

	Superintendent's Circular School Year 2011-2012	NUMBER: FAM-2 DATE: September 1, 2011
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HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT GOVERNMENT: SELECTION, FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

"As we continue to work at improving the quality of education for all students, it is important that the voice of students be heard at the local, state and national levels."

Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, www.doe.mass.edu

Every Boston public high school (including district high schools, exam schools, and all high school-level alternative and pilot schools) must have a written student engagement policy documenting opportunities for students to assume leadership roles within classrooms and the broader school community. **As part of this policy, each school must also have a functioning and engaged student government.*** Student leaders in this body will represent their peers by serving as advisors, researchers and participants in the decision-making process at the school and district level. The headmaster, with student input, should appoint one or more faculty advisors to oversee each student government. Student governments can be considered school clubs, and as such headmasters are encouraged to pay a stipend to the faculty advisor(s) (*Boston Teachers Union Contract, page 146*).

Each high school must also elect at least one student to be a member of its **School Site Council** and help to identify one to two students to act as **Boston Student Advisory Council representatives** (more details on BSAC below).

* Middle and elementary schools have the option to establish their own student governments; however, this is not required.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT OVERVIEW

The job of the student government is not to just organize dances or school events. With faculty and administrative support, student government members should:

- Assist in fulfilling the school's mission and design
- Improve the culture and climate of the school
- Ensure student voices are heard and incorporated in school decision making through the School Site Council, and meetings with the administration
- Develop and grow as student leaders by working closely with the faculty advisor(s) and the headmaster

Suggested guidelines to elect, set up and maintain a student government (in some cases also known as a student council or student leadership), can be found in the attached addendum. The guidelines and resources developed and mentioned in this circular and addendum are based on the student government model developed by Youth on Board. Schools may develop a process of their own, provided it offers all students an open, fair opportunity to apply and participate in the selection process. **Schools shall strive to form a student government that reflects the diversity of the student population** in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, educational program (e.g., general, special and bilingual education), and other factors. Small Learning Communities (SLCs) are also encouraged to develop their own student governments, with two representatives from each SLC forming the school-wide student government.

It is the responsibility of every headmaster to ensure that the student government is established no later than October 14th. Once the Student Government is established, each school must submit the following forms to Maria I. Ortiz in the Office of Family and Student Engagement **by October 28th**, mortiz@boston.k12.ma.us.

1. SG Membership Roster
2. SG Information Form for each member
3. The meeting calendar outlined

ROLE OF THE FACULTY ADVISOR

The headmaster, with help from existing student government members, will designate one or more faculty advisors to oversee the student government.

The Faculty Advisor(s) will:

- Assist in the establishment of a student government (see addendum for more details)
- Meet with the student government at least twice per month and organize at least two retreats per school year
- Act as a liaison between the student government, the Faculty Senate, and the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)
- Assist the student government in managing their events/activities
- Assist student government members with in-school logistics and date approval
- Assist students in the development of action plans for the school and obtain the appropriate approvals before the plans are implemented
- Track and support members as they complete tasks on the action plans
- Give the headmaster regular updates on how the action plans are being carried out
- Assist the student government in creating the meeting and retreat agendas
- Monitor and record all student work and approvals for proposals and dates
- Help develop student leaders

More details on the role of the faculty advisor can be found in the attached addendum.

BOSTON STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (BSAC)

The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC), a citywide body of student leaders representing their respective high schools, serves as the voice of students to the Boston School Committee. They offer their perspectives on high school renewal efforts and inform their respective schools about relevant citywide school issues. They also address student issues by developing district-wide policies.

Each BPS High School (including district, exam, and all high school-level alternative and pilot schools) is required to have at least one and, if desired, two BSAC representatives from their school.

The BSAC Representative is a part of the student government and should attend student government meetings in order to share BSAC work, receive feedback, and gather input on projects/policies.

BSAC Representatives will:

- Represent their schools at BSAC meetings twice monthly - Mondays 3:30-5:30 p.m. at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School
- Assist in decision making for their school by advising the administration on student-centered citywide issues and policies
- Work on policies that BSAC develops
- Perform scheduled assignments, such as surveys, meetings with headmaster and student government advisor, peer interviews, etc.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following documents, based on the Youth on Board model, can be found in the attached addendum to this circular:

- Guidelines on establishing your student government
- Responsibilities of student government members
- Responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor(s) and headmaster
- Specific ways to involve students

These additional resources can be accessed here: <http://boston.k12.ma.us/bulletins/BSACDocuments.pdf>.

- Sample meeting agenda
- Sample membership application
- Sample member contract/agreement
- Sample member job description
- Sample planning process document
- Sample action plan outline
- Sample retreat agenda

OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES

- **Youth on Board “15 Points,”** www.youthonboard.org Youth on Board helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change society. “15 Points” collects the essentials of our knowledge in an easy-to-use format and aims to challenge and inspire your work with the young people and adults in your organization or school. An additional document, “Specific Ways to Involve Students,” can also be found in the addendum.
- **New York City Students’ “Bill of Rights” by the Urban Youth Collaborative,** <http://www.urbandyouthcollaborative.org/rights.html> The Urban Youth Collaborative brings New York City youth together to fight for change through local and citywide organizing strategies. They strive for social and economic justice throughout their communities -- overcoming obstacles to make sure youth voices are heard and youth empowerment is emphasized. They are committed to building a strong youth voice that can ensure high schools prepare students to go to college, earn a living wage, and work for justice in society.
- **Philadelphia Student Union,** www.phillystudentunion.org/: The Philadelphia Student Union was started by a group of young people who were angry about the low quality of education in their schools and wanted to do something about it.
- **Sound Out,** www.soundout.org: Sound Out works intensively throughout the education system to promote meaningful student involvement in school improvement. Their activities promote student voice in school as students and educators realize the powerful and purposeful possibilities of meaningful student involvement.

Youth on Board is available as an additional resource for training and assistance in setting up your student government. Contact Jenny Sazama at 617-308-5384.

Maria I. Ortiz, Engagement Facilitator, is available to assist in the coordination of elections and provide ongoing guidance and technical support. Citywide BSAC meetings will be coordinated by Maria I. Ortiz, Office of Family and Student Engagement, and Jenny Sazama, Youth on Board.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT DATES AND DEADLINES:

Date	Activity
September 16, 2011	Deadline to report student government election date to Family and Student Engagement staff
September 19, 2011	1st BSAC Meeting
October 14, 2011	Deadline for student government elections to be held
October 28, 2011	Deadline for the 1st student government meeting to be held; SG Membership roster, SG Member Info Form and meeting calendar due to Family and Student Engagement staff
November 7, 2011	BSAC Freshman Recruitment Begins

For more information about this circular, contact:

Name:	Maria II. Ortiz
Department:	Family and Student Engagement
Mailing Address:	55 Malcolm X Boulevard, Roxbury, MA 02120
Phone:	617-635-8079, Ext. 104
Fax:	617-635-6571
E-mail:	mortiz@boston.k12.ma.us

Carol R. Johnson, Superintendent

Circular Addendum

ESTABLISHING YOUR STUDENT GOVERNMENT

1. Create a job description, contract and application for the student government (see samples in Supporting Documents).
2. Begin recruitment.
3. Have candidates fill out an application (see sample in Supporting Documents).
4. Form a Student Selection or equivalent body to coordinate and monitor the election process. (Note: the Selection should include non-biased interviewers. For this reason we suggest outgoing senior leaders and teacher advisors)
5. Conduct interviews of candidates for student government. (This step is recommended to prevent the school-wide vote from becoming a popularity contest.)
6. Elections should be conducted within two weeks of identifying prospective student government members.
7. Once members are elected, the student government officers are elected from this group through a second whole school voting process. Every student government should include but is not limited to the following positions: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The process can be conducted at an assembly, within classrooms or in advisories.
8. Have student government members sign contracts after elections.
9. The 1-2 BSAC representative(s) are not elected by the student body. Students must apply for BSAC membership with the BSAC Coordinators (Maria I. Ortiz and Jenny Sazama).

STUDENT GOVERNMENT MEMBERS MUST COMMIT TO:

- Attend biweekly meetings (or more frequent) and retreats (sample retreat agenda in Supporting Documents)
- Be available for new member orientation
- Actively participate and complete tasks between scheduled meetings
- Identify and work on important, real school issues, and develop campaigns and proposals to address these issues
- Lead and organize activities/projects aimed at improving school climate, teacher-student relationships, student voice and student governance
- Share their ideas and help develop school rules and policies, plan student activities, identify school issues and represent student voice at the school
- Represent the ideas and needs of students in the school
- Develop a base of student leadership through a discussion of student rights and responsibilities
- Keep the whole school informed of youth voice activities and issues through advisories, assemblies, school forums, etc.
- Meet with the headmaster regularly (recommend at least once a month)
- Facilitate general student government meetings and small group work at those meetings
- Prepare for meetings by making copies, setting up the space, setting the agenda, etc
- Develop leadership skills through work on projects
- Represent the school at outside meetings
- Represent the student body at teachers meetings, such as the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)

THE HEADMASTER AND FACULTY ADVISOR(S) SHALL WORK WITH THE STUDENT BODY AND STAFF TO:

- **Develop a school-wide process** (if none is in place) involving students and staff to determine an appropriate form of student government. Ideally, any new or revised structure and process should be discussed and voted on by the student body.
- **Form and support a student selection** or equivalent body to coordinate and monitor the election process. The selection should consist of outgoing senior leaders and teacher advisors.
- **Convene a school-wide assembly** (or series of assemblies) to explain and organize a representative student government.
- **Seek nominations** and offer candidates an opportunity to address the student body.
- Ensure that the **roles of the student government are clearly understood** by students and staff.
- **Arrange the time, place, and schedule of meetings** and retreats in cooperation with the newly-elected student government. The student government shall meet, whenever possible, on a schedule which pre-vents students from missing classes. Students who miss class because of a student government meeting should be allowed to make up all work within a reasonable time without penalty.
- Assist students in developing and implementing action plans for improving the school.
- Ensure that at least one member of the student government (or appropriate equivalent) serves as the student representative to the **School Site Council**.
- **Ensure student representatives' participation in BSAC and School Site Council.**
- Provide the student government with an office or room for **meeting space** and receipt of notices and other mail.
- Assist the Office of High School Renewal in its efforts to **promote student voice** through the Boston Student Advisory Council and other student engagement initiatives.
- **Ensure records are retained** for reference in school files such as agendas of student government meetings, meeting notes, calendar, activity plans, etc.
- **Submit any information** about the school's student government requested by the Office of the Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent.
- Ensure that **student voice is heard and incorporated** in decision making bodies by having them meet together twice a year with groups like, the Instructional Leadership Team, School Site Council and the administration.



“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.

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.

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 *14 Points: Successfully Involving Young People in Decision Making*



Student Government 2011 – 2012 Roster
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SCHOOL _____

Student Government Advisor _____

Student Government Advisor _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Please list all the members of your Student Government and their titles. Attach a copy of the Student Government Elected Member Info Form for each member on your student government. This form is due by October 28 th . You can either fax or mail it in.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY SO WE CAN RECORD YOUR INFORMATION CORRECTLY.

First Name	Last Name	Grade	Title/Position



**Student Government
2011 – 2012 Information Form**

SCHOOL _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Congratulations on your election as a member of your schools Student Government. Please fill out the information below and return it to your advisor. We want to keep you informed on information and events about the Boston Public Schools. Thank you and good luck to your entire Student Government.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY SO WE CAN RECORD YOUR INFORMATION CORRECTLY.

LAST NAME _____

FIRST NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/TOWN _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE (day) _____ (evening) _____

Email Address _____ Grade _____

PRIMARY LANGUAGE _____

What position(s) will you represent? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:

_____ President _____ Vice-President _____ School Site Council Rep

_____ Secretary _____ BSAC Representative

_____ Treasurer _____ Other: _____