to participate in the board’s work?
- ☐ Is there informal time to network and build relationships with other representatives?
- ☐ Are young people encouraged to stay connected with their peers about their governance role?
- ☐ Do adults ask youth representative(s) how they can better work together, and take these recommendations seriously?
- ☐ Does the district offer training for young people and adults in governance skills and board work?

## We are Ready and Committed. What is the Process to Bring Student Representation to the Board Table?

When bringing a student representative to the table, the following are items and resources to consider:

- You may need to adjust the board structure, protocols, and policies to accommodate the newly created position.







- Consider having a minimum of two student board representatives. This will avoid tokenism, increase diversity of thought, and make it easier for youth to participate.
- Create a description of the roles, responsibilities, key commitments, and timing so youth can make an informed decision if this is something that matches their interests, schedules, etc. Promote the benefits of involvement: it is a learning opportunity and a way to contribute to the community; and most importantly, it is an opportunity for youth to voice their concerns and advocate for their peers.
- Create an application, interview process, and communication plan.
- Designate an adult board member as a liaison/mentor to the students. This will allow consistency and be a source of contact for the student representatives.

**Resources ([available online at IASB.com](https://iasb.com)):**

- Sample Student Representative to the Board Descriptor
- Sample Student Representative Application
- Sample Interview questions
- Sample Student Representative Oath of Office



## **We Have Appointed Our Student Representative to the School Board. Now What?**

Just like you would welcome and have a formal orientation for a newly elected board member, create an orientation process for student representatives:

- Assign a board mentor/liaison to be the point of contact for the students.
- Include the new representatives in appropriate board training and events.
- Provide representatives with the history of the board, including past actions taken, and other useful information. The more newer members know, the more effective and thoughtful partners on your board they will be.
- Share minutes from the previous meeting, a copy of the agenda, and any materials needed before the next meeting. Communicate how representatives will receive this information in the future.
- Take time to help build a professional relationship with each student representative and board member to encourage a greater comfort level for the student and a better connection with the board.



Delegate responsibilities. Some possibilities for youth member responsibilities include:

- Placing a member report at the beginning of each meeting. This will allow your student members to share their involvement in board projects and report back from any other assigned groups or subcommittees.
- Nominating youth to serve as co-chairs of your board and/or as members of your smaller subcommittees.
- Having representatives speak at events on behalf of the school board/district.

## Board Best Practices for Thriving Youth Involvement

(From *Principles of Youth Voice – Washington Youth Voice Handbook*)

- **Respect.** A culture of respect provides all participants with opportunities to speak and learn from each other. This is particularly important for youth to see and understand. Respect builds up comfort for asking questions, making mistakes, or asking for changes to meet their needs as board members.
- **Positive communication.** Youth are best heard when adults step back and listen to understand. Honest, positive, and on-going communication is needed for youth to come forward and explain their perspectives and ideas for board direction and decisions.
- **Investment.** Young people need access to ongoing information, training, and support to be successful as board representatives. Youth must be able to develop their own skills and practice them often to have the confidence to act and speak up in adult situations. Investing in young people on your board takes time and resources, but the results are worth it for the entire board.
- **Meaningful involvement.** Youth roles and board responsibilities should be an integral part of the way the board functions. Developing meaningful engagement means that the recruitment, roles, training, and preparation of young people are well thought out and supported across all activities and processes of the board.

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