

Thinking of Adding a Student School Board Member?

In 1993, the Minnesota State legislature enacted a law that required school districts to have a student representative on their respective school boards. Three years later, the legislature repealed this mandate. Many districts made a decision to maintain the student representation on the school board. In 2000, Representative Greiling made an effort to restore the 1993 legislation. However, her bill would have softened the language by making it permissive for districts to have a student representative(s) on the board. State statute is silent regarding student school board representatives. Today, approximately 95 public school boards have at least one student representative on the school board. The student board representative is also eligible to apply for one of two MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarships. Contact MSBA's Greg Abbott at gabbott@mnmsba.org for more information.

Issues to Consider:

Compensation – MSBA thinks student representatives should not receive compensation for their school board service.

Expense reimbursement – MSBA believes this is a local decision, but, if student representatives are allowed expense reimbursement, they should seek preapproval from a designated person or group.

Voting authority – We believe student representatives should not be given the right to vote.

Closed Meetings – The Board decides who attends its closed meetings. MSBA believes attendance by student representatives at closed sessions would almost never be appropriate.

Board Training – Students can be involved in the board training components offered by MSBA subject to Board approval. The budget impact would likely be minimal. Often the travel costs would be shared with other attending board members.

Agenda items – Student representatives can have the ability to submit an agenda item, but students should not be given the authority to demand that items be included on the agenda. The student representatives can submit items for consideration according to the board's process/procedures on developing the agenda. The board should offer the student representative(s) the opportunity to speak to agenda items on which they have knowledge to provide input, but this is not likely to include all agenda items.

Student representative selection process – Whether the student representative(s) are selected by the school board or the high school student body is a local decision. Whether the student representative is required to be an officer in the student council is also a local decision.

Number of Students – MSBA believes the number of student representative(s) is a local decision. Some school districts have a student representative from each high school on the school board.

Orientation - Some type of orientation should be provided for the student representative(s) and school board.

Length of term - The term of the student representative(s) is a local decision.

Adult Mentor/Coach – Whether the student representative is provided with a mentor/coach (an experienced school board member) is a local decision. However, we would recommend that an adult mentor be used.

Attendance expectations - Student representative(s) should be expected to attend all school board meetings and working group sessions (i.e., any sessions that are deemed public). Be mindful of the student representative's outside commitments.

Committee membership - Whether student representative(s) will be expected to be a member of the board committees is a local decision, but it makes sense that student representative(s) only participate in those committees that pertain to student issues (not employee issues).

Improved board functioning - School boards have anecdotally reported better functioning boards due to the fact that student representatives are providing input and board members are sensitive to the need to inform the students. The result is that more informed decisions are made by the elected board members. Adult board members may have an additional incentive to be more civil in meetings where students are present.

Suggested Policy Guidelines - Making Student Representation a Success

- * Support from school administrative staff and school board members, especially the board chairperson, is essential. Make the student representatives feel welcome at each board meeting to demonstrate that the board values their attendance and perspectives.
- * Seek input from the student representative(s).
- * Being a student is the priority over being a board member. The student may have extracurricular activities to consider. The student's position on the board is a valuable civic lesson.
- * The student representative will be seated at the board table at all regular meetings. Feeling like you are part of the school board is essential. This doesn't happen when separate seating arrangements are made.
- * The role of the student selected will be advisory to the Board. The student representative(s) will not have a vote.
- * The student will serve at least a one-year term. The Board shall reserve the right to assign a new representative if the original representative cannot serve the entire one-year term.
- * The student representative(s) will be bound by all rules and regulations within law that bind the Board.
- * The board reserves the right to discipline/control/correct the student representative if his/her actions or comments are out of order or do not follow the board's rules and processes.
- * The student representative will not be furnished with sensitive materials/information pertaining to personnel matters, legal action, negotiation strategy, land acquisition, individual student discipline/family matters, or other confidential data.
- * Student representatives will not receive per diem payments. Expense reimbursements to the student representatives will be made only for preapproved expenditures.
- * Student representatives can be aligned with mentors, or experienced board members, to help with process and content of board meetings.
- * The chairperson will retain the right to establish the Board agenda and control the board meeting within the board's established rules and processes.