



NZSTA
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Student Representative Handbook

www.nzsta.org.nz

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1. The nuts and bolts: getting started



Hapaitia te ara tika pumau ai te
rangatiratanga mo nga uri whakatipu.

**Foster the pathway of knowledge, strength
and growth for the future generations.**

Congratulations on becoming a member of your school's board!

As the board's student representative, you have equal standing, voice, accountabilities and voting rights as all other board members.

You will get to participate in the full range of duties of a board member, including employment matters, principal appraisal, student suspension meetings, handling of complaints, the leadership and monitoring of student achievement and stewardship of the school.

You will be well-supported in your role as student representative.

The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) provides training and learning opportunities, guidance and resources. You can find out more on our [website](#).

Many principals and board chairs also take an active interest in supporting student representatives to succeed, so be sure to connect with those people who can help you grow and succeed in your role.

The role of the school board

School boards are responsible for the governance of the school.

The four key areas of governance are:

- Leadership
- Accountability
- Employer role
- Representation

As a member of the board, one of the key things you'll need to get your head around is the relationship between governance and management.

A very basic definition is that 'governance' is the strategic task of setting the school's goals, direction, limitations and accountability frameworks. This is what the board does.

'Management' is the allocation of resources and overseeing the school's day-to-day operations. This is what the principal and staff of the school do.

The Education and Training Act 2020 contains the legal definitions of the board's role and that of the principal's. You can access it [here](#).

The structure of school boards

Most boards include up to three school-based trustees - the principal, a staff representative and for schools with students in Year 9 and above, a student representative.

The remaining positions on the board are for parent representatives. Boards typically have between three and seven parent representatives, elected by the parents, guardians and caregivers of students at the school.

Some boards also have proprietor appointees (state-integrated schools) and co-opted members. Boards can co-opt members for a variety of reasons, but usually it's to ensure a good balance of skills, experience, gender or ethnicity.

How the board works

The chair of the board

Every board must appoint a board member to preside over its meetings. This position is commonly referred to as the chair. A chair cannot be the principal, staff or student representative.

The chair's leadership role is also to ensure the board's work gets done, and to encourage a team culture on the board. They are also expected to develop and maintain a productive working relationship with the principal.

It's important to note that the chair has no more authority than any other board member, unless the board delegates further authority.

Governance framework

Within legislation every board has its own governance framework. This includes its charter/strategic plan and its policies.

It's up to each board to determine how it organises itself to get the work done.

Some boards create committees to look after certain aspects or projects, while others allocate portfolios or specific responsibilities to individual members.

2. Meeting procedure

It's likely you'll come across a range of new processes and procedures in your role as a student representative. This page will explain some of the processes, protocols and names you will encounter during your board meetings.

Always remember that you're new - so you're not expected to know everything! The best way to learn is to ask questions if there's anything happening that you don't understand or are unfamiliar with.

Board meetings

Boards typically meet monthly or twice a term. You will be sent information ahead of each meeting and it's really important that you ensure you read the material and come to the meeting prepared to comment, debate, vote and engage.

If you can't attend a board meeting, you must contact the board chair or secretary. There's more information about this procedure under 'Apologies'.

Meeting terms

Agenda

This outlines the order of business for the meeting. The agenda is often sent out with the notice of meeting. Many boards use the agenda as the notice of meeting. Agendas should be available publicly at a meeting, along with copies of all reports, so that visitors can follow what is happening.

Amendment

Motions can be amended during discussion. The amendment must be moved and seconded before it is discussed and voted on.

Apologies

Apologies are received from board members who cannot attend and should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. A board member who misses three consecutive meetings without prior leave of the board ceases to be a member of the board. Prior leave is different from 'Apologies'.

Conflict of interest

Any board member who has an actual or potential conflict of interest in what is being discussed should leave the meeting. This applies to any agenda item, not just those where the public has been excluded. You can read more about how conflicts of interest affect the student representative on page 8.

Exclusion of the public

The board may exclude the public (move into committee) from all or part of a meeting. Rules for doing this are found in the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987. Members of the public, including media, are excluded from the meeting when it moves into committee, unless specifically invited to stay.

This process is most commonly used to discuss staff (personnel), complaints or financially-sensitive issues.

Lying on the table

When a matter cannot be resolved, or when further information is necessary before a decision can be made, the matter can be left unresolved for future discussion.

Matters arising from previous minutes

These are matters that were nominated for action at the previous meeting and recorded in the minutes. Dealing with matters arising means that a check is kept on whether all tasks have been carried out from the previous meeting. Many boards now record these tasks in an action plan.

Minutes

These are the written record of business conducted at the meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting are usually reviewed and confirmed as a true and accurate record at each meeting. Minutes taken during public excluded business are stored separately and securely. They can, however, be requested by anyone. How much of the information the board releases depends on the rules in the Privacy Act 2020 and the Official Information Act, 1982.

Motion

A motion is a formal proposal for consideration. It is moved by the person proposing it and seconded by another person. It is then open for discussion, after which a decision is made by way of a vote. When a motion is accepted it is described as being carried.

Moving from the chair

The chair can put a motion before the meeting. When moved from the chair, a motion does not require seconding (usually used to move through administrative matters).

Notice of meetings

This should state the date, time, and location of the meetings, and should be sent to all board members and be available publicly.

Points of order

These are questions directed to the chair that require an answer or a ruling. They are not open to debate and usually relate to the rules for the running of a meeting.

Quorum

This is the minimum number of board members that must be present before a meeting can conduct business. A meeting quorum consists of more than half of all board members currently holding office.

Tabling documents

When written information is used in support of a discussion, it is tabled so those present can examine it, and forms part of the official record of the meeting.

3. Roles and relationships

Some challenges of the student representative role

The role of the student representative is similar to that of the staff representative, because unlike parent representatives, you are dealing with information that relates to the people you see and work with every day.

You will be privy to information about student behaviour and staffing issues, which will require you to uphold high levels of discretion and confidentiality.

You can ask to be excluded from discussions that make you feel uncomfortable or compromised.

Because you receive information ahead of the board meeting, if there's anything in there that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you don't want to be part of, you should talk to your board chair or principal who will advise you what to do.

Conflicts of interest

There are however, some situations where the student representative **must** leave the board meeting. They are:

- When the discussion is about you (as a student at the school, not as a board member)
- When you have a 'pecuniary interest' - i.e. you may lose or gain money as a result of the board's decision
- When you have an interest that may be reasonably regarded as likely to influence your decision (e.g. a disciplinary matter relating to your best friend at school).



Student representative and the principal

The relationship between the principal and the student representative is slightly unusual. The school board is the 'employing body', which means the board is the principal's 'boss'.

So in your role as a board member, you will deal with employment and management issues that relate to your principal. However, on a day-to-day basis, you are a student and as such, you have to respect the rules - and your principal!

The student representative should try to act on a 'no surprises' basis with the principal. In other words, if there is a matter you want put on the agenda for a board meeting it is only fair that the principal knows what it is first. However, as long as you have followed a good process and the issue you want discussed is a 'governance issue', you do not need the principal's agreement to raise the matter.

Student representative and the board chair

When it comes to understanding your role as a board member your main communication with the board should be through the board chair. In particular, if you would like something included on the agenda, or if you want clarification about an issue, they are the person to talk to.

Student representative and school staff

Be aware that you are now a member of the employing body. However you can't make jokes about being the boss. But when there is restructuring or redeployment (reduction of staff numbers) and staff are under some stress it is worth remembering the principles we highlighted earlier around discretion and confidentiality.

The only appropriate place to voice your opinions or talk about these issues is around the board table.

The other thing to be aware of, and this applies to your interactions with your fellow students, is that people may try to influence you to vote the way they want you to vote.

Remember, your role on the board is not to represent any particular group or 'side'.

It's your job, like all of the other board members, to weigh up the facts from all of the information provided to you, and make a decision based on what you consider to be the best outcome for the school.

Student representative and other students

Your relationship with other students stays the same but there are a few things you should be aware of:

- It goes without saying that student representatives tend to be interested in the wellbeing of their fellow students. You may want to be involved in setting up projects like student advocacy to assist students dealing with student behaviour management issues. While you can promote such an idea at the board level, in terms of day-to-day involvement you need to be 'hands-off'.
- The board has the final say in any student behaviour management process. If you have already been involved at an earlier stage, you cannot be impartial when it comes to the board's decision and therefore you will not be able to take part in the discussion or decision making.
- Be cautious when students are complaining about teachers, classes, services etc. You might be sympathetic to their concerns, and this could be taken as supporting or advocating for them. The best thing to do in this circumstance would be to listen to what they have to say and then point them in the direction of the board's complaints process. If students want you to raise an issue (complaint) with the board, you have to ensure it's been through the proper procedure first (i.e it's been raised with the school first).
- Representation is a difficult process. It might feel like your presence on the board is token and that you have not achieved anything much. Because strategic plans tend to be written up to three years in advance you could manage to get something included and end up leaving school before it's achieved. Your presence does have value though.
- Be prepared for board meetings. Ask other students what they think about agenda items so you can make a contribution when the item comes up. If you have a student council, work with them on issues that require board knowledge and approval. We know keeping a record can be a pain, but it also helps you see what you have achieved, and lets an incoming student representative see where you have got to on an issue.



4. Effective representation



One of the challenges of being a student representative, and this goes for all board members, is wondering if you have actually achieved a positive difference.

Here are a few suggestions which might help:

- Over the summer break take some time to read the strategic plan and the workplan for the year ahead. That way, when students suggest ideas you will have a reasonable idea of any chances of successfully promoting that issue.

For instance, a number of students are commenting that every time they have gone to use the library computers they are either ‘down’ or very slow. If you know that improving ICT and upgrading the library is two years down the track in the property plan, you already know it is unlikely that this problem will be fixed any time soon. You can help by raising the issue with the board, e.g., “I know that we have planned for it for next year but is the board aware that some students are complaining about ICT access in the library?” (Note: It would be a good idea to talk to the principal first if you are going to say something like this – that no surprises rule!)

- As school is gearing up at the beginning of the year, play the politician and introduce yourself around a bit, particularly with junior classes. Utilise networks that already exist in your school, e.g. student council, house meetings, and peer support programmes, to get a feel for what issues are impacting student.
- At each board meeting note anything that is discussed which is deferred for decision to the next meeting. Use the networks you developed at the beginning of the year to get an idea of what students think about that issue and contribute that at the next meeting.
- Keep notes so your successor can see what you have been up to and where you have got to on incomplete projects.
- Do celebrate your successes and make sure the student body hears about them!

5. Frequently Asked Questions



When do I officially ‘take office’ as the student representative?

Student representative elections take place in September every year.

If you were elected unopposed (i.e. there were no other candidates standing for election), you will go onto the board seven days after nominations closed.

If there was an election and you gained the most votes, you will go on to the board seven days after voting closed.

Is there a handover between student representatives?

Officially, no. The current student representative will leave the board the day before you take office. However, you are encouraged to make contact with them to talk about the role, the issues they were working on during their time on the board and anything that's coming up. This will give you a good perspective of the types of things being discussed at board level and ensure you come prepared to your first meeting!

What happens if my circumstances change while I'm on the board?

Student representatives are elected to the board for a one-year period. If however, your circumstances change during your tenure you can resign, or you can be replaced. You can resign your position on the board at any time for any reason.

Circumstances which would lead to you being replaced include:

- You miss three board meetings in a row, without getting prior approved leave
- You leave school
- You are excluded or expelled from school
- You are convicted of a criminal offence

Do I get paid for being on the board?

Yes. You are entitled to the same payment as all other members of your board. Payments are tax free, up to a maximum of \$605 per annum.

Can I get time off during school to read prepare for board meetings?

Unfortunately, no. We acknowledge there is always preparation needed ahead of each board meeting and it's important you turn up to meetings having read the board papers, so you're prepared to engage and participate.

Always consider your curriculum workload and extra-curricular activities before you take on any extra board roles (like committees or a delegated role).

Speaking of committees, should I be on the student behaviour committee?

It's entirely up to you. There's no reason you shouldn't be on it – but as we've mentioned already in this handbook, you need to be sure that you can be discreet and keep sensitive information safe. It's not just about being respectful and careful with other people's private information, there are laws that govern privacy – and they apply to boards!

NZSTA's advice to boards is that having the student representative on the student behaviour committee might actually deliver better outcomes. This is because you can deliver a student's perspective to the discussion and the student in question may also respond better to having a 'peer' on the committee.

It's important to remember that you are not there as the student's advocate and if there is a conflict of interest (e.g. the student in question is related to you or part of your friend group), you should withdraw from any involvement.

There are resources to help you understand student behaviour management processes. Ask your board chair or principal for a copy of the suspension guidelines.

Can I be involved in the appointment of staff?

Most boards are only directly involved with the appointment of senior management roles, such as principals, associate or assistant principals and heads of departments. There is no reason student representatives should not be on the selection committee. If, however, there are staff already employed at the school who are applying for management positions, this may present a conflict of interest for the student representative. Talk it over with your chair or principal.

What about staff disciplinary actions?

This is similar to the advice given above about student behaviour management. It's up to you whether you want to be involved or not – just keep in mind that any breach of confidentiality puts the board at risk of legal action.

Do I have to prepare a student representative report for the board?

Some boards have traditionally asked for a student representative report, but if other board members aren't expected to deliver a report, NZSTA's advice is that student representatives shouldn't have to either.

However, if this is something you want to do and has value in sharing the voice of students, then by all means, you should do it!



We're here to help!

NZSTA is here to ensure you are successful in your role on your school board.

We offer a range of free learning resources and workshops to help you develop the skills you need to be a great board member.

Here's how to get in touch with us:

Phone

0800 782 435

Email

Advisory & Support Centre - Governance

govadvice@nzsta.org.nz

Advisory & Support Centre - Employment

eradvice@nzsta.org.nz

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