



Policy Toolkit for Student Board Members

Table of Contents

Understanding Policy & Regulation

Introduction

What Is Public Policy?

What Is Regulation?

Levels of Education Policy

Federal Policy

State Policy

District Policy

School Site Policy

How to Create Student-Led Policy

Step One: Find a Cause

Step Two: Gather Input for a Policy

Step Three: Determine the Avenue for Change

a. Step Three-A: Resolution

b. Step Three-B: Board Policy and Administrative Regulation

c. Step Three-C: Superintendent Action and School Site Action

Step Four: Gathering Support

Step Five: Writing

Step Six: Your Policy Passed, What's Next?

Words of Advice

Understanding Policy and Regulation

Introduction

Being a student board member (SBM) gives you the unique opportunity to write, propose, and pass policies, resolutions, and proclamations that have a critical effect on the countless students that you represent during your tenure.

What is Public Policy?

Public policy is a set of proposals, either bylaws, codes, or other systems of legislative governance, that is set to solve an issue or recurring problem in a community through programs or enforcement of the proposal. Under public policy is education policy, which influences the governance and curriculum of an educational institution, usually implemented by the governing body of the educational institution or its designees. In your work as a student board member, the types of education policy that you will focus on are federal, state, district, and school site policy.

What is Regulation?

At every level, there are also regulations that influence the way that policy is enacted. Regulation refers to the specific rules, procedures, or administrative requirements established to implement and enforce school board policies. While the school board sets broad goals and principles through policy, regulations provide detailed guidance on how those policies are carried out within the school district. Policy tends to focus on governance whereas operations focuses on regulation. Regulations are typically developed and maintained by the superintendent or district staff, not the board itself, and focus on day-to-day operations, such as procedures for student enrollment, disciplinary actions, curriculum implementation, and staff evaluations. They ensure that the intent of board policy is consistently applied and legally compliant across the district.

Levels of Education Policy

Federal Policy

Federal education policy establishes national standards, funding structures, and legal protections to ensure consistency and equity across the U.S. education system. Policies at this level are often enacted through legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The federal government also oversees civil rights protections, school nutrition programs, and funding for special education and low-income students through Title I and Title IX regulations.

State Policy

State education policy determines how federal mandates are implemented while also setting additional standards and regulations that shape public education within the state. State governments oversee funding allocations, standardized testing requirements, teacher credentialing, and curriculum frameworks. State legislatures and departments of education play a key role in crafting policies that align with both federal mandates and local needs. Many times, the student board member position and voting rights are based on state policy. For example, AB 824 in the California legislature allows students to serve on county boards of education and 2023-S9018A in New York mandates a nonvoting student board member on every board.

District Policy

District education policy governs how schools operate within a specific district. They are created and enacted by local school boards. These policies cover areas such as curriculum adoption, budgeting, staffing, student discipline, and district-wide initiatives. Local school boards develop policies that reflect the needs and priorities of their community while ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations.

School Site Policy

School site policy refers to rules and guidelines that are specific to an individual school and are typically set by the school administration, site council, or leadership teams in alignment with district, state, and federal policies. These policies address day-to-day operations, such as school bell schedules, trash and recycling procedures, technology use, dress code protocols, open campus lunches, and student leadership involvement. While schools must follow district and state regulations, site-specific policies allow flexibility to meet the unique needs of the student population and school community.



How to Create Student-Led Policy

Step One: Find a Cause

The first step in any public policy project is finding an issue to fix or a constant problem that needs to be addressed in your school district's community. It can be as small as fixing the lock on school bathroom doors or as big as changing the whole district's graduation requirements, the world is at your fingertips.

Finding such an issue can be as simple as observing your surroundings and speaking with your peers.

Fundamentally, every policy should directly address a specific issue and have a positive impact on the student body. The best policies from student board members come from their unique perspective as a student; utilize your ability to be on campus, learn in classrooms, and connect with peers to your advantage; it is a resource your adult board members do not have. It's helpful to think about what issues affect you and your peers the most and potential solutions.

Step Two: Gather Input for a Policy

When beginning to write your policy, see what policies your district already has on that topic. Understanding your district systems and separation of powers, that is who handles what issues, is important when understanding what stakeholders to talk to and what avenue of change to pursue.

You should be gathering input from students at every stage of the policy-making process. Any solution you propose should be vetted by the student body to ensure support.

During the beginning stages of forming a policy proposal, it is important to gather opinions from your constituents, district personnel, and site-level staff in order to construct an accurate and effective solution. Depending on district demographics, SBM relationship with the board, size of the district, and the nature of the policy proposal, the methods for collecting input may vary.

Stakeholder engagement is essential for the success of a proposal. Please look at our forthcoming *Effective Representation Toolkit*, available at: nsbma.net/resources for more information about how to best approach this.

Focus on who to collect feedback from, and how.

Who to Gather Input From

Students are the primary stakeholders in education, and their lived experiences provide essential insight into how policies and programs function on the ground. Visiting classrooms allows you to observe school culture and instruction while having informal conversations with students. Student advisory committees can serve as formal spaces to collect structured feedback.

You can also partner with student leaders through programs such as ASB, Link Crew, peer mentoring, or student government to gather input from a broader student base. Clubs and affinity groups, including Black Student Union, GSA, and Latinx student organizations, are valuable spaces to ensure representation across different backgrounds, interests, and identities.

From the staff side, school and district administrators can offer perspective on feasibility, staffing, and timelines. Principals and assistant principals bring knowledge of day-to-day operations and campus-specific concerns. In smaller districts, department heads may also serve as key contacts for areas such as special education, counseling, or athletics.

District office staff involved in curriculum, student services, technology, and communications play a central role in shaping implementation. Finally, legal counsel or governance teams can advise on compliance, risk, and whether your proposal requires board-level approval or administrative action.



How to Gather Input

Community forums are a valuable way to engage stakeholders directly and should be offered in multiple formats, including in-person, virtual, and hybrid settings to ensure accessibility. These forums allow for open dialogue and help build trust by creating space for real-time feedback and clarification.

Surveys are another key tool for collecting input. When designing a survey, use neutral and inclusive language to avoid bias. A well-rounded survey will include both quantitative questions, such as scaled or multiple-choice formats, and qualitative prompts that allow for open-ended responses. Keep surveys brief and mobile-friendly to maximize completion rates and ensure accessibility for all participants.

There are several tools you can use to deliver surveys effectively. Google Forms is a simple and widely used option for digital distribution and easy analysis. Paper surveys can be helpful in settings where internet access is limited or unavailable. Social media polls can provide quick insight into general student sentiment, especially when targeting younger audiences or specific school communities.



Step Three: Determine the Avenue for Change

Before getting started, here are a few helpful questions to ask yourself to determine the best avenue for change. The information here is generalized, it is important to use your own discretion when thinking about what to do.

Does this require formal adoption to be impactful? → **Resolution**

Does this issue require a change in governance direction?

→ **Board policy or administrative regulation**

Can direct action achieve the goal more efficiently?

→ **Superintendent or school site action**

Step Three-A: Avenue for Change – Resolution

A resolution is a formal statement or decision adopted by a governing body, such as a school board, city council, or legislative assembly, to express a position, establish a policy, or take a specific action. Resolutions are often used to acknowledge an issue, set goals, or direct future actions without necessarily creating a binding law.

- A resolution is a formal written motion
- Contains “whereas” clauses explaining why the resolution is needed
- Contains “therefore be it resolved” that explains the result of the resolution being adopted
- Most of the policy work you will do as a student board member will be in the form of resolutions. It is important to understand how they are formatted, how to write one, and how to gather support for your resolution.

[Here is an example of a support resolution](#)

Symbolic Resolution: express a sentiment or official stance of the board of education.

- Symbolic resolutions will establish or recognize events and people
- Often uncontroversial and simple to pass with unanimity (though not always)
- Symbolic resolutions can also have the potential to change culture
- These resolutions do not direct the district to change any of its operations

[Here is an example of a symbolic resolution](#)

Tangible Resolution

Resolution that directs the Superintendent to take an action.

- These are the most common types of resolutions, appearing at every regular meeting in the form of budget decisions, contract approvals, and other changes
- These resolutions require negotiations and preparation before they appear before the board, and often take up more substantial amounts of time during public board deliberations
- Tangible resolutions can be contentious and pass along narrow margins, making advocacy and planning especially important
- When brought forth by a board member, tangible resolutions are the most complex and forceful of the three resolution types
- This is the most outward and “flashy” method of creating change within a school district

[Here is an example of a tangible resolution](#)

When working on a resolution, here are some tips:

Writing a resolution requires clarity, structure, and strong justifications. Here are some key tips to ensure your resolution is persuasive and actionable:

1. Define your purpose

Identify what you want to achieve with the resolution. Make sure the issue is within the authority of the governing body you are addressing. Ask yourself: Is this resolution calling for a specific action, a policy change, or a formal stance?

2. Write the resolution, following the standard structure

Most resolutions follow a standard format:

- Title – A concise and specific name for the resolution
- Whereas Clauses – Provide background information, evidence, and justification
 - Each “Whereas” clause should establish why the resolution is necessary
 - Use facts, statistics, research, or past precedents to support your case
 - Avoid overloading the resolution with too many clauses—keep it concise and impactful
 - Example: Whereas, student mental health issues have increased by 40% in the past decade, affecting academic success and well-being

- Resolved Clauses – State the specific actions or commitments being made
 - These should state exactly what action the governing body will take.
 - Use strong, direct verbs such as "adopts," "commits to," "supports," "requests," or "directs."
 - Make sure the language is specific and avoids vague terms.
 - Example: Resolved, that the district will implement a peer-led mental health ambassador program in all high schools by the 2025-2026 school year
- Check with district leaders about any requirements for whereas and resolved clauses, or check through previous resolutions that your board has passed

3. Ensure feasibility and alignment with existing policies

- Check if the resolution aligns with current laws, policies, and budgetary constraints
- If funding is required, specify how resources will be allocated or suggest potential sources
- Make sure there is a plan for follow-up to ensure implementation

4. Finalize the resolution

- Avoid jargon or overly complex wording
- Keep sentences short, clear, and professional
- Ensure consistency in formatting and terminology
- Check for grammar, punctuation, and formatting errors
- Make sure all clauses flow logically and each one adds value
- Have someone else review it for clarity and effectiveness

After your resolution is fully developed and peer-reviewed, you can begin working with school district officials to turn your proposal into policy. The steps for this should be as follows:

1. Determine your sponsor: Start with the people that will eventually vote on this proposal—your board members. Being observant of who can be an ally and has the same values as you do is a great place to start.
2. Set up meetings to see if they would be interested in introducing the resolution. Always come to meetings with stakeholders with these pieces to present to them
 - The key issue (Description and history)
 - Data collected
 - Drafted solutions
 - How they can help

3. Address concerns proactively to increase the chances of approval.
4. If needed, build a coalition and gather broad support from different stakeholders to support your resolution
5. If that board member agrees to bring it ahead of the board, be prepared to advocate for it in discussions or hearings
 - a. Know the key arguments for your resolution and anticipate potential objections
 - b. Prepare a one-page summary or talking points to present during discussions
 - c. Be ready to answer questions and negotiate while staying firm on key points

Step Three-B: Board Policy and Administrative Regulation

Policy: A written guideline adopted by the board under which the school district operates. Policy should reflect essential board governance statements, such as broad authorizations of programs and services or outlining the administration's role in implementing these programs. Only the board can adopt & change policy.

[Here is a link to a board policy.](#)

Regulation: Board policies that are left to administrative discretion in both design and implementation. Regulations are written and implemented by the superintendent/administrative team, as directed by the board. Administrative regulations define how a policy is executed.

A regulation can:

- Designate a management process
- Specify a step-by-step process to enforce policy
- Describe what, when, how, and by whom the policy is enforced
- Give instructions
- Provide examples of exhibits, forms, or management reference tools
- Give specific applications of the policy
- Expand or complement the policy

You can make an impact without an item on the school board agenda! Do my goals need the approval or attention of the entire school board?

[Here is a link to a regulation](#)

Step Three-C: Superintendent Action and School Site Action

Superintendent Action

Superintendent Actions consist of any policy proposal or project on the district or school site level that can be pushed for, executed, or enacted by the Superintendent. This includes proposals such as a district-wide teacher professional development day on the validation of diverse linguistic practices, a briefing for school resource officers on restorative justice, or an internal memo to school site janitors to provide lunchtime community service to students who volunteer to clean up litter at lunch or after school.

As an SBM you should hold a close relationship with your Superintendent, meeting with them once a week or every two weeks. Doing so provides you with ample access to an incredibly effective avenue of change!

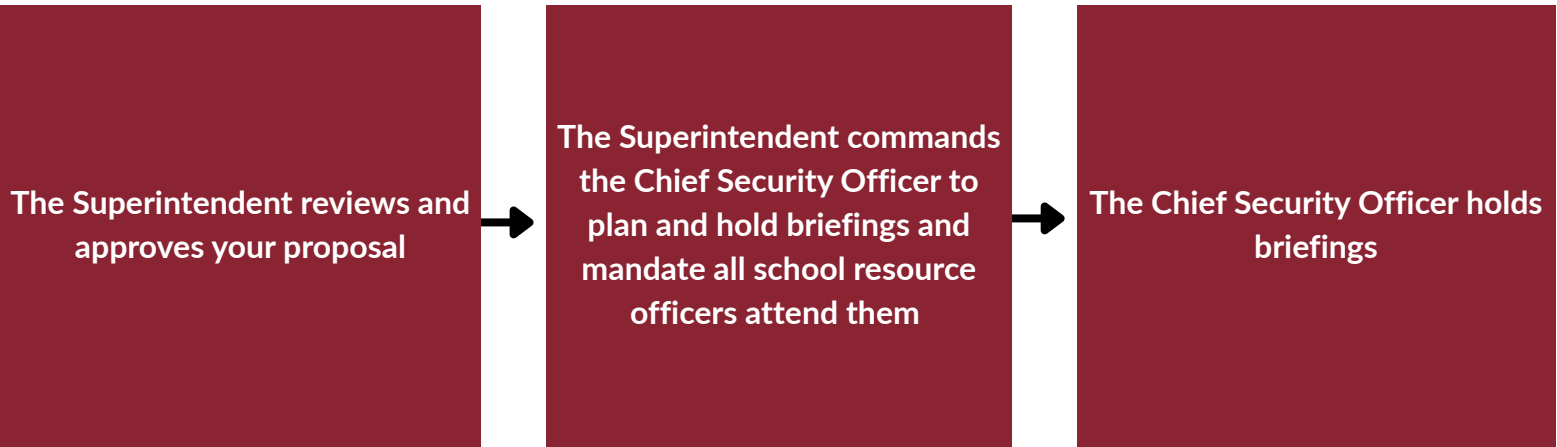
Policy proposals completed through the Superintendent Action avenue of change usually are enacted through a tactful use of your Superintendent's internal chains of command.



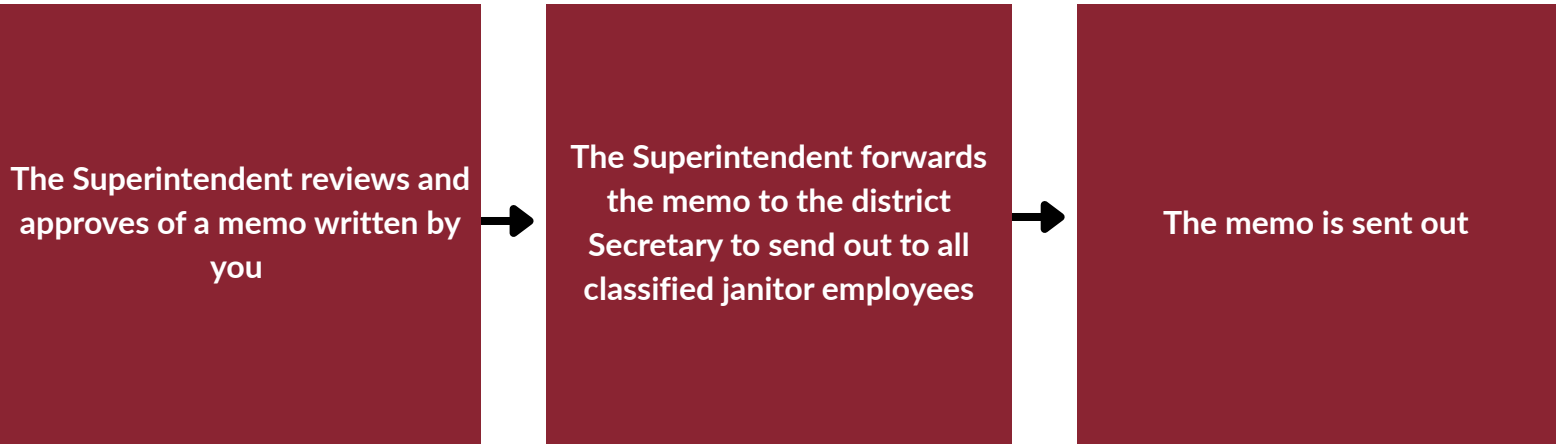
District-wide teacher professional development day on the validation of diverse linguistic practices.



A briefing for school resource officers on restorative justice.



Internal memo to school site janitors to provide lunchtime community service to students who volunteer to clean up litter at lunch or after school



School Site Action

Several policies fall under the jurisdiction of a school site instead of the district. These policy proposals can be pushed for, executed, or enacted by employees at the school site level. Examples include proposals such as expanding diverse texts within an English curriculum, a new policy against exams on religious holidays, or including students in email announcements sent to parents regarding new school policies.

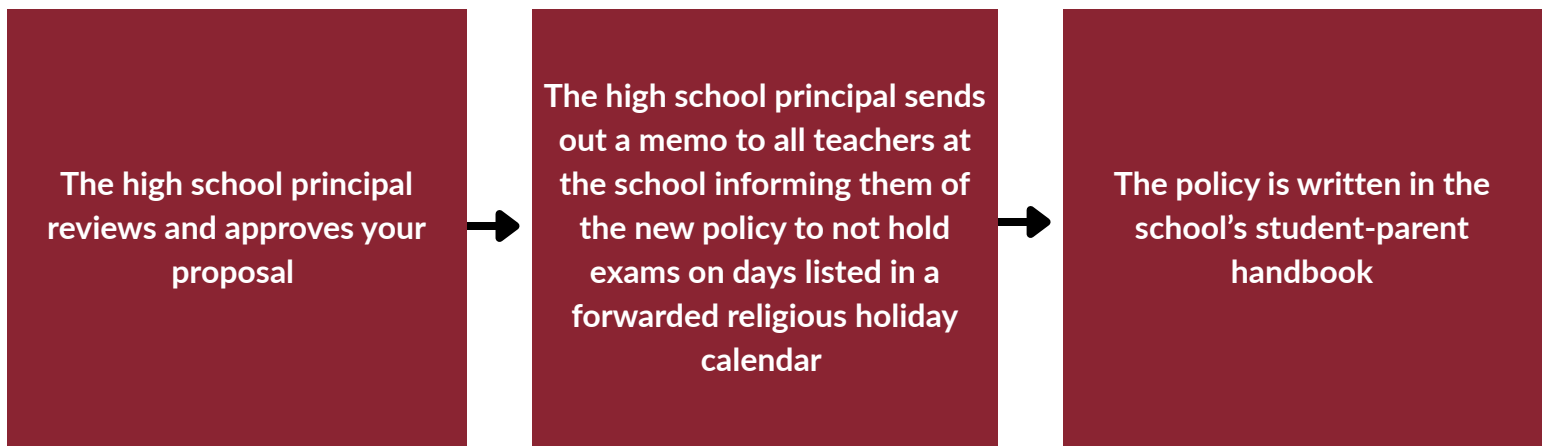
Policy proposals completed through the School-Site Action avenue of change usually are enacted through the school-site channels of command.



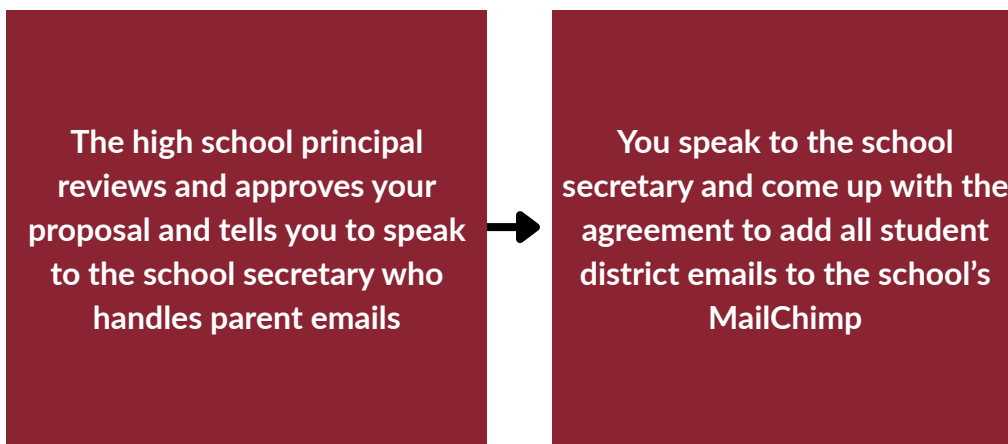
Expanding diverse texts within the High School English curriculum



A new policy against exams on religious holidays



Including students in email announcements sent to parents regarding new school policies.



School Site Action policies are not passed through headstrong political advocacy for your goals nor longtime planning for a vote on a written proposal, but instead, they are created and enacted through deep conversations with administrators and educators at the school site level. To pass School Site Action policies you must be open to feedback on your proposal and work alongside administration and faculty, not against them. Sometimes, you may not even need to change or edit any written policy, but instead, merely, change how the policy itself is carried out.

Step Four: Gathering Support

After your proposal is fully developed and peer-reviewed, you can begin working with school district officials to turn your proposal into policy. The steps for this should be as follows:

1. Identify what level of approval your policy needs (site-level, administrative regulation, board approval, etc.)
2. Create a timeline with the relevant adult staff member to further this proposal through the proper channels (ex. subcommittee review before board approval).
3. Regularly check in with the adult staff to ensure that the timeline is being followed. For any policy proposal, your consistent energy and advocacy is required to ensure its success.

Step Five: Writing

Once you've secured sponsors for your policy proposal, it's time to shift into the research and writing phase of the policy development process.

Understanding your sponsors' perspectives, non-negotiables, and areas of expertise is crucial to crafting a successful proposal. Start with an introductory meeting to learn about their priorities and ideas — this will help you narrow your research and refine your approach.

After that conversation, compare their input with your initial ideas. Note which suggestions align with your proposed solutions and which do not. This reflection will guide your writing and help you focus your efforts.

After that conversation, compare their input with your initial ideas. Note which suggestions align with your proposed solutions and which do not. This reflection will guide your writing and help you focus your efforts.

Begin your research by reviewing sample policies, academic literature, community data, and other relevant sources.

Once you've developed a draft policy, share it with your sponsors for feedback. Expect a round of edits and negotiations before reaching a final version. Once finalized, be sure to format your proposal according to your district's policy standards.

If your issue is already addressed in an existing policy, you may only need to review the current language and supporting research. In that case, identifying and revising specific sections of the policy may be enough to achieve your desired outcome.

Step Six: Your Policy Passed, What's Next?

Now that the policy has passed, your work shifts to two key responsibilities: ensuring the successful implementation of the policy you just passed and identifying your next area of focus.

Continue to monitor the progress of your policy and follow through on the "how" — the action steps you outlined during the proposal process. You can support this by providing the district administration with any necessary background information, resources, or preliminary implementation plans to help guide the process.

If students were surveyed or involved in shaping the policy, it's especially important to follow up with them. More broadly, it's good practice for student board members to keep their peers informed about what the school board is doing and how recent decisions impact students. And when the board passes a policy you proposed — especially one that benefits students — remember to celebrate your success and share the win with your community!



Words of Advice

Hear from former student board members about their experience pursuing the policy process!



Kevin Bokoum

Student Member of the Board

Washington County Board of Education, MD (2020-2021)

Maryland State Board of Education
(2021-2022)

During my time as Student Member of the Maryland State Board of Education (2021 – 2022), I knew from the start that I wanted to do something big around mental health. We were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were isolated, and I had personally witnessed the impacts of suicide in my county, in Maryland, and throughout the United States. I knew during my campaign, I wanted to focus on statewide mental health. I knew that I could not sit on the Board with that mandate and responsibility while leaving it to the side.

So I took action and led a policy, [COMAR 13A.07.11. \(Student Suicide Prevention and Safety Training\)](#) that required all public school staff who interact with students – not just certificated teachers, but also coaches, tutors, paraeducators, etc – to complete annual training in suicide prevention, behavioral health awareness, and trauma response.

Before this, training was uneven across the state. Some counties had strong systems in place, others didn't. That inconsistency was costing lives. I wanted to make sure no matter where you went to school in Maryland, the adults around you would know how to spot the warning signs and how to help.

To make it happen, I started early in my term. I sat down with state education department staff and talked extensively with other student board members. I asked questions, read through the COMAR text – line by line – and figured out what was in place and what was missing. I wasn't afraid to admit when I didn't understand something. I listened more than I spoke at first, then once I had my footing, I used my position to push for real change never letting no be an answer. When they initially tried to dismiss me I just scheduled meetings with them so they could not. The final regulation we passed in February 2022 added protections that hadn't been there before along with a whole deep drive on mental health during the meeting. So while I will never know how many lives that policy saved, I'm confident it made a difference.

Words of Advice

Hear from former student board members about their experience pursuing the policy process!



Anika Yu

Student Board Member

Dublin Unified School District, CA
(2022-2023)

At the end of my one-year term, I felt as if I had put in the same amount of work on the board as my adult counterparts, looking at the positive changes I was able to bring to my district. However, there was a stark difference: they were getting paid monthly stipends for their service, while the student board member only received a lump sum scholarship of \$500 at the end of their term. The scholarship was better than nothing, which was what most student board members in California had to work with, but I knew that its existence meant our district could do better. I proposed a policy to grant every student board member, starting from my successor, equal compensation with the adult board members.

Collaborating with my superintendent and testifying with personal experience were the most important actions I took, which ultimately pushed my policy forward and helped me secure student board member compensation at 75% of adult compensation.

From ideation to final passage, I sought my superintendent's advice and support, which was invaluable! He spoke with the other board members about my policy and convinced them of its necessity and helped me edit as needed. We ultimately lowered the amount of compensation after a couple board members pointed out that student board members didn't serve in closed session and therefore only served for about 75% of the time that adult board members did. When the policy came to the board for a vote, I spoke extensively on why I believed it was necessary. I noted that I was working a part-time job on top of school and being a student board member in order to save for college, and that this scholarship would allow future student board members more flexibility and time to dedicate to public service. I think that adding personal touches, apart from logical reasoning, helped me win the support of a board majority.

Going through multiple stages of ideation will help you arrive at the best policy for your constituents. Don't be afraid to reach out to your superintendent or fellow board members for help and feedback in addition to student and teacher stakeholders, because considering all perspectives is an important best practice. Ultimately, a policy will last longer than your influence on the district; it's bigger than yourself. So edit it over and over and be open to changing what you had originally planned!





NATIONAL STUDENT BOARD MEMBER ASSOCIATION

