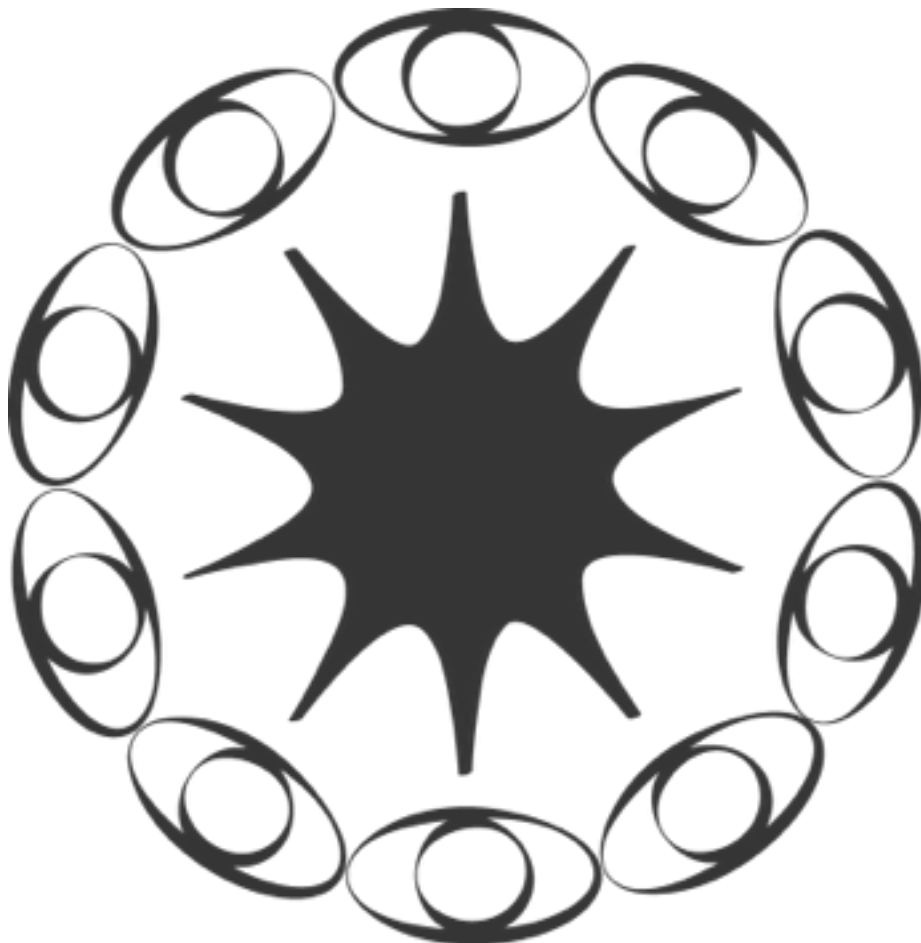


SoundOut Guide to Students on Canadian School Boards



Students across the nation are clamouring to have more than a voice in their education. Typical student leaders and nontraditional student leaders, as well as high achieving and low achieving students, are demanding powerful roles in the places they spend the majority of their waking hours. This report highlights roles for students on Canadian school boards, sharing useful tips, highlighting significant research and sharing detailed examples of what is happening nationwide.



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Introduction

“...We are making decisions that affect students all the time, yet with no direct connection to our students’ point of view... A student trustee will enrich our dialogue and decision-making with perspectives and first-hand knowledge which we, frankly, are decades removed from.”

—Silas White, Chair of the Sunshine Coast School Board

Across Canada, there is a growing movement in education calling for Meaningful Student Involvement. In the early 2000s, SoundOut began promoting the concept; Ontario integrated students onto school boards; and different advocates across the country began calling for student voice to be engaged in school reform.

Since then, I have studied more than 3,000 examples of when students said involvement mattered to them in K-12 educational settings. In these examples, a series of patterns emerged. Putting these together along with the seemingly disparate research surrounding the fields of student voice, student engagement, student leadership and student empowerment, I formed a unified theory of student voice I called Meaningful Student Involvement. Soon after, I wrote a series of publications related to the topic, and SoundOut.org became the hub for an international movement.

The education ministries of several provinces have lent credence to Meaningful Student Involvement. This has led to more schools in more places across the entire country adapting the frameworks and citing the findings I combed together more than a decade ago.

Interest continues to grow across our country. Canada’s education sector is proving its commitment is through increasing awareness that students should be partners on school boards. In rural, urban, suburban and remote places, school trustees are being to consider how, why, when and where students should be partners in their decision-making efforts.

In order to answer emerging questions, I have met with elected leaders in several provinces; spoken with a few provincial school board associations; dialogued with student activists and organizations; and deeply studied existent research on the field. The following report presents my findings, along with recommendations, tips and more.

I hope you find this document useful. Please contact me directly for more information.



Section 1. Rationale

As a nation, Canada is facing a crisis of epic proportions. Right now, an entire generation of Canadians is growing up highly engaged in their world. They are growing up deeply connected to their peers, highly self-initiated in their out-of-school learning activities, and deeply segregated from adults throughout their lives.

Their world may only be as wide as the screen of their smartphone, and their out-of-school learning activities may only focus on video games. Their age is the predominant reason why they are routinely segregated, too, since schools serve as the *de facto* educational motivators in their lives and after school programs clog their hours with other students. Summer programs often remove students from their communities, too.

When they do interact with adults, students are frequently seen as suspects, foreign and alien to the store clerks, officers of the peace and neighbours they see every day.

All this illustrates that the crisis of epic proportions is looming. Schools are the one place in our society where every Canadian spends a significant portion of their lives. This unique place in our nation teaches social literacy, encourages Canadian pride and empowers students to envision their places in our democracy.

However, without opportunities to affect the decisions made on their behalf in schools everyday, students are increasingly seeing a disconnection between their lives outside school and inside school. I call this **the engagement gap**, and the its size is actually beyond epic.

The engagement gap occurs whenever some people do not have a sustainable connection to the things that affect them most, while other people are deeply connected to those things.

Engagement happens anytime someone experiences a sustainable connection to something within or around them. In schools, students can be engaged in learning, teaching or leadership. They can be engaged in school pride, friendships and mentoring. They can also be engaged in bullying, cheating or skipping class. Student engagement happens through *any* sustained connection, whether or not adults approve of it.

Schools can and must foster student engagement, and Meaningful Student Involvement provides a logical, strategic and research-driven framework for fostering students' sustained connections throughout the learning environment and beyond.

Students need to become meaningfully involved in making decisions that affect them everyday, as well as decision-making that affects their entire educational experience. That can happen in



classrooms, through building-level activities, in district programs, and across school boards' activities.

It must happen because whether or not school trustees acknowledge it, social change is leading students to make more decisions out of school than ever before. It must happen because engaging students on school boards lends itself to Meaningful Student Involvement in substantial ways. It must happen because, as a nation, Canada needs it to.



Section 2. Responsibilities

Students can do all of the activities of a school board, including participating in all decision-making, policy-making, advocacy, and personnel issues.

That includes the...

- **Vision:** Students can participate in setting the vision and goals of a district or ministry of education.
- **Rules:** Student board members can adopt policies that give schools direction as they set priorities and achieve goals.
- **Hiring:** As board members, students can be responsible for hiring and evaluating a district or provincial minister of education, whether a superintendent, executive director, or otherwise.
- **Money:** Students can work with other board members to adopt and oversee the annual budget.
- **Personnel:** Student board members can join the board in managing the collective bargaining process for employees.

School boards manage the leadership side of school districts. A typical school board meeting includes all kinds of business items, including...

- **Culture:** Setting the tone for professional relationships throughout a district
- **Calendar:** Approving the school calendar and operational activities
- **Curriculum:** Adopting curriculum and testing
- **Construction:** Overseeing school construction, siting, and related issues
- **Contracts:** Approving contracts with teachers' unions, outside vendors and others.

Good school boards maintain a balance between the hard work of running the district at the same time as they focus on the district's priorities for academic achievement. Students should be part of all these activities, and more!



Section 3. Roles

There is no one set role for student trustees.

If a board of trustees has student representation, it is often a single student who is charged with representing hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of their peers.

The fundamental purpose of allowing a Student Trustee to sit on the school board is to ensure Meaningful Student Involvement throughout the education system.

Research shows that actively engaging student trustees can...

- Increase student engagement in learning, teaching and leadership;
- Build student ownership in education; and
- Secure lifelong civic engagement among participants and their peers.

What They CAN Do

Student trustees can do anything adult trustees can. The question becomes whether or not policies allow them to. Here are some things student trustees can do.

- Help define and maintain the purpose and function of their role, as well as the role of school boards overall;
- Provide proportionate student representation in relationship to the entire student body. This is in relationship to adult roles, e.g. if one adult represents 25,000 constituents, one student should represent 2,500 constituents, and so forth;
- Facilitate democratic elections for student trustees;
- Ensure diversity and inclusion in all student engagement activities, particularly in those relating to student trustees;
- Fully participate in board meetings and board committee meetings; and
- Receive service learning credit for their participation as democratically elected officials.



What They SHOULD Do

Student trustees participation in board meetings should not simply consist of a report on their activity and progress on student initiatives. Instead, best practices show student trustees can:

- Have a full, binding vote.
- Be able to move a motion Engage with their peers by strategically and frequently visiting schools within their boards
- Meet regularly with their Student Senate as well as other student groups representative of a schools' diversity
- Work with adults in their schools and across their districts to organize initiatives that enable them to meaningfully involve more students

What They DO NOT Do

Roles for student trustees do not:

- Mean all students are equally represented
- Automatically ensure students know all about education and the education system
- Ensure elementary and secondary students, students with special education needs, students in specific programs (e.g. extended French or Enrichment), and students in all curriculum streams are engaged

Instead, roles for student trustees generally mean that school boards have student members. Just like adult trustees cannot effectively represent every constituency in their district, students cannot and should not be expected to do that, either.

Student trustees can strive to listen to their peers and engage other students in meaningful ways, but their roles cannot be the only roles for Meaningful Student Involvement in their districts.



Section 4. Recruitment

There is no single way to position students on school boards. Instead, SoundOut encourages every district and every province to devise a culturally responsive, culturally responsible way that works for them.

Following is a process we recommend.

Step 1. Create Classroom Student Action Meetings.

Students and teachers develop partnerships fostered through daily or weekly meetings that foster action to improve their local school.

- Students experience classroom student action meetings in their homeroom or advisory period;
- Teachers initially lead the meetings, then teach students how, then diverse students of varying abilities lead the meetings alone or with teachers as partners;
- Students learn the basics of Meaningful Student Involvement;
- Teachers establish learning partnerships with every student;
- Mutual respect and accountability is experienced in every interaction; and,
- Student members are chosen for the Principal's Student Action Team.

Step 2. Coordinate a Principal's Student Action Team.

Meeting bi-weekly, the principal's student action board partners with principals to advise, research, lead and direct student action focused on school improvement throughout their local school.

- Diverse student members from all constituencies within a school building partner with building leaders to co-lead building-level and community-wide action to improve schools;
- Students and principals operate in equitable partnerships, recognizing each others' assets and challenges and working as a team to lift schools;



- Students and school leaders are mutually accountable to each other for their actions and outcomes’;
- Student members are accountable to their peers in classroom student action meetings;
- The Principal’s Student Action Team chooses student members for the District Student Action Team; and,
- Students receive credits for service learning through the Principal’s Student Action Team.

Step 3. Engage a District Student Action Team.

Working with district school board members and staff, the district SAT informs all district-level decisions, including curriculum, assessment, professional development, etc.

- Student members are appointed by Principal’s Student Action Teams from each K-12 school within a district;
- Every student receives appropriate training in order to participate fully, while every meeting is facilitated accordingly to engage every student;
- All students participate fully in meetings while adults are appointed accordingly to staff and sustain activities;
- District Student Action Team members facilitate meetings, research issues, ensure decision-making and develop action with adults as partners;
- Students and adults work together to ensure adherence to the frameworks for Meaningful Student Involvement;
- District student action team members elect student trustees on the district school board; and,
- Students receive additional credits for service learning through the District Student Action Team.

Step 4. Elect Student Trustees to the District School Board.

Elected for alternate two-year terms, student trustees serve as full members of district boards. They are not routinely excluded from any decisions; instead, educated on conflicts of interest, they recuse themselves when necessary. They also receive full board training and participate in



requisite provincial school board association meetings and other functions. SoundOut encourages districts adopting plans for equal student/adult memberships on their boards, as well as mutual student/adult mentorships that partner student trustees with adult trustees.

- Student trustees are engaged as full partners to adult trustees;
- They are engaged with a complete voice, e.g. the ability to raise issues, respond at will and vote with full affect;
- Student members are engaged in school board activities, including all planning, research, facilitation, evaluation, decision-making and advocacy activities within and affecting the school board; and,
- Students receive additional credits for service learning as student trustees on the district school board.



Section 5. Retention

Once you've secured positions for students on school boards, there are many ways to get started. The following steps were adapted from a publication by the National School Boards Association:

1. **Representation:** Ensure student representatives are a true cross-section of your district's student culture, involvement, and interests.
2. **Equitable Numbers:** Make positions for six to 10 students to join the school board so that students are equally represented in all conversations.
3. **Full Membership:** Have students meet with the entire school board as frequently as possible.
4. **Adult Allies:** Encourage students to invite caring adults to come along with them—for instance, a teacher, coach, youth worker, or other adult ally they trust.
5. **Safe Environments:** Have school board meetings in comfortable locations as frequently as possible—and allow them to be selected by students.
6. **Supportive Processes:** Routinely schedule your school board meetings to run 60 to 90 minutes. Limit jargon. Use active facilitation.
7. **Reflect:** Ask students and adults to write up their reflections on the meetings afterward, and ask for at least both students and adults to volunteer to share those reflections. They could be published in a school publication or on the district website.

Questions to Consider

Once students are on board, schools can be transformed *forever*. Here are some additional considerations you will want to keep in mind for the long term.

- How will student representatives continue to be selected?
- How long will their terms last? Will they be allowed to serve multiple terms?
- Can more students be involved?
- How do students on the school board find out what their peers are concerned or interested in?



- What are student representatives responsibilities? Should those be expanded? How can they be expanded?
- Will students on school boards be expected to do everything that is required of adult members?
- Who will set the agenda for student advisory boards?
- How will decisions be made about controversial ideas or projects?
- How will student representatives communicate with other students throughout the school district?



Section 6. Profiles

Provinces across Canada are engaging students on school boards. Following are some details and examples we have collected.

Alberta

The Alberta School Act and Regulations does not currently mandate Student Trustees to sit on boards of education in Alberta. As of 1995, the Alberta Education Act allowed for student involvement at the local level on school councils.

There are currently roles for students in a few districts across the province. Alberta Education, the provincial ministry of education, also has a student advisory council that reports to the Minister of Education, in addition to a province-wide program designed to promote student engagement in school buildings called SpeakOut.

Example: Edmonton Student Trustee

The Edmonton Board of Education created a seat for a Student Trustee that was elected to represent student voice starting in 2013. Through a district-level election process, a student is identified as the successful Student Trustee candidate. This student is a non-voting member on the Board of Trustees for one year. Each high school is asked to run a selection process that will result in a single candidate coming forward to participate in the District's election of a Student Trustee.

Example: Calgary Catholic School District Student Advisory Council

The Calgary Catholic School District Student Advisory Council, or SAC, is intended to build community among Calgary's Catholic high schools. Each school is represented by two to three students who meet regularly throughout the district to exchange ideas pertaining to educational and social issues, while developing their personal leadership skills.

Example: Calgary Board of Education Student Advisory Council

The Calgary Board of Education Chief Superintendent's Student Advisory Council is a group of public high school students with representation from each of Calgary's public high school programs. They meet regularly with the district's Chief Superintendent to discuss issues in the system and propose solutions. The council started in 2010.

The Calgary Board of Education Student Advisory Council is part of a larger district-wide Career and Technology Studies (CTS) program instituted by the Calgary Board of Education. The program, called "Empowering Student Voice," gives students learning opportunities, course credits, and aligned their activities in context of the Provincial Program of Studies. Of



the hundreds of students in the program across the district, 21 are selected to sit on the Chief Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

British Columbia

The British Columbia School Act does not currently enable Student Trustees to sit on boards of education. A 2013 proposal to promote student trustees through the British Columbia School Trustees' Association failed. However, districts are establishing positions currently.

Example: Sunshine Coast Student Trustee

In British Columbia, the Board of Education of School District No. 46, called Sunshine Coast, created a permanent seat for a student trustee on the board in 2013. District Student Leadership Team, or DSLT Two senior students from each of the district's high schools form a district student leadership team to support the student trustee. Through a thoughtful consensus process, the team agreed that one of their number will be the Student Trustee for the 2013/ 2014 school year. They selected another student to be their Chair. Meeting frequently, the DSLT helps the student trustee to understand issues that are relevant and important to the district's student body and to provide a venue for student discussion and support. The team meets monthly with the district superintendent.

Example: Vancouver District Students' Council

The Vancouver District Students' Council, or VDSC, is a committee of dedicated student representatives from all 19 secondary schools and 22 alternative programs at the Vancouver School Board. The VDSC's mandate is to provide student input in the planning and decision-making of the district. It is also an opportunity for students to develop leadership skills, work collaboratively with students from other schools on pertinent educational issues, to contribute to the Vancouver school district and to learn about decision-making and policy development.

Example: Vancouver School Board Student Trustee

Beginning in 2013, the Vancouver School Board Student Trustee serves for one school year, and can be elected for two terms. According to Vancouver School Board policy, student trustees will:

- Participate with other trustees in discussions
- Provide a student perspective on matters before the Board



- Present a Student Trustee report at the first regular Board meeting of each month Report regularly to the students of the VBE, through the Vancouver District Student Council (VDSC), the activities of the Board pertaining to public meetings of the Board and its committees.

Manitoba

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Manitoba.

New Brunswick

According to the New Brunswick District Education Councils, starting in 2009, each of the four education councils in the province has a student representative appointed by the Minister of Education. Student trustees' votes are counted but student trustees can't attend in-camera meetings.

Newfoundland and Labrador

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Northwest Territories

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in the Northwest Territories.

Nova Scotia

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Nova Scotia.

Nunavut

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Nunavut.



Ontario

Since 1998, every school board in Ontario has had student trustees by law. The Ontario Department of Education established policies that provide for student involvement at the district level as non-voting trustees on district boards.

Every district in the province is mandated to include one to three students. Student trustees in Ontario:

- Can share input, raise issues and discuss topics just like any trustee, influencing policy decisions, etc.
- Do not have a vote
- Is intended to bring the student voice to the board table
- Is intended to help to ensure the school board is acting in the best interest of the students
- Can attend every in-camera meeting except those related to personnel

Some school boards in Ontario also have a student council made up of student representatives from each high school that advises the student trustee. There are currently roles for students in every district in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education also has a student advisory council that reports to the Minister of Education, in addition to a province-wide program designed to promote student engagement in school buildings and districts called SpeakUp.

Example: Toronto District School Board Student Trustees

The student trustees in Toronto are elected to bring student voice and perspectives representing 250,000 students to the school board. Student Trustees work with and through the TDSB Student SuperCouncil, which is a group of 20 democratically elected students who work on the advocacy of the TDSB students throughout their terms. Student trustees do this by holding monthly meetings where their peers can openly share their thoughts and engage in constructive conversations with other students all across the city on how to improve education.

Example: Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario

The student trustee for the CDSBEO represents the more than 13,000 students. They serve as the leader of the district-wide Student Senate, which is made up of representatives from all CDSBEO secondary schools. The Senate discusses student issues, gathers student opinion,



and helps to develop communications with all students across the CDSBEO. The student trustee then shares these opinions and communications with the school board through their position.



Prince Edward Island

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Prince Edward Island.

Quebec

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Quebec.

Saskatchewan

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association does encourage school boards to make roles for students on building-level School-Community Councils; however, they are not mandated or monitored.

Yukon

This report includes no evidence of students having any formal roles on any school boards in the Yukon.



Section 6. Barriers

There are three main reasons why students do not serve on school boards across Canada right now.

Barrier 1: Structures

The structure of education is determined by formal and informal laws, policies, rules and regulations. These policies create school districts, school boards, student trustees, the school day, and many other functions at the local building level, throughout school districts, and across entire provinces.

The structure of school includes policies that give school boards permission to exist; grants school trustees their authority; and give schools their functions. They are the same structures that can allow student trustees to exist. These structures generally 1) don't allow student trustees, or; 2) allow students with conditions, or; 3) do not say anything about student trustees at all.

School structures are not immovable, unchangeable features of the education system. Policies, rules and procedures can and should be changed to accommodate student trustees.

Barrier 2: Adults

Adults can be barriers in a variety of ways. The main way adult school trustees are barriers is by treating students in ways that are disingenuous or inauthentic. This can include:

Manipulating students to participate on school boards.

This happens when adults use grades, scholarship offerings, or general goodwill towards particular students to ensure they participate on school boards. Adults are acting as barriers to student trustees by forcing attendance and prohibiting student genuine ownership in school boards.

Decorating school boards with students.

When students are placed strategically in school decision-making just to make it look like students attend, it is decoration. Adults are acting like barriers when this happens because they are preventing students from having any actual, practical contributions.

Tokenizing students on school boards.

Making grand gestures towards student trustees and constantly calling out their presence simply to claim their input, school trustees tokenize students. Adults act like barriers when they do this because they are treating student trustees as mere symbols and not as real people.



Barrier 3: Students

The last barrier to students on school boards are students themselves. After any number of years being raised in an adult-centric world and being taught in adult-centred schools, students are often caught off-guard when they are offered opportunities to serve on school boards.

There are dozens of ways students can be barriers to student trustees on school boards. Three primary ways include refusing, testing and parroting.

1. **Refusing** is the first way students can be barriers. When asking students to contribute to school decision-making, adults hear or see students flatly replying, “No, that’s not my job –its yours.”
2. **Testing** is the second way students can be barriers. Given opportunities to participate in decision-making, students reply outlandishly and in over-the-top ways. This is a test to see if adults will act on what they are offering.
3. **Parroting** is the third way students can be barriers to decision-making. Conditioned to believe there are right ways and wrong ways to answer adults, students simply repeat what adults say or give adults answers they think are acceptable. They don’t offer their sincere opinions or dissent from adults.

Considerations

According to experienced school boards in Canada, there are a variety of important considerations for students on school boards. The following were adapted from several conversations I had with associations nationwide.

- It can be challenging to fill positions. Work with students to create a strategy and use it to meet your goals.
- Engaging nontraditional student leaders can be as important as creating new opportunities for traditional student leaders.
- Long distances for meetings and late nights can raise concerns among students, parents and educators. Make appropriate concessions for students to participate.
- There need to be new opportunities in schools for disengaged students, and not just more opportunities for students who are already engaged.



- It can be a struggle for student trustees to communicate and act as a representative of a large range of schools. Use technology in forward ways and create in-school activities that foster student voice, and gives student trustees critical information from fellow students.
- In predominantly English-speaking or French-speaking regions, make sure there are linguistically appropriate outreach activities for students who speak other languages.
- Engage as many students in school decision-making and action to improve schools as possible. Use activities like student forums, school service days and other activities to engage with students from across a district.
- Confront public criticism of student trustees directly. As fellow school board members, adults should be allies who stand up for students when appropriate and necessary. Educate adults from the larger community about the roles of student trustees, and eliminate unfair age discrimination whenever it arises.
- When students face conflicts of interest, they should recuse themselves. However, students are emotionally and ethically capable of separating their self-interest from the well-being of all students. Given proper training, they will do this consistently.



Section 8. FAQs

Can students join my district school board?

It depends on which province you live in.

In Canada, are students guaranteed representation on the school board?

No.

Which students can serve on school boards?

It depends on what rules are set by provincial laws and/or local school boards. Most school boards consist of adults who live in the local community and are selected by the community (or, if it's an appointed school board, selected by either the mayor or county elected officials). They are parents, grandparents, local business owners, retirees and other ordinary people. Students who serve on school boards should be the same: Ordinary, everyday students. They should be struggling students, average achieving students or high achieving; fully disengaged or completely busy; students of colour or white students; girls and boys and students who identify otherwise. However, they can be whichever students are chosen by local or provincial rules and regulations.

What is the role of the school board and students on school boards?

The school board should represent the concerns of local people to school administrators, and represent the needs of the students and school district to the community. The school board does not operate the district on a day-to-day basis; that is the job of the superintendent, who is the district's chief executive. Rather, the school board sets the policies, goals and objectives for the district – and it holds the superintendent responsible for implementing the policies and achieving the goals. Students on school boards should participate fully in ALL of these activities.

I am a student with a problem with my school. When is the student school board member the right person to share it with?

SoundOut suggests students work with the leadership structure in schools to address their concerns, which can help promote Meaningful Student Involvement. For instance, if a student has a problem with a teacher, the student should first address it with the teacher and, if the issue is not resolved, the student should turn to the principal or headmaster. If that fails, they can bring their concerns to the student school board member, and then the district superintendent. In districts with student representatives, students addressing the school



board should be the last resort. Often, students can get answers to their questions simply by asking the right person in their school or calling the right person in the school district.

Can students speak at school board meetings?

Generally, provincial laws require a public comment period at school board meetings, no matter whether the speakers are students or adults. Boards are allowed to establish reasonable restrictions on the time, place and manner of public comment. For instance, school boards typically set guidelines on the length of an individual's comment (e.g., a certain amount of time per person), so no one person dominates the meeting. There is no required format for public comment; some boards have one public-comment period in the middle of the meeting, some have two public-comment sessions during a board meeting.

Some districts have student representatives attend school board meetings but do not allow them to talk unless they are invited to. Few provinces have laws mandating students be able to fully participate as full members of school boards. Many provinces have no laws at all.

What is proper protocol for student participation in school board meetings?

There is no one protocol for all school boards everywhere all the time.

Comments from students who are not trustees generally go through the chair at the board meeting who is usually the board president. Boards use the public comment period as an opportunity to listen to citizen concerns, but not to debate issues or enter into a question-and-answer session or a "cross examination" between the public and individual members. Be aware that not all issues brought before a board meeting will be resolved that evening; boards may respond to public comment by seeking additional information or by delegating the authority to investigate the issue to the superintendent or his/her designee. While public education can be an emotional issue, and understandably so, the board will strive to maintain a certain level of decorum at the meeting. Many meetings are recorded or televised, and students often attend or participate in the meetings. As such, students are expected to maintain tone of courtesy and civility.

However, school boards are free to set their protocols for student participation.

How do school boards set rules at the meeting?

A local school board's parliamentary procedure is a matter of local policy. Most boards follow Roberts Rules of Order, which describes how meetings are run, how motions and votes are



taken and other procedures. The school board's secretary can inform meeting attendees, including students, on rules of order and other issues of board policy.

The board goes into a closed-door meeting each meeting. Why can't students witness what occurs there?

Often, provincial laws dictate areas that are to be discussed in "executive" or closed-door sessions. Among the most common include privacy issues (including employee privacy as well as matters dealing with individual students and student discipline); anticipated litigation and issues involving attorney-client privilege; negotiations with labor unions and negotiating strategy; matters involving the purchase of property; and any issues dealing with security that could undermine safety if made public. Sometimes, citizens will want to know why a school board took a vote regarding a particular staff member (e.g., not re-hiring a teacher or principal). However, school board members are not allowed to publicly discuss evaluative aspects of the staff member's employment, unless the employee authorizes it.

Sometimes student trustees are limited as to which topics they are allowed to hear during meetings. They can include any of the above, as well as anything else determined by the school board.

What is a board agenda?

A board agenda is a plan for the meeting set to happen. Generally, school boards are not required by law to post an agenda for each meeting. However, most do have an agenda. If they do, the agenda must reasonably reflect the matters to be discussed. However, the board is not precluded from addressing an issue that arises just because it was not on the agenda. In some provinces, school boards must publicly post an annual notice describing the date and location of meetings. However, they aren't obligated to share their agendas.

My school board seems to rapidly work through the agenda, without much debate. Why is that?

There are different ways to conduct school board meetings that are very public or very private. School boards can meet openly for the majority of their matters. Sometimes, school boards have a "workshop" or "caucus" meeting where they discuss issues in greater detail, but don't vote on the issues. Sometimes, they will hear a wide range of public opinions in general sessions and then go into workshop sessions. Boards may use a committee structure where certain members of the board, often working with the superintendent or key administrators, study a specific issue and make recommendations to the full board for a vote. By the time the board has a regular "agenda" or "business" meeting where it votes on issues, the agenda



items have usually been vetted or studied already and members are simply prepared to vote up or down an issue.

What is the difference between school board policy and provincial laws?

School board policies, regulations and statutes all govern the ways school boards behave. Statutes are the laws that are enacted by provincial legislators. Usually the law will contain broad language on an issue, and it will authorize the appropriate agency to write regulations, also called “administrative code,” that detail how the law will be carried out.

Local public schools must adhere to provincial statutes and regulations. There are many aspects of school management that the province does not manage. Those are covered by the local school board’s policies, which are the local school board’s rules and guidelines that detail how the district will operate. Policies address many issues ranging from student discipline and dress codes to whether the district will rent the gym to community groups after school hours. The province generally does not delve into the oversight of local board policies unless there is a specific law requiring boards to have policies on an issue (such as bullying), or if the local board’s policies are found to be arbitrary or capricious, or have otherwise run afoul of provincial laws and regulations.

What role does the provincial school board association or the provincial ministry of education have in engaging student trustees?

School board associations are service organizations that may provide training, assistance and advocacy for local school boards. However, they are generally not regulatory agencies and do not have authority over local school districts. Provincial ministries of education are the agencies that regulate public schools.

If a person has an issue that cannot be resolved by working up the chain of command locally, he or she can bring it to the attention of their provincial ministry of education. These agencies often serve as an effective liaison between local residents and the ministry of education. There may be School Ethics Commissions or education ombudsmen who hear cases involving conflicts of interest and possible ethics violations. The minister of education also hears many cases dealing with education issues.



Resources and References

Edmonton Public Schools Student Trustee webpage. <http://www.epsb.ca/ourdistrict/board/about/studenttrustee/>

Alberta School Act and Regulations website. <http://www.education.alberta.ca/departement/policy/legislation/regulations.aspx>

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Rossi, C. (October 7, 2013) "Vancouver School Board names first student trustee", Vancouver Courier. www.vancourier.com/news/vancouver-school-board-names-first-student-trustee-1.651860

"How can I get involved with my District Education Council (DEC)?" New Brunswick District Education Councils, <http://decnb.ca/get-involved/get-involved-in-dec/20-how-can-i-get-involved-with-my-district-education-council-dec>

Critchley, S. (January 2003) "The Nature and Extent of Student Involvement in Educational Policy-Making in Canadian School Systems", Educational Management Administration Leadership. Vol. 31 No. 1 97-106.

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Vancouver School Board. "BK-R: Student Trustee". www.vsb.bc.ca/district-policy/bk-r-student-trustee-vancouver-board-education-pilot-project

Organizations

- SoundOut www.soundout.org
- Student Voice Initiative www.studentvoicei.org
- Ontario Student Trustee Association www.osta-aeco.org



SoundOut Resources

Since 2002, SoundOut has provided tools, training and technical assistance to schools, districts and provinces across Canada.

Training

Our training to support school boards includes:

- Introduction to Meaningful Student Involvement
- Students as Partners in Education
- Evaluating Student Voice
- Preparing School Boards for Student Trustees
- Evaluating the Success of Student Engagement

Tools

Our website is a repository for Meaningful Student Involvement, student voice, student engagement and student/adult partnerships. For more than a decade we've been sharing the very best research, examples, tools and other information for K-12 educators, policy-makers, administrators and others. You can find it online at <http://soundout.org>.

- *Meaningful Student Involvement Guide to Students as Partners in School Change* at <http://soundout.org/meaningful-student-involvement-guide-to-students-as-partners-in-school-change/>
- *The Guide to Student Voice* at <http://www.amazon.com/The-Guide-Student-Voice-Edition/dp/0692217320>
- *The SoundOut Student Voice Curriculum* at <http://www.amazon.com/SoundOut-Student-Voice-Curriculum-Teaching/dp/1483941396>
- *Stories of Meaningful Student Involvement* at <http://soundout.org/stories-of-meaningful-student-involvement/>