

What if students got to serve – and vote – on school committees?

POLICY #8

School Committees

Description:

Each school district in Massachusetts is governed by an elected school committee. According to state law, each school committee is supposed to have one student member... BUT they are chosen by adults and they do NOT get to vote on any decisions. At last year's Youth Summit, attendees voted to advocate for a bill that would increase the number of student representatives from 1 to 2, give high schools students the right to elect these student members, and give the representatives full voting rights. Unfortunately, the bill was not passed into law. But we could try again!

Examples:

- Maryland has been the leader in electing students to serve on school boards. In that state, any district can choose to have an elected student member on its school board and the student member has full voting rights. They've been doing this since the 1970s and the sky hasn't fallen! These elections are big deals in Maryland with students running and campaigning just like adults.
- In Oregon, students don't serve on school boards, but they do serve on district-wide Equity Committees. They serve alongside adults and get to advise the superintendent and school board on all matters in the district that relate in any way to equity.





School Committees (Continued)

Pros	Cons
Student power: Student members would have the same voting power as adults on the school committee.	Student power: Students would only be 2 of 9 votes on most committees.
Inclusion: Students would get to participate in almost all of the same decisions as adults.	Inclusion: Only two students get to actually serve on the school committee and they might not be representative of the full student body.
Likelihood of passing: There is already an organization of current student members that has advocated for this bill and might support it again.	Likelihood of passing: Adult groups would probably oppose this because it would mean sharing power.

If we chose School Committee, we would want to make sure that:

- Elected student members are supported by a larger advisory council so that they can learn the views of more students and represent them well.
- Include requirements so that elected student members have training to understand decisions, like the budget, that adults might already know.
- Student members are provided with mentors to help them navigate this highly public role and fulfill their responsibilities with confidence.