



SPECIFIC WAYS TO INVOLVE STUDENTS

This tip sheet describes specific ways that schools can involve students in policy, curriculum, governance, and other aspects of school life. There are four ways in which schools are **required** to involve students: on BSAC, on the School Site Council, in student government, and on design teams. The rest are ideas for expanding and deepening student involvement in all sorts of capacities.

There are two main approaches to student involvement:

1. Involve students directly in an existing adult activity, such as a special task force, school site council, or instructional leadership team.
2. Set up an activity just for students, such as a student advisory board or a peer mediation group.

In some cases, you can incorporate both approaches: for example, have students on an adult task force, but also have a student action forum where students identify important issues the school should address.

There is no “right” approach; you should consider what will work best for your school. The Youth On Board office can help with technical assistance as you develop your plan.

Mandatory Ways

Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)

The job of BSAC is to advise the School Committee on its decision-making process, keep schools informed about relevant citywide issues, and develop projects during the school year. Each school is required to appoint 2 students to serve as members of BSAC.¹

School Site Council (SSC)

School site councils are responsible primarily for reviewing and approving the school’s Whole School Improvement Plan and its budget for discretionary items. High schools are required to have 1 voting student member elected by the student body. SSCs may also have non-voting associate members, including additional students.

Student Government Association (SGA)

All schools must have some form of student government. It’s important to give students a voice in school issues and a chance to learn leadership and organizational skills.

Design Teams

Students must be included on design teams if a school has them. It’s mandatory that students stay on the team as long as it exists.

¹ For more information, contact Maria Ortiz at the Office of High School Renewal, (617) 635-8079, ext 104.



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Other Ways

Student Advisory Boards

Student advisory boards have no governing authority but serve an official advisory capacity within a school, offering regular feedback and advice on student issues. Students are uniquely qualified to advise a school on the issues that concern them.

Task Forces/Action Forums

Task forces are short-term entities created to complete a special project (such as renovating the gym facilities) or to address an urgent problem (such as violence at school). Often task forces are organized when a school is given funding to be used for a specific purpose. These can be student groups or mixed groups of students and adults.

Policy Committees

Students can take part in advising the school on specific policies regarding curricula, academic codes, hiring, budgeting, or other pertinent issues. Like student advisory boards, policy committees have an official, institutionalized role even though they do not necessarily create or implement policy.

Headmaster Advisory Boards

If you're a headmaster, you can form an advisory board by asking 3 or 4 students whom you respect to help you process the issues you encounter in your position. Ask them to give you good advice about how things are going in the school and how you can do your job better. Lead teachers or other school leaders can also form personal advisory boards.

Staff

Students can be great staff members. Think about how your school can hire them. Students can be given the responsibility of planning an event or program, or acting as peer leaders in school activities.

Hiring Team

Have students help you hire new teachers and staff members. In the final phases of the interviewing process, it's very important to find out if a prospective teacher can relate well to students—and who better than students themselves to rate a candidate's abilities in this area. Students don't have the final say on hiring decisions (unless you want them to), but they can offer invaluable input.

Peer Mediators

Students trained in mediation can negotiate conflicts among their peers. Mediators help their fellow students by offering a peer perspective on difficult issues, and also improve their own conflict resolution skills in the process.

Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)

Some schools have had great success involving students in ILTs. You can have students be full, participating members of ILTs or invite them to meetings on specific topics.



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Mentors

Students can serve as mentors to others.

- *Students mentoring younger students.* A junior or senior can be a great mentor to an incoming freshman. Mentors can teach younger students life skills, give advice on upcoming years in school, help with homework, or just be a friend.
- *Students mentoring adults.* Students and adults can meet regularly and share their knowledge, or have a one-time meeting where students teach adults about school issues or student life (such as current slang, favorite music, fashion trends).

Advocates

Students can be powerful advocates for student involvement, as well as for other changes that students want in policy or governance. It makes a big difference for a *student* to say what students think; adults tend to listen to student advocates in a different way than we listen to each other. Student advocates can attend School Committee meetings and make presentations or proposals about their ideas.

Public Speakers

Student speakers can make informative presentations or share compelling stories from their schools. These experts on student issues can be called upon to speak at conferences and events.

Trainers

Student trainers can train other students and/or adults. For instance, students can lead trainings around a special curriculum, such as interpersonal violence or environmental issues.

Fundraising

Get students involved in fundraising for your school. Ask students for their input on grants that you're writing, and have students be available to answer questions when foundations come to the school for site visits.

For More Information

Visit the Youth On Board Web site at www.youthonboard.org for more information about our work or to order our publication *15 Points: Successfully Involving Young People in Decision Making*.