Adding a Student School Board Representative

Background

In 1993, the Minnesota State Legislature enacted legislation requiring school districts to appoint a student representative to their respective school boards. This mandate was repealed in 1996, although many districts chose to retain student representation.

In 2000, Representative Greiling introduced a bill to reinstate the requirement, proposing permissive language that would allow—rather than mandate—districts to include student representatives. Currently, state statute does not address student board representation. Nevertheless, more than one hundred and thirty-four public school boards in Minnesota include at least one student representative.

Key Considerations

- *Compensation:* MSBA recommends that student representatives not receive compensation for their service. They are not elected by the public and do not have voting rights on board actions.
- *Expense Reimbursement:* Expense reimbursement is a local decision. If permitted, student representatives should obtain preapproval from a designated authority.
- *Voting Authority:* Student representatives should not be granted voting rights and are not eligible for officer positions on the school board.
- *Closed Meetings:* Attendance at closed sessions is not recommended by MSBA, but the final decision is made by the local school board. MSBA maintains that due to the confidentiality and potential legal ramifications, student participation in such meetings is not appropriate.
- *Board Training:* Student representatives may participate in MSBA school board training sessions with school board approval. MSBA workshop rates are discounted for students.
- *Agenda Items:* Student representatives may propose agenda items in accordance with the school board's established procedures. However, they should not have authority to mandate inclusion. School boards are encouraged to invite student input on relevant agenda topics.
- *Selection Process:* The method of selecting student representatives - whether by the school board or student body - is a local decision.
- *Number of Representatives:* The number of student representatives is determined locally. Some school districts appoint one representative per high school.
- *Orientation:* Districts should provide structured orientation for student representatives and school board members to ensure clarity of roles and expectations.
- *Length of Term:* The duration of service for student representatives is determined locally.
- *Mentorship:* MSBA recommends assigning an experienced school board member as a mentor to support the student representative.

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- *Attendance Expectations:* Student representatives should be expected to attend all public school board meetings and working sessions, with consideration given to their academic and extracurricular commitments.
- *Committee Membership:* Participation in school board committees is a local decision. MSBA suggests limiting student involvement to committees focused on student specific topics.
- *Improved School Board Functioning:* Anecdotal evidence suggests that student representation enhances school board awareness of board conduct and student needs, leading to more informed decision-making.

Suggested Guidelines: Making Student Representation a Success

1. Ensure strong support from school administrators and school board members, particularly the chairperson. Create a welcoming environment to affirm the value of student participation.
2. Actively seek input from student representatives.
3. Prioritize the student's academic responsibilities. School board service should complement, not compete with, their educational experience.
4. Seat student representatives at the school board table during regular meetings to foster inclusion.
5. Student representatives serve in an advisory capacity and do not hold voting rights.
6. Representatives should serve a minimum one-year term. The process to fill a vacancy is at the discretion of the school board and should be memorialized in the school board handbook.
7. Student representatives are subject to the same legal, procedural, and policy standards as school board members.
8. The school board retains authority to address any misconduct or procedural violations by the student representative.
9. Student representatives shall not receive confidential materials/private data as defined in school board policy related to personnel, legal matters, negotiations, or individual student issues.
10. Per-diem payments are not provided. Expense reimbursements require prior approval.
11. Mentorship by experienced school board members that will actively support the student in their role is encouraged for successful student engagement.
12. The board chairperson maintains control over meeting agendas and proceedings.

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Student School Board Representatives are eligiable to apply for one of three MSBA Robert E. Meeks Student Scholarships. Contact MSBA for more information: development@mnmsba.org

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