

How to: Student Convenings for a School Board



Structure 3

Student Convenings

Periodic, intensive sessions where students and board members work side-by-side on a specific problem or decision.

What is a Student Convening?

A student convening is a structured, time-bounded session in which students and board members work together on a specific problem, question, or decision. Unlike ongoing advisory structures, convenings are periodic: a facilitated work session, a design sprint, a facilitated discussion tied to a specific agenda item. What defines this structure is not frequency but the nature of the work. Students and board members sit at the same table, thinking through the same problem, each expected to contribute and each expected to learn.

What Student Convenings Makes Possible

Student convenings allow both board members and students to engage with a problem at the same time. Convenings allow for:

- **A real exchange between people who each hold part of the picture.** Students bring what schools feel like right now. Board members bring policy context and governance responsibility.
- **Analysis boards cannot get from other sources.** Students surface considerations and insights adults likely miss with more traditional data sources.
- **A table where lived experience and governance responsibility meet.** Boards gain perspectives that shape their decisions.

Done well, convenings change what the board believes is possible the next time a hard question comes up.

What It Takes

Mindsets that matter

Collaborative authentically through openness, deep listening, and by treating student input as equal to other input.

Empowering environments

Address real governance questions — not hypotheticals or decisions already made — and provide stipends, meals, and transportation that make participation possible.

Supportive practices

Involve students in designing the convening. Provide students with governance context and provide board members with practice in deep listening.

Student body representation

Recruit students most directly affected by the decisions at hand, not only those whose voices are regularly heard.

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

Student Convenings: Conditions Check

Whether you've already held convenings or are looking to hold your first one, use this assessment to evaluate your strength and needs.

Mindsets that matter	Not Yet	In Progress	Established
The board enters convenings open to students changing the direction of a decision, not just informing it.			
Board members treat student input as legitimate and important, not as an anecdotal supplement.			
After each convening, the board tells participating students what was done with what they built together.			
The board treats convenings as one part of a broader student involvement strategy, not as the only strategy.			

Empowering Environments	Not Yet	In Progress	Established
Convenings are organized around live, authentic governance questions.			
Students are compensated with stipends, meals, and transportation coverage.			
Student input meaningfully shapes the convening's structure and use of outcomes.			
The board clearly integrates convening outcomes with its formal decision-making process.			

Supportive Practices	Not Yet	In Progress	Established
Students are trained in governance context, and board members are trained in student partnership.			
The convening closes with structured sensemaking where both groups name what they learned and what they want next.			
Outcomes are documented, including what was decided, what was learned, and what commitments were made.			
Convenings run on a predictable schedule, at minimum annually, so both groups can plan participation in advance.			

Student Body Representation	Not Yet	In Progress	Established
Students most affected by decision-making are priority recruits.			
For state-level convenings, outreach reaches rural and lower-resource communities.			
Convening evaluation invites students and board members to reflect on representation.			

Total/15	Not Yet: _____	In Progress: _____	Established: _____
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Your Next Move

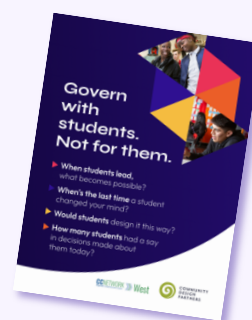
Look at your assessment results.

If most of your responses were "not yet"	Look at your next meeting agenda. Find one item that will directly affect students' daily experience and schedule a two-hour session with a group of students to work through that problem before the board acts on it.
If most of your responses were "in progress":	At your next convening, give students a role in setting the agenda rather than arriving at one already set. Before the session, ask students to identify the question they most want the board to work on with them. Use their question as the opening item.
If most of your responses were "established":	Identify two items that you marked "in progress" that, if moved to "established," would most change the quality and impact of student convenings. Work with students to improve those items.

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

[SABE Conference](#). California holds a four-day conference for about 75 students from around the state. Students are divided into small groups to identify and discuss specific problems in the state's education system. On the last day, each group presents its proposal to the California State Board of Education.

[Student Summit](#). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) holds a summit with over 125 students from across the state as a platform to share their experiences, advocate for their needs, and help shape the

Want to go further?

Check out more tools, case studies, and resources to support student partnerships at studentpoweredimprovement.com →

