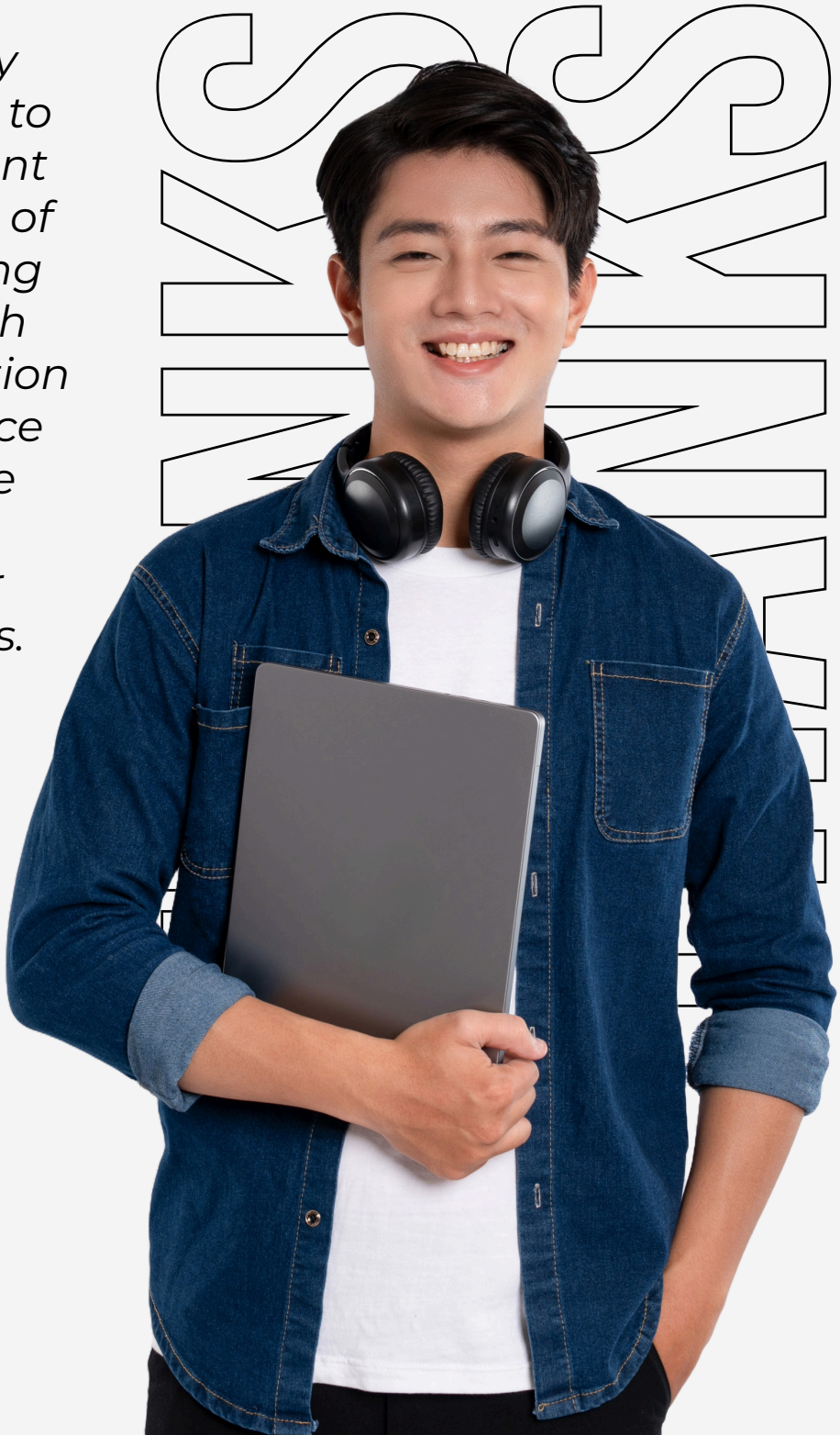
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

ADDING A STUDENT MEMBER TO YOUR BOE

WPSBA
WESTCHESTER PUTNAM
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

DATA!

Recognizing that many districts will be looking to add one or more student members to the Board of Education in the coming year in accordance with New York State Education Law, we asked for advice from districts that have already incorporated student voice into their board table discussions.



Many thanks to the student board members and superintendents of Croton-Harmon UFSD, Hastings-on-Hudson UFSD, Katonah-Lewisboro UFSD, Putnam Valley CSD and White Plains City SD for participating in our survey to understand the role, expectations, selection process and onboarding of student board members in those districts.

PROFILE

EFFECTIVE STUDENT VOICE

POSITION

According to the law, student board members must have been a student in the high school for at least one year prior to service as an ex-officio (non-voting) member of the Board of Education. Districts with student board members have typically chosen one or more high school seniors to serve in the role for one-year terms. Ensuring that alternates are available to allow student board members to coordinate their schedules with attendance at board meetings is one reason that boards have appointed two or three student board members. Districts have also chosen to have two students serve two-year terms (junior and senior year) to ensure continuity and to provide a role model for the junior student board member to learn from.

Student board members will quickly realize that everyone wants to hear the voice of students at the board table, and adults in the room will be silent and pay attention when they are speaking. Students who embrace the role will look to seek opinions and questions from a range of students, not just those in their social group, so they can effectively present a broader range of student perspectives. Articulating student views on learning, school culture and areas for growth, in addition to student activities and celebrations, are an excellent way for student board members to impact the themes and issues that will be discussed at the Board table. Effective student board members comport themselves calmly, professionally and in a good-natured fashion. Excellent student board members are good public speakers who communicate in a clear, accessible and compelling manner and who have the courage to speak up, even when student perspectives may contradict adult views. (See More info for a sample of selection criteria for student board members.)

ROLE

While most board policies (see More info) regarding ex-officio student board members outline the role of student board members in terms of voting and meeting attendance, a shared understanding of the expectations of student moving into the role of Board of Education trustee can be helpful for the entire governance team to understand.

INTENTION

MEETING ATTENDANCE

All student board members and superintendents expect student board members to attend board meetings. Given the difficulty with student schedules, some districts choose to emphasize the requirement up front in the selection process of student board members. Other districts ensure that more than one student board member is recognized by the board so that one student will not be expected to show up, and potentially stay late, at every meeting of the Board of Education.

While recognizing the limitations on student time and availability, some districts offer student members the opportunity to serve on Board committees. Even when the offer is made, however, most student board members do not have the time for the additional volunteer effort and are more likely to only attend meetings of the entire Board.

All districts that we surveyed do not include student board members in board retreats or executive sessions of the Board of Education.

LIAISON ROLE

The liaison role of the student board member is most evident when it comes to reporting on student activities at school board meetings. All the student board members and superintendents expect that regular public reports are expected of each student sitting at the board table.

Most student board members and superintendents also see the position as a two-way liaison, assuming that student board members will report to student government on board decisions, or issues that come up at the board table. The expectation is not universal, however, so it is helpful to clarify the expectations up front with candidates for student board members. There is less consensus over whether the student board member expects to be formally or informally polling students on issues that come before the board. Some superintendents and student assume it is part of their role, and others do not consider it necessary. Again, a discussion as to what is expected and how the liaison role to the student body is expected to work would be valuable to the student board member and the board governance team.

SELECT

The new NYS law requiring student board members allows for a great deal of district discretion in how to select a student for the Board of Education. As one might expect, there are pros and cons to any selection process. Here are some mechanisms that have been used to select student board members in our region, with the positives and negatives as outlined by the superintendents and student board members themselves.

PROCESS

Selection Process	Pros	Cons
All high school students vote	• Reflects all student voices • Giving a speech about qualifications was good preparation for board service	• Can be a popularity contest.
Student government selects	• Reflects limited student voice • Students have experience and interest in student government	• No faculty input • Not everyone involved in student government is available for additional evening meetings • Anyone not involved in student government would not have the opportunity
High school students and counselors select through application and interview process	• Board of Education is not involved • Students seek to participate • Application is concise and relevant to the position • Interview process with administrators was conversational and comfortable	• Application needs clear information on the requirements and expectations of student board member
Current student board members interview and recommend candidates to HS Principal (existing procedure)	• Current student board members understand the position and interview questions were effective and appropriate	• District revising procedure to include additional members in a selection committee to ensure that process includes input from more students.

ONBOARD

The onboarding process truly begins with the information sent out to potential student board members and continues throughout their term of office. Clear guidelines as to length and frequency of board meetings, in addition to the expectations that will be placed on student board members are very helpful in allowing students to proactively consider if the position is the right one for them.

All the districts surveyed ensured that new student board members met with the Superintendent and/or Board President to discuss their role on the Board of Education. The student board members surveyed mentioned that the ability to ask questions and get guidance from the current student board members and the superintendent were instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition. Information that students suggest passing on to future student board members include details of the format and content of student reports and a clear overview of how board meetings are conducted. Student board members who wish to reach out for assistance should know who to contact for help understanding their role.

When asked what they wished they had known to better prepare for the role, a couple of student board members passed on some words of wisdom about how to best present student voice at the board table.

"The student opinion is very important in helping to provide insight on things that in the end affect them the most. Making sure that what you say is adding to a conversation and not directly attacking any particular concept or thought is important as you don't want to offend any group of individuals. You definitely need to think about what you say before you state anything and be knowledgeable on that fact."

"So many of the Board's decisions can seem one-sided depending on who you talk to. Getting as many points of view as you can and speaking up for your own opinion is the best way to advocate!"

MORE

BOARD POLICIES:

- Croton-Harmon Board Policy 2125: Ex-Officio Non-Voting Student Trustee
- Hastings-on-Hudson Board Policy 2245: Student Liaison Representative
- Katonah-Lewisboro Board Policy 2245: Ex-Officio Student Member of the Board of Education
- Putnam Valley Board Policy 2245: Student Member of the Board

SAMPLE: SELECTION CRITERIA FOR STUDENT BOARD MEMBER

Selection Criteria (from Hastings High School Principal memo dated January 2025)

A. Leadership Qualities
    a. Ability to organize and motivate others
    b. Initiative and problem-solving skills
    c. Commitment to public speaking
    d. Decision-making capabilities

B. Communication Skills
    a. Active listening skills
    b. Clear and concise communication
    c. Ability to effectively convey student experience

C. Representation of Student Body
    a. Awareness of diverse student perspectives
    b. Willingness to engage with students from different backgrounds
    c. Ability to advocate for the needs of the entire student body

D. Academic Standing
    a. Maintaining a good academic record
    b. Demonstrating commitment to learning

E. School Involvement
    a. Participation in extracurricular activities
    b. Leadership roles in clubs or organizations
    c. Prior experience in student government

F. Personal Qualities
    a. Responsibility and reliability
    b. Positive attitude and enthusiasm
    c. Commitment to serving the student community