

Guide  
*to*  
Student  
Voice  
*in*  
*Education  
Governance*

A resource from the  
**VERMONT  
SCHOOL  
BOARDS  
ASSOCIATION**

Great Governance, Excellent Education, Strong Communities





## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

This guide is intended to provide school boards and administrators with general guidance and information to assist them in engaging students on public school boards. It includes information

to consider when debating the inception, preparing the board and the youth for the task and implementation. This document should not be relied upon for legal advice. We recommend all boards consult with their attorney if they have legal questions.



# Student Representation *and* Youth/Adult Partnership *on* Vermont School Boards

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## *Introduction*

# Student Voice in Education Governance

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## **GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENT REPRESENTATION ON YOUR SCHOOL BOARD**

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**W**hat is the place of student voice in the governing of public schools? As the people for whom the system is created, designed and operated to serve, do students have a role in influencing the decisions that guide our schools?

For an increasing number, the answer is "yes."

Based on some twenty years of experience with student representation on school boards around the state and the state board of education, there is a growing consensus in the public education community that Vermont should continue to embrace youth voice in education governance and continue to refine the practice.

The material that follows is intended to provide guidance for students and adults who want to make a place for student voice in the governance of our schools.

As a result, we hope this guide helps move the big questions and the specific details forward.

We are indebted to a community of students, teachers, administrators and board representatives from around the state as well as students, teachers, administrators and board representatives from around the country who have helped shape our efforts. There is a complete list of people who have participated directly in the development of this guide at the end of this document.

At the start, we want to acknowledge the debt we owe to the Association of Alaska School Boards, The Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement and The Alaska Health and Social Services Division of Behavioral Health who together published "The Power of an Untapped Resource: Exploring Youth Representation on Your Board or Committee", with the leadership of Hans Bernard, an Alaskan student. Much of the material in this guide is adapted from their work.



The contents of this guide address the following areas:

- ✓ **RATIONALE, READINESS AND PREPARATION**
- ✓ **SELECTION PROCESS**
- ✓ **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**
- ✓ **TRAINING AND SUPPORT**
- ✓ **MEETING DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT**
- ✓ **DECISION MAKING AND VOTING**
- ✓ **COMMUNICATIONS**

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## WHY HAVE YOUTH ON YOUR BOARD?

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A greater number of Vermont youth want to participate in the governance of their schools, and an increasing number of previously adult-only boards are soliciting youth involvement.

Vermont school boards benefit from the creative thinking, point of view and type of questions that youth voice brings to the table, and youth representatives gain leadership skills and valuable life experience.

Students, like any new adult representative, require training and support to be successful. We cannot assume that every new representative understands how boards operate, the laws and rules that define meetings, the culture of the board, how Robert's Rules of Order work, or any of the other aspects of effective governance.

A young person - like an adult new to this work - who serves on a board, should be trained and mentored.

Individually, youth who participate in governance roles with adults gain new skills, develop responsibility, learn citizenship, and acquire the assets needed to succeed as adults.

In the big picture, we all benefit by having young people engaged in the institutions of a democratic society.

Here are a few reflections from work around the state and country.

- ✓ **ADULTS WHO WORK WITH YOUTH ON BOARDS GAIN INSIGHTS ABOUT YOUTH, BROADEN THEIR OWN PERSPECTIVES AND HAVE A MORE POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH.**
- ✓ **BOARDS THAT HAVE INCORPORATED YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES ARE IMPROVED BY YOUTHFUL ENERGY, PERSPECTIVES AND INSIGHTS—PROGRAMS AND SERVICES ARE IMPROVED AS A RESULT.**
- ✓ **ADULT BOARD REPRESENTATIVES CAN BE REVITALIZED AND THUS WILL INCREASE THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANIZATION AND GAIN A STRONGER SENSE OF COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS WHEN SERVING WITH YOUTH BOARD REPRESENTATIVES.**



# Preparation for the Transition

## PREPARING YOUR BOARD

Boards tend to work effectively with youth if, prior to including youth representatives, they are willing to:

- ✓ **BE FLEXIBLE WITH MEETING TIMES AND LOCATIONS IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE SCHOOL SCHEDULES.**
- ✓ **HOLD MEETINGS AT TIMES THAT ARE CONVENIENT FOR YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES. TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION FACTORS SUCH AS SCHOOL, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, WORK AND FAMILY OBLIGATIONS. SOMETIMES THESE TIMES ARE NOT CONVENIENT FOR OTHER BOARD REPRESENTATIVES, SO TRY AND REACH A COMPROMISE.**
- ✓ **ADJUST THEIR CULTURE FROM DOING THINGS TO AND FOR YOUTH TO WORKING WITH YOUTH.**
- ✓ **GIVE UP SOME TIME-RELATED EFFICIENCY WHILE NEW REPRESENTATIVES ARE BECOMING COMFORTABLE WITH THE CULTURE AND PRACTICES OF THE BOARD AND THE USE OF ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER.**
- ✓ **MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS TO THE WAY THE BOARD SUPPORTS ITS REPRESENTATIVES. (I.E. PAYING YOUNG PEOPLE IN ADVANCE FOR THEIR EXPENSES, PROVIDING SNACKS AT MEETINGS AND/OR EXPLAINING THE YOUNG PERSON'S ROLE TO PARENTS.)**
- ✓ **ADVISE YOUR BOARD IN ADVANCE OF WHO YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES ARE AND WHEN THEY WILL BEGIN ATTENDING MEETINGS.**



Once your board has decided it is willing to make adjustments and accommodations for youth representatives, some of the following actions would be appropriate for your board to take.

- ✓ **PROVIDE SOME RESEARCH BASIS FOR WHY INVOLVING YOUTH IS IMPORTANT (E.G. HELPING YOUTH SUCCEED, LEARNING LEADERSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS, IMPROVING DECISION MAKING, IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE, INCREASING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT).**
- ✓ **PROPOSE THE IDEA OF HAVING YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES ON YOUR BOARD. REPRESENTATIVE CHANGE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT - SO BE PERSISTENT AND LET THE OTHER BOARD MEMBERS GET COMFORTABLE WITH THE IDEA.**
- ✓ **HAVE A VISION FOR WHAT THE BOARD COULD ACHIEVE BY WORKING WITH YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES AND SHARE IT WITH YOUR BOARD MEMBERS.**
- ✓ **GIVE POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF YOUTH ACTION/ACTIVITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**
- ✓ **SET MEETINGS AT TIMES THAT WOULD BE CONVENIENT FOR YOUTH TO ATTEND.**
- ✓ **PERSONALLY INVITE YOUTH TO COME ATTEND THE MEETING AS A GUEST.**
- ✓ **STAY POSITIVE AND RESOLUTE. BOARDS ARE OFTEN COMPRISED OF THE BUSIEST MEN AND WOMEN IN A COMMUNITY.**

- ✓ **UNDERSTAND THAT ANY CHANGE IN THE CULTURE OF THE BOARD WILL CAUSE SHIFTS THAT WILL BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED. THE YOUTH WILL BE MORE READILY WELCOMED IF LESS DRASTIC CHANGES OCCUR.**
- ✓ **REDUCE THE USE OF ACRONYMS OR PROVIDE ALL YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES AND ADULT BOARD MEMBERS WITH A CARD OF COMMONLY USED TERMS AND ACRONYMS.**
- ✓ **REACH OUT TO OTHER BOARDS THAT HAVE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES TO LEARN FROM THEIR EXPERIENCES.**

Once your board has agreed to have youth representation, a few logistics are necessary. Of course each board culture will determine the extent of the youth's role and involvement. Here are some things to consider:

- ✓ **BECAUSE VERMONT'S SCHOOL BOARDS ARE PUBLIC BOARDS, CURRENT STATE LAW LIMITS YOUTH REPRESENTATION TO AN ADVISORY CAPACITY. IN THIS CASE, INSURE THAT YOUTH INPUT IS OBTAINED AND LISTENED TO (I.E. PROVIDE A MECHANISM FOR YOUTH ADVISORY VOTES, BEFORE THE OTHER MEMBERS VOTE).**
- ✓ **WHEN CREATING YOUTH POSITIONS YOU MAY NEED TO ADJUST YOUR BY-LAWS OR BOARD STRUCTURE TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEWLY CREATED POSITION.**



- ✓ **CONSIDER HAVING A MINIMUM OF TWO YOUTH BOARD REPRESENTATIVES. THIS WILL AVOID TOKENISM, INCREASE DIVERSITY OF OPINION AND MAKE IT MORE COMFORTABLE FOR YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE.**

When deciding how the youth representative(s) will be chosen, it is a good idea to consider the following:

- ✓ **ARE THERE LEGAL GUIDELINES THAT WILL INFORM THE WAY YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES ARE CHOSEN?**
- ✓ **WILL THE YOUTH BE REPRESENTING A CONSTITUENCY ON YOUR BOARD?**
- ✓ **IF SO, SHOULD THAT GROUP SELECT YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVE?**
- ✓ **CREATE AN APPLICATION AND ASK QUESTIONS THAT PERTAIN TO THE ISSUES OF YOUR BOARD. BE CAREFUL NOT TO MAKE THE APPLICATION A BARRIER TO RECRUITMENT. UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WILL PROBABLY BE THE FIRST APPLICATION OF THIS KIND COMPLETED BY THE YOUTH.**
- ✓ **DESIGNATE A CONTACT PERSON WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION. THIS WILL HELP YOUR BOARD EVALUATE APPLICANTS AND WILL ALLOW CONSISTENCY WHEN DEALING WITH THE YOUTH APPLICANTS.**
- ✓ **MAKE SURE THE PROCESS IS OPEN ENOUGH TO ATTRACT A DIVERSE GROUP OF QUALIFIED CANDIDATES.**

- ✓ **PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT: A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY, A WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY, “REAL WORLD” EXPERIENCE AND MOST IMPORTANTLY AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A VOICE FOR THEIR AGE GROUP**

## PREPARING THE YOUTH

The essence of local decision-making is based upon civility, personal relationships and respect. Once the adults on the board reach out to the youth, it is up to us (the youth) to reach back – and really stretch in order to make the connection. Here are a few things for us to consider when being selected to be on a board:

1. **HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF.** By whatever means, you have been selected, appointed or voted onto the board, you belong there. Sure, it will take you a few months to get comfortable in your position, just listen, watch, ask questions and learn.
2. **FIND A GUIDE.** There is an old saying that you can't be a guide unless you are on the journey. So find a guide, coach, or mentor with whom you feel comfortable, someone who has experience with the board and who is willing to learn alongside you.
3. **BE A LEADER.** You are now in a leadership role – use this role to advance the fact that youth are capable, intelligent and mature. People are watching you and



you are now seen as an example of all youth. This does not mean that you have to change your whole personality. It does mean that you will be held to a higher standard than some of the youth who are not at the table.

**4. STAY INTERESTED AND CURIOUS.**

Sometimes the issues that a board faces are not that interesting – to anyone. However, the work of a board is to do all the work it is responsible for and it is up to you to take responsibility for your learning and contribution. If you look bored, the people will have a difficult time taking you seriously.

**5. SHOW UP.** If you want the board to invest in you, take the time to invest in the organization and board with your time. Attend all meetings, confirm the dates, times and locations. Mark them in your calendar.

**6. USE THE POWER YOU HAVE.** Speak up, if you feel like you have some ideas about how to improve the flow of the meeting, the dialogue between representatives and the agenda topics. Use your politeness skills to not offend other members and they will listen. It is also important to know that you are one of many people, don't expect the board to do everything you say. To be treated like an equal means that your ideas are considered to be as valuable as all the others, not more so.

**7. DO SOMETHING.** Of course you are busy. School, extracurricular activities, work, family obligations, other service commitments – your schedule is packed. However, if you want to be a leader, you will have to take on some projects and deliver what you promise through action. Get on a working committee, take on a project, do some in-depth investigation of an issue or two for the board. The bottom line is that you get respect by making contributions through action.

**8. IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION, IT IS LIKELY THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS A SIMILAR ONE.**

Becoming a decision maker is complex. Learning leaders ask questions. Asking questions gets it out of the negative and sets a positive tone. So, feel free to ask questions. In case you have so many questions that you would actually slow the meetings down to a crawl, jot your questions on a note pad and get your answers in other settings. The board members will expect you to learn the lingo – so make certain that you are learning as you go. Study their language, use their language and soon it will become second nature for you as well.





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## FRAMING THE IDEA

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Best practice is for School Boards to have two student board representatives who can represent the interest and perspectives of the student body at the board level and have an in depth understanding of what is occurring at the school as well as the potential impact of any decisions the school board makes on students.

One student school board representative should be a junior and one should be a senior. The junior who is on the board should serve again as a senior. In this way, the board always has one experienced student school board representative.

Best practice is to make sure student school board representative selection illustrates the breadth of the student body by giving equal opportunity to all students who wish to serve.

An election or appointment processes that would fulfill this objective needs to utilize teacher student relationships. The ideal structure would have teachers nominate the students they felt fit the description. The chosen students would then have the opportunity to apply if interested. That said, individual school districts are best able to ascertain the manner in which student school board representatives are appointed.

In addition to board representation, student representatives would be appointed to other school governance related committees, organizations, advisories, councils, etc. The key is that student board representatives are involved in all levels of school decision-making. Student representatives of the board have an essential role of conveying the ideas and needs of the students in the district to the school board. Simultaneously, the representatives would have the responsibility of sharing concepts and decisions of the board with the student body and could survey students to solicit their viewpoints on issues the Board is considering.

### Roles

Roles may be different depending on the governance structure of the organization. Adult board members, superintendents, and principals all have critical roles in supporting student board representatives.

Adult board members must value the important perspective that student representatives have on all issues and recognize that students have knowledge-based authority about what is occurring in the school (s). An adult board member should be assigned to mentor the new student representative. Adult board members and



student board representatives must work in collaboration; adults must recognize the student representative as a full participant on the board within legally defined limits.

Superintendents need to work with principals and boards on establishing criteria and process for student selection to school board service. Superintendents must advocate for student voice and work with board representatives to utilize the wealth of information that students have to share. Superintendents can help clarify any questions students may have about board rules, meeting procedures, and agenda items.

The Principal will work with the student representative as a liaison between the school board and the student body.

## SEEKING QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

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If you want to attract the best candidates, allow your process to bring out the best in your applicants, rather than “weed them out.” This will take some intentional effort, but you will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of each candidate. Some ideas for consideration include:

- ✓ **CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH APPLICANTS. MAKE THESE INTERVIEWS AT YOUTH FRIENDLY TIMES AND LOCATIONS.**
- ✓ **ASKING FOR REFERENCES. A CONVERSATION WITH A PARENT, TEACHER OR COMMUNITY LEADER CAN HELP YOU EVALUATE THE TRAITS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF EACH CANDIDATE.**
- ✓ **SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE OF THE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS EACH APPLICANT WOULD MAKE. LOOK FOR DIVERSITY, A DESIRE TO ADVOCATE AND A CONFIDENT VOICE.**



## EDUCATING AND PREPARING THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

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- ✓ FAMILIARIZE NEW BOARD REPRESENTATIVES WITH THE BOARD'S WORK BY INCLUDING THEM ON ALL COMMUNICATIONS.
- ✓ PREPARE BRIEF TALKING POINTS FOR BOARD REPRESENTATIVES SO THEY CAN ADVOCATE FOR THE ORGANIZATION.
- ✓ PROVIDE ALL NEW BOARD REPRESENTATIVES WITH THE HISTORY OF THE BOARD, PREVIOUS ISSUES, PAST ACTIONS TAKEN AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION. THE MORE YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES KNOW THE MORE THEY WILL BE EFFECTIVE AND THOUGHTFUL REPRESENTATIVES OF YOUR BOARD.
- ✓ WHEN YOU GIVE YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVE THE INFORMATION THEY NEED, BE SURE TO INCLUDE A COPY OF THE MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS. THIS WILL ACQUAINT THEM WITH THE FLOW OF YOUR MEETINGS AND THE INTRICACIES OF ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER.
- ✓ PROVIDE YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES WITH A COPY OF THE AGENDA AND ANY NEEDED MATERIALS BEFORE YOUR MEETING SO THEY CAN REVIEW THE INFORMATION AND BECOME PREPARED.
- ✓ BE PATIENT. THE NEW REPRESENTATIVE'S LEARNING CURVE IS PROBABLY VERY STEEP.
- ✓ MAKE CERTAIN YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES KNOW OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BOARD ON A PERSONAL LEVEL. THIS SIMPLE ACTION WILL MAKE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES FEEL MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE AND CONNECTED TO YOUR BOARD.
- ✓ HAVE AN OPEN DIALOG ABOUT APPROPRIATE MEETING DRESS. WILL THE NEW REPRESENTATIVES DRESS UP, OR WILL THE BOARD CHOOSE TO MOVE IN A MORE CASUAL DIRECTION?
- ✓ IDENTIFY A BOARD REPRESENTATIVE WHO WOULD BE WILLING TO ACT AS A MENTOR. IDEALLY THIS WOULD BE A PERSON IN A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP AND BE IN A POSITION TO ADVOCATE ON THE BEHALF OF YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES.
- ✓ BEST PRACTICE IS FOR A "MENTOR" TO MEET WITH YOUTH/NEW REPRESENTATIVES BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING, TO GO OVER ISSUES SUCH AS APPROPRIATE DRESS, ISSUES ON THE BOARD AGENDA, ETC.

## PREPARING THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE FOR BOARD SERVICE

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It will be helpful for youth representatives to get information about:

1. Differences between School Districts and Supervisory Union structures
2. Structure and function of boards at all levels: elementary schools (K-4, K-6), Middle / High School Boards, Supervisory Union Boards
3. Role and responsibilities of the board
  - A. Vision
  - B. Policy
  - C. Budget and Finance
  - D. Superintendent
  - E. Monitoring
  - F. Community Engagement
4. Meeting structures: Full board, committees, carousel structure, etc.
5. Role of Superintendent vis a vis Principal with Boards and at meetings
6. Agenda formats: including time, place, length
7. Role of committees
8. Nature of board issues: high level items (finance, policy, hiring the Superintendent), not micro-management.
9. Relationships among and between: Governor, Agency of Education, State Board of Education, Supervisory Union / School District and local school boards



## ORGANIZATIONAL ADULT CHECKLIST

ADAPTED FROM 14 POINTS BY  
YOUTH ON BOARDS)

Adults can use this checklist to assess your board's ability to have meaningful youth representation. This tool could help everyone involved comprehend the necessary adjustments and to measure their commitment. It is important to note that we are not implying that every board meet all of these criteria.

### KEY

**1. YES = WE DO THIS ALREADY – NO NEED FOR FURTHER ACTION.**

**2. TO CONSIDER = WE THINK WE NEED TO CONSIDER THIS OR HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS.**

- ☐ Does the board have the time and resources to make a commitment to effective youth representation?
- ☐ Has the board amended the by-laws or created policies stating that young people will be a permanent part of governing your organization?
- ☐ 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 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 issues, 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 equal to those of adults?
- ☐ Do young people have equal voting status and/or does your youth representative sub-stantially influence governance of the organization?
- ☐ Do young people have access to the resources needed to participate in your board's work? (e.g., long distance phone cards, faxes, computers, and copy machines)
- ☐ 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 training for young people on speaking up in adult groups?
- ☐ Do you offer training for young people and adults in general governance skills?
- ☐ Are youth representatives briefed ahead of time on how to read a financial statement?

## ORGANIZATIONAL YOUTH CHECKLIST

ADAPTED FROM 14 POINTS BY  
YOUTH ON BOARDS)

Youth can use this checklist to assess your ability to provide meaningful youth representation. This tool could help everyone involved comprehend the necessary adjustments and to measure their commitment. It is important to note that we are not implying that every board meet all of these criteria.

### KEY

#### 1. YES

#### 2. TO CONSIDER

- ☐ Do I have motivation, ability and knowledge to put in the time to understand the issues of the board?
- ☐ Am I aware of my job description and what the board expects of me?
- ☐ Has the board communicated the specific objectives they have for me as a youth representative?
- ☐ Have I either identified or been assigned a mentor for my board role?
- ☐ Do I have the motivation, ability and knowledge needed to make a contribution to the board?
- ☐ Do I work to know individual board representatives on a social level?
- ☐ Am I aware of the written and unwritten agenda and flow of the board meetings?
- ☐ Do I demonstrate my willingness to learn through my words and actions?
- ☐ Am I aware of the needs, public positions and opinions of the youth I represent?
- ☐ Do I have the motivation, ability and knowledge to correspond with my community and the group(s) I represent about my governance activities?
- ☐ Do I have the motivation, ability and knowledge to take leadership roles on committees and/or the board when possible?
- ☐ Am I willing to ask questions that give me insight and understanding of the board's activities?
- ☐ When receiving feedback, information and answers to questions, 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 representatives of the board hold any stereotypes about young people?
- ☐ Do I hold any stereotypes about adult board representatives?
- ☐ Have the adult board representatives received training that allows them to consider their assumptions about "kids these days?"
- ☐ Does the board show its appreciation for the good work that you are doing and have done?
- ☐ Am I mentoring other potential student representatives who may replace me?



## *Recommendations*

# Recommendations for the Position

### SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

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In order to be on School Board:

1. The student must attend one board meeting before applying to join.
2. Only students in grades 9-12 are eligible.
3. The term is for two years, with at least one new person each year.
4. Students interested in becoming a School Board representative write a letter of interest to the School Board Chair, Principal and Superintendent.
5. If more than two students are interested in becoming representatives, then an election will be held in the manner of Student Council elections each spring.

There is no limit to the number of students who can attend board meetings to listen, present, and discuss ideas and issues as determined by the board.

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### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

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What is the difference between students on the school board and students who just come to the meeting?

- ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES ATTEND AN ORIENTATION WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT AND AT LEAST ONE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORKINGS OF THE BOARD AS WELL AS PRESSING ISSUES.
  - ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES WILL SIT WITH ADULT BOARD MEMBERS AT MEETINGS.
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- ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES ATTEND BOARD RETREATS AND OTHER SPECIAL ACTIVITIES.
- ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES WILL ATTEND ANNUAL TRAINING.

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES WILL COMMUNICATE REGULARLY (AT LEAST ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS) WITH STUDENTS FROM OTHER SCHOOL BOARDS AROUND THE STATE.
- ✓ STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES RECEIVE RECOGNITION ON THEIR HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPTS.

The State training for student School Board representatives should include:

- ✓ **LEARNING THE ESSENTIAL ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES**
- ✓ **LEARNING ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER**
- ✓ **LEARNING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARD IN LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNANCE**
- ✓ **LEARNING HOW TO SOLICIT AND REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE STUDENT BODY. THIS INCLUDES SPECIFIC TOOLS, SUCH AS ONLINE SURVEYS, INFORMATION TABLES, AND USING SCHOOL FORUMS FOR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION**

- ✓ **OPTIONAL LEARNING IN PUBLIC SPEAKING AND OTHER ORAL COMMUNICATION**

This training may be for both student and adult Board representatives.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

- **ATTEND ALL THE MEETINGS AND RETREATS.**
- **FOLLOW ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER AND OTHER BOARD PROTOCOLS.**
- **RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY AND OTHER NORMS.**
- **REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE STUDENT BODY.**



## STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER STUDENTS

After each School Board meeting, the student representatives do the following:

- **PRESENT TO THE (MIDDLE AND) HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCILS.**
- **WRITE A STATEMENT FOR THE STUDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT INCLUDES SCHOOL BOARD INFORMATION OF INTEREST TO STUDENTS.**
- **MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS SCHOOL BOARD ISSUES.**
- **ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO WATCH THE TELEVISED SCHOOL BOARD MEETING.**

## DECISION MAKING AND VOTING

Students should participate in the board's work to the fullest extent possible. Their participation should mirror the role of an elected adult board member, with the exception that students cannot make motions, vote on a motion, or attend executive sessions. However, students' may cast a symbolic vote on each motion that is recorded in the meeting minutes. Students should participate in all discussion and other parts of the meeting. With the exception of confidential material, all information provided to adult board members should also be provided to student board representatives.

Students should play an active role in the decision making of the board. Students should feel free to speak up at any time. If students are not speaking up, adult board members should solicit student board representative opinions. Student representatives should feel respected and valued by the administration and other board members. The same respect afforded to other board members should also be given to student representatives.

Students should also participate in committee meetings. These are smaller settings where students might feel more comfortable speaking up. Students should be an active part of committee level discussions.

## CONSIDERING LEGAL ISSUES

16 V.S.A. 558(a) restricts eligibility for election to a school board to a legal voter in the school district. Only board members who have been elected under 16 V.S.A. §423 or appointed to the board under 16 V.S.A. §424 may vote to take action that is binding on the school district. Therefore, students serving on school boards should not make motions or vote on motions. Students should also not participate in executive sessions where confidentiality requirements prohibit sharing information about fellow students, school district employees, or contracts with non-board members.

## ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

After selecting the youth, have a discussion with your board about the responsibilities of your new representative. Consider this a continually evolving list because as youth representatives gain confidence and competence, the board will need to consider some adjustments.

Some possibilities for youth representative responsibilities include:

- ✓ **NOMINATE YOUTH TO SERVE AS CO-CHAIRS OF YOUR BOARD AND/OR COMMITTEES.**
- ✓ **ASSIGN YOUTH TO MEANINGFUL, BUT NEEDED TASKS SUCH AS CONTACTING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE BOARD.**
- ✓ **SPEAK AT EVENTS ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANIZATION.**
- ✓ **PLACE A YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE REPORT FOCUSED ON THE BOARD'S WORK - AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH MEETING. THIS WILL ALLOW YOUR YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES TO SHARE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN BOARD PROJECTS AND REPORT BACK FROM ANY OTHER GROUPS OR COMMITTEES THEY MAY BE A PART OF.**

## COMPLETING THE DETAILS

- ✓ **PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM YOUR MEETINGS FOR YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVES IF THEY NEED IT. A CAR RIDE, BUS, OR CAB FARE SHOULD BE PROVIDED IF NEEDED.**
- ✓ **CALL THE PARENT/GUARDIAN OF YOUR NEW REPRESENTATIVE TO COMPLIMENT THEM ON THEIR SON'S/DAUGHTER'S EFFORTS. ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THEY HAVE. THIS IS AN EXCELLENT TIME TO BUILD THE IMPORTANT LINK TO THE HOME. PROVIDE THE PARENTS WITH ALL THE NECESSARY INFORMATION INCLUDING NAME AND PHONE NUMBERS OF YOUR BOARD MEMBERS. MAKE SURE THAT WHEN YOU HANG UP THE PHONE EVERYONE INVOLVED FEELS SUPPORTED AND VALIDATED.**

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

1. Develop process in each district/supervisory union to decide how representatives are chosen
2. Discuss and define responsibilities of youth representatives
3. Discuss and decide how to gather student voice/input
4. Make student representatives comfortable/knowledgeable
5. Seek inclusivity in student board representatives
6. Manage for effective meetings
7. Make connection with curriculum to support critical thinking skills and engagement



# *Resources*

## **THE VERMONT SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION**

Exists to achieve Vermont's vision for public education by supporting local boards to serve as effective trustees for education on behalf of their communities, and by providing a strong collective voice in the development and implementation of public education policy.

2 Prospect St

Montpelier, VT 05602

(802) 223-3580 / (800) 244-8722

Website: <http://www.vtvsba.org>

## **UP FOR LEARNING**

Helps educational institutions across the country fully engage students in their own learning through a research-based model that focuses on deepening youth-adult partnerships.

Website: <http://www.upforlearning.com>

## **YOUTH ON BOARD**

Provides consultation, and publications to involve young people in decision-making.

58 Day Street PO Box 440322

Somerville, MA 02144

(617) 623-9900 x 1242

<http://www.youthonboard.org>

## **YOUTH/ADULT PARTNERSHIPS**

Provides information and consultation on getting youth and adults to work together in meaningful ways in Southeast Alaska.

Seven Circles Coalition, SEARHC

Sitka, AK 99835

(907) 966-8753

## **NATIONAL CENTER FOR NONPROFIT BOARDS**

Dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening their boards of directors.

1828 L Street, NW, Suite 900

Washington, DC 20036-5104

(800) 883-6262

<http://www.ncnb.org>

## **THE INNOVATION CENTER FOR COMMUNITY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Provides resources and training to organizations and communities to increase youth-adult partnerships in creating a just and equitable society.

6930 Carroll Avenue

Suite 502

Takoma Park, MD 20912

(301) 270-1700

<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS  
WITH YOUTH, INC.**

Offers a training curriculum and provides training to young people about their role as trustee, or as partners in the governance process.

6744 Falcon Ridge Court  
Indianapolis, IN 46804  
(317) 875-5756  
<http://www.cpyinc.org>

**RESILIENCY, YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

Division of Behavioral Health  
3601 C Street, Suite 934  
Anchorage, Alaska 99524  
(907) 269-3425  
<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dbh/prevention/programs/resiliency/default.htm>

**ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL  
BOARDS**

1111 West 9th Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Phone: (907) 586-1083  
Fax: (907) 586-2995  
Website: <http://www.aasb.org>

**DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL  
HEALTH**

3601 C Street, Suite 934  
Anchorage, Alaska 99524  
Phone: (907) 269-3425  
Fax: (907) 269-3786  
Website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/>

**ALASKA INITIATIVE FOR  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

1111 West 9th Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Phone: (907) 586-1486  
Fax: (907) 586-1450  
Website: <http://www.alaskaice.or>

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## SPECIAL RECOGNITION: HANS BERNARD

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Hans was the primary author of "The Power of an Untapped Resource: Exploring Youth Representation on Your Board or Committee." Hans was the longest serving youth representative to a school board in America. His three consecutive one-year terms on the Anchorage School Board was unprecedented. Hans has presented at three National School Boards Association conferences and spoken to several Association of Alaska School Boards statewide audiences. Hans was a full voting representative and subcommittee chair of Alaska's state Adolescent Health Advisory Committee for three years. Hans graduated from Chugiak High School, Eagle River in 2001 and from Willamette University Salem, Oregon in 2005, with a degree in Political Science. From 2003-2005, Hans served as a legislative aide to the majority leader of the Oregon State Senate.



2 Prospect Street, Montpelier, VT 05602

800-244-8722

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**VERMONT**  
**SCHOOL**  
**BOARDS**  
**ASSOCIATION**  
Great Governance, Excellent Education, Strong Communities

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