WPSBA
WESTCHESTER PUTNAM
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

STRENGTHENING THE STUDENT BOARD ROLE

A Resource for School Boards & Superintendents

WHY STUDENT BOARD MEMBERS MATTER

Student board members bring a perspective that cannot be found in reports, surveys, or data alone. By sharing firsthand experiences and insights from their peers, they help boards better understand how decisions may affect students and school communities.

When student voice is intentionally included in board discussions, it strengthens decision-making, builds trust, and demonstrates a commitment to meaningful engagement. Student board members also gain valuable leadership experience while serving as a bridge between students and the board of education.

Creating a positive and supportive experience requires more than simply providing a seat at the table. It involves preparing student board members for success, fostering an environment where they feel welcomed and respected, and ensuring their perspectives are genuinely considered.

★ **Best Practice:** Student board members are most effective when they are viewed as partners in the governance process and are given the support and encouragement to participate confidently.



STARTING STRONG

Appointment & Selection

Thoughtful planning before the school year begins helps students feel prepared and confident in their new role.

Recommended Practices:

- Begin selection process in spring.
- Appoint the student board member before the start of the school year.
- Clearly communicate expectations during recruitment.
- Consider leadership potential, communication skills, and a willingness to represent all students.

Best Practice

Provide students with enough time to prepare before their first meeting. An early appointment allows for orientation, relationship-building, and a smoother transition into the role.

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 & interest in student government	• No faculty input • Not everyone involved in student govt. is available for additional evening meetings • Anyone not involved in student govt. wouldn't have the opportunity
High school students & counselors select through application & interview process	•BOE is not involved • Students seek to participate Application is concise & relevant to the position • Interview process with administrators was conversational & comfortable	• Application needs clear information on the requirements & expectations of student board member
Current student board members interview and recommend candidates to HS Principal	• Current student board members understand the position & interview questions were effective & appropriate	• District revising procedure to include additional members in a selections committee to ensure that process includes input from more students.

ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

- *District Email*
- *Meeting Schedule*
- *Mentor Assigned*
- *Board Policies Reviewed*
- *Introduced to Board*
- *Board Packet Explained*
- *Reporting Expectations Discussed*



Defining the Role

A successful experience begins with a shared understanding of the student board member's role. Before the first meeting, discuss expectations, reporting responsibilities, communication, and how the student will contribute to board discussions.

Consider discussing:

- Meeting attendance/participation
- Student reports or updates
- Gathering student feedback
- Communication with the board and student body
- Opportunities for asking questions and contributing

★ Best Practice

Don't assume students understand how board meetings work. Take time to explain the process and answer questions.

Best Practice
Student voice is strongest when students are invited into the conversation—not just given time on the agenda.

CREATING A MEANINGFUL STUDENT BOARD MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Student voice is most valuable when boards intentionally create opportunities for students to contribute, ask questions, and share perspectives. A supportive environment doesn't happen by chance—it develops through clear communication, thoughtful preparation, and ongoing encouragement.

Support the Student

- *Assign a board member or administrator as a mentor.*
- *Provide a district email address & access to publicly available BOE materials.*
- *Explain meeting procedures, terminology, and expectations.*
- *Check in before and after meetings.*
- *Encourage questions and provide constructive feedback.*

Encourage Student Voice

- *Invite the student into discussions, not just student reports.*
- *Ask for their perspective on issues affecting students.*
- *Consider how policies and decisions may impact students.*
- *Create opportunities for the student to share feedback gathered from peers.*
- *Recognize contributions and the value of student insight.*

Where is your board today?

COMPLIANCE	DEVELOPING	INTEGRATED	EMPOWERMENT
Student participation meets the legal requirement, with limited support or integration.	Expectations and supports are in place to help the student board member succeed.	Student voice is intentionally included in board discussions and meeting practices.	Student perspectives are valued as an integral part of board governance.

Every board starts somewhere. The goal is continuous growth by taking intentional steps to strengthen student voice and create meaningful opportunities for participation. (Adapted from the New York State School Boards Association's Board Readiness Continuum.)

"Having better instruction and reaching out for assistance would have made creating my reports much easier."

"The student opinion is very important in helping provide insight on things that affect students the most."

"Giving students an overview of how board meetings are conducted would be helpful so they know what to expect and can prepare accordingly."

SHARE RESOURCES:
Collect materials that will help future students get off to a strong start.

EXIT INTERVIEW:
Invite honest feedback about their experience and suggestions for improvement.

INTRODUCE THE INCOMING STUDENT:
Encourage a smoother transition through peer connection.



END OF YEAR REFLECTION:
Take time to discuss what worked well, what was challenging, & lessons learned.

CREATE CONTINUITY:
Build on what worked and continue to improve each year.

TRANSITION & SUSTAINABILITY

Quotes above are student reflections from WPSBA's 2025–26 Student Board Member End-of-Year Survey

★ Best Practice
Ask outgoing student board members to share advice and resources with the incoming representative.

TOP 10
TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Add student role and expectations to board operating protocols
2. Identify mentor position and expectations for mentorship
3. Develop district information package for each new student member
4. Review board operating protocols with student
5. Provide a specific board email for student member(s)
6. Provide ongoing development and networking opportunities for student board member
7. Incorporate student into non-confidential board communications
8. Check in with the student board member regularly
9. Solicit student input into board discussions
10. Assess your student board member experience and contributions, continually moving your district toward empowering student BOEs.

WESTPUT IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU IN THIS JOURNEY

Encourage your students to attend WPSBA's **Student BOE Connect Series**.

Info can be found at wpsba.org

Reach out any time
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