



Student Voice Committee

Libby Albright, Addy Danielson, Faith Defenbaugh, Owen Deibler, Grace Downey, Lexi Duffy, Olivia Duffy, Haley Gonzalez, Pranesh Kalavala, Leslie Kim, Jonathan Meyer, My Duyen Pavey, Grant Pedersen, Haley Reed, Davis Robe, Lauren Smith, Kira Strashko, Vrinda Vegiraju, Cannen Vold, Anika Yadav

School Board Student Representation

Contact: Anika Yadav | Student Voice Committee | aanikayadav@gmail.com

Position Statement:

It is the position of Iowa Youth Congress, the voice of Iowa youth, that a minimum of one non-voting student should be allowed on each district's school board.

Position:

Legislation should require a minimum of one non-voting student member on all Iowa school boards to increase student voice acknowledgment and transparency within the school districts.

Current Situation:

Currently, there is little representation of students' viewpoints on school boards. This lack of representation has caused decisions to be made that do not reflect the student body's feelings or thoughts on the school's management. Students are so disconnected from the school boards that many are unaware how the school board functions or their representatives. According to the Iowa Association of School Boards, in the 327 school districts in Iowa, the education of approximately 487,651 students is governed by 1,859 school board members (ISBE). The current Iowa policy on school board member eligibility also states that candidates must be 18 years of age or older and must reside in the school district they plan to represent (Mind & Vision).

The student body and a large percentage of the public ignore school boards. Voter turnout for school board elections is usually small compared to other elections. School board meeting attendance usually only drastically increases during important events, like the COVID-19 pandemic. School board meeting attendance rose during the pandemic because of the frequency of controversial decisions being made. There is a lack of effort to bridge this gap between the school boards and the youth and public. Therefore, awareness for school boards and putting youth on school boards will help increase constant youth involvement. Through this, the school board members can get an accurate idea of the student body's thoughts on policies and decisions. We can change the current situation by giving youth a bigger stake in the school board.

Rationale:

School boards were initially conceived as a way for the community to be represented in the decisions made by the school district, however, the Iowa Youth Congress postulates that the



separation between school boards and student bodies has become far too large. For example, it is a common theme that school board meetings are scheduled at inconvenient times for the average involved student or students do not meet the age requirement of turning 18 on August 23.

Iowa Youth Congress believes that a student representative would be a great addition to a school board for the following reasons. A student representative(s) would attend meetings and provide input from a student perspective without interfering with the current policies set in place by the Iowa Association of School Boards. It would also be a great way to bridge the gap between school boards and youth. The opportunity to have student representatives would also allow students to become more involved in the school community.

Iowa Youth Congress asks legislation to make a change as the separation between the school boards and youth is becoming too wide. A representative on school boards would be able to make decisions based on knowledge of the actual culture and events going on in the school buildings. Iowa Youth Congress knows that having a student representative would benefit everyone involved. While a high school representative could not represent every individual building, they could shed light on certain issues and eliminate any false assumptions. Iowa Youth Congress believes students need to be involved in the decision-making process because they are the ones most directly impacted by school board decisions. Especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, education and societal norms, in general, have seen great amounts of change, leading to students needing a voice more than ever.

Recommended Action:

Iowa Youth Congress supports the idea of all school boards in Iowa being required to publicly announce a position for a minimum of one non-voting high school student member on school boards. Students who come forward and meet the standards decided by the school shall be allowed on the board. Rules can be made individually by the school district. The student on the board is there to give advice to the council, not to make a vote on the issue being discussed. A new law shall be created giving this opportunity to the students of a school district.

Sources:

Mission & Vision. IASB. (n.d.). Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://www.ia-sb.org/about/mission-vision>. Accessed Oct 12 2021

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