

# Student Advisory Council to the Board



## Structure 2

# Student Advisory Council to the Board

An ongoing body of students with a sustained, structured relationship to the board, surfacing issues and shaping the agenda over time.

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## What is a Student Advisory Council?

A student advisory council is a formally established body of students with a recurring relationship to the board. Not a one-time presentation, not occasional public comment, but an ongoing structure through which student knowledge reaches governance.

The form varies: some councils meet monthly and include a formal board presentation; others are smaller, more conversational, and embedded in committee work. Some are organized by the board itself; others are student-coordinated through student councils or other mechanisms. What defines a student advisory council isn't the format. It's the commitment to sustained, structured access to students.

## What a Student Advisory Council Makes Possible

Students walk into a board room with expertise that no adult has: what it feels like to be a student right now. A student advisory council brings:

- **Information the board cannot get anywhere else.** Students can surface what the board doesn't know it needs to know.
- **An early warning system.** The group becomes the board's most reliable read on what is happening in schools and what's on the horizon.
- **Trust built from genuine co-ownership.** Students develop a stake in the outcome and build a bridge of credibility that extends back to their peers.

## What It Takes

It is critical to attend to four conditions that shape how the council functions:

### Mindsets that matter

Avoid tokenizing students. Use the advisory as a genuine input channel, rather than a rubber stamp or PR gesture. Tell students how their input was used or why it wasn't.

### Empowering environments

The advisory format, norms, and focus areas should reflect student needs. Give students substantive, real work, rather than peripheral "student issues."

### Supportive practices

Provide orientation, materials, and a staff coordinator to manage logistics and ensure input reaches decision-makers. Codify the council in ways that ensure continuity over time.

### Student body representation

Let students lead the selection process for advisory members. Actively recruit beyond existing pipelines — across schools, grades, and backgrounds.

For more of what it takes, complete the conditions check on the next page.

## Student Advisory Council: Conditions Check

Whether you already have an advisory council or are looking to start one, use this assessment to evaluate your strength and needs.

| Mindsets that matter                                                                        | Not Yet | In Progress | Established |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Board members engage with students on substantive policy and planning topics.               |         |             |             |
| Students surface and lead inquiry on priority issues, as well as react to board priorities. |         |             |             |
| Board members treat student input as legitimate and important.                              |         |             |             |
| The board regularly explains how student input was or was not used.                         |         |             |             |

| Empowering Environments                                                                  | Not Yet | In Progress | Established |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| The advisory council is codified in official board policy or governance.                 |         |             |             |
| Students are compensated through stipend, course credit, or equivalent.                  |         |             |             |
| The board and students track student input and regularly evaluate council effectiveness. |         |             |             |
| Student roles and expectations are clearly communicated before students join.            |         |             |             |

| Supportive Practices                                                                         | Not Yet | In Progress | Established |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Students receive ongoing support about how the board functions.                              |         |             |             |
| A staff person supports the group with logistics, preparation, and follow-through.           |         |             |             |
| Participation barriers like transportation, scheduling, and language are actively addressed. |         |             |             |
| Students are briefed on agenda items and have access to materials in advance.                |         |             |             |

| Student Body Representation                                                    | Not Yet        | In Progress        | Established        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| The group reflects the student body's demographic and experiential diversity.  |                |                    |                    |
| The membership selection process is clearly defined and publicly communicated. |                |                    |                    |
| The selection process recruits across schools, grades, and backgrounds.        |                |                    |                    |
| Total/15                                                                       | Not Yet: _____ | In Progress: _____ | Established: _____ |

## Your Next Move

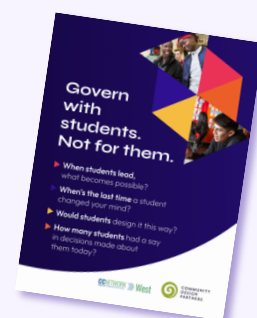
Look at your results from the conditions check. Plan your next steps with the directions below.

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If most of your responses were "not yet"      | <p>Start with a conversation among board members about questions like these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What decisions has this board made in the past year that would have looked different if we'd had a student advisory council?</li> <li>• What assumptions do we hold about students' readiness to engage in governance?</li> <li>• What do we need to help ensure a student advisory council is not tokenizing student voice?</li> </ul> |
| If most of your responses were "in progress": | At your next advisory meeting, ask students to bring one thing the board should know more about. Listen to the students without redirecting the conversation and put their suggestion on the next board agenda.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| If most of your responses were "established": | Identify two items that you marked "in progress" that, if moved to "established," would most change your partnership with students. Make that your focus for the next quarter.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## Printable posters

Student partnership practices can fade under the weight of old habits and urgent deadlines. Companion posters are designed to keep them visible in the rooms where your board works.

[See the posters](#) →



## Additional Reading

[District of Columbia Student Advisory Committee](#) is one of the largest student advisories in the country. Read their annual report, recruiting methods, and more on their website.

[Hawai'i State Student Council](#) is structured to serve as an advisory to the state school board and the state board student member is part of this council. The group receives support from a designated individual within the Department of Education.

## Want to go further?

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Check out more tools, case studies, and resources to support student partnerships at [studentpoweredimprovement.com](https://studentpoweredimprovement.com) →