STUDENT TRUSTEE HANDBOOK

YR. 2014

“A movement to give students a voice in their education”
For non-commercial purposes, the material in this publication may be reproduced free of charge without requiring specific permission, provided the source is acknowledged and recognition is given to Student Voice Initiative. This is subject to the material being reproduced accurately and not being used in a derogatory manner nor misleading context.

For commercial purposes, the material in this publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, or transmitted in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or otherwise – without the prior written permission of Student Voice Initiative Canada*.

*We are a Canadian federally registered not-for-profit corporation. Our corporation registration number is 881265-9 and operate legally as “Student Voice Initiative Canada” while doing business as “Student Voice Initiative”. © Copyright 2014
## Contents

- Student Voice Initiative .................................................................................................................. 1
- What is a Student Trustee .................................................................................................................. 2
- History ............................................................................................................................................... 3
- Issues ................................................................................................................................................ 5
- Benefits of Student Trustees ............................................................................................................. 6
- Student Voice Framework .................................................................................................................. 8
- Student Trustee Selection Process .................................................................................................... 10
- Student Trustee Resources ............................................................................................................... 11
- Endorsements .................................................................................................................................. 12
- Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 14
- References ....................................................................................................................................... 16
- Appendix .......................................................................................................................................... 18
Executive Summary

Students are the products and consumers of education. As such, they understand how education can be improved and maintained to ensure their success. Student Voice Initiative (SVI) deeply believes in the benefits that the student voice offers to our education system.

We are a collaborative mentorship network devoted to furthering student success in communities across the country by leveraging the creativity, insight, and expertise of Canada's young change-makers. Founded in 2011 by student leaders who had already implemented positive change in their own communities, SVI's mission is to make Canada's top student leaders accessible to young people across the country, share student leadership experiences and best practices, and replicate and further successful student-led initiatives.

Our mission is to give high school students a voice in their education by establishing a democratically elected student representative ("Student Trustee") in every school board across Canada. Endorsed by academic researchers and policymakers throughout the Canadian education community, SVI is expanding its reach. Through consultation with both policymakers and student leaders, we have successfully advocated for the position of Student Trustee in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec. However, there is much more work to be done.

The purposes of this handbook is to give you direction and autonomy in implementing a Student Trustee within your board’s jurisdiction. As such, we present a mold that should be adapted and expanded upon. Supporting the implementation of a Student Trustee will allow you to have richer dialogue about policy that impacts students, a more accurate metric to gauge the use of scarce budgetary resources when servicing student needs, and a solution for a lack of student engagement.

If you are interested in learning more, I would sincerely appreciate the opportunity to personally introduce you to Student Voice Initiative. SVI is always seeking to expand its knowledge on education policy, student advocacy, and strategies for student success.

Thank you for your interest in furthering student success in Canada.

Best regards,

Chris Grouchy
Executive Director | chris@studentvoicei.org
www.studentvoicei.org
WHAT IS A STUDENT TRUSTEE?

The purpose and function of a Student Trustee is very similar to the role of a Trustee. Student Trustees are democratically elected by their peers to represent the collective voice and opinion of students in the board to the Board of Trustees. Student Trustees participate in monthly board meetings and regularly scheduled board committee meetings. At monthly board meetings, the Student Trustee(s) typically delivers a report on their activity for the corresponding month as well as progress on their initiatives. Student Trustees are encouraged to participate in board discussions, but they do not have a binding vote; although their vote does not count, it must, however, be recorded. Student Trustees may not move a motion but can recommend a motion through another Trustee on the board.

To engage with their peers, Student Trustees frequent schools within their boards, meet regularly with their Student Senate (see: Student Voice Framework), and organize initiatives that enable them to gain the perspective of their constituents. The fundamental purpose of allowing a Student Trustee to sit on the school board is to ensure appropriate dialogue between students and their policymakers.

Student Trustees do not speak solely for their friends, students at their school, or students with a specific set of needs, but for every student in their school board. This includes elementary and secondary students, students with special education needs, students in specific programs (e.g. extended French or Enrichment), and students in all curriculum streams. Although at first this seems like an overwhelming task, Student Trustees should strive to begin by speaking to all these types of students. This consultation will provide Student Trustees with a basic understanding of issues affecting your constituents (students). The most conventional way of consulting students from a variety of schools and circumstances is through a Student Council or Student Senate (similar to a district-wide Student Council). This body is usually chaired by the Student Trustee(s) and has member students from each school in the school board. The Student Trustee(s) can then facilitate discussions on issues the board is facing through this student body. Other options for student consultation include visiting schools, website based forums or surveys, and informal discussion with students.
The position of Student Trustee first began in the early 1990s when the Ontario provincial government, under Premier Bob Rae, appointed a Royal Commission on Learning to explore innovative ways of revitalizing the province's education system. In its final report published in December 1994 titled “For the Love of Learning”, the Commission recommended sweeping changes that would revolutionize the Education Act. Among the many recommendations was the implementation of a student member on all school boards in the province who would be able to vote.

The final report of the commission was tabled in January 1995 just as Premier Bob Rae was reaching the end of his term. In the spring of 1995, the Progressive Conservatives, under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris, were elected. They promised significant changes in the education system and based much of their campaign on the recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Learning.

It became increasingly evident that changes to the Education Act would be necessary to accomplish the vision and goals that were set out. Shortly after the summer of 1997, the provincial government introduced Bill 160, The Education Quality Improvement Act. Bill 160 included drastic changes to the education system, including the transfer of much of the power from school boards to the provincial government, and the probability of budget and labour cuts. Such changes were not well received from teachers’ unions and consequently led to a strike that marked one of the largest organized labour disruptions in North American history. The legislation passed, with few amendments made despite the obvious discord.

Among the voluminous changes set out by Bill 160 was the creation of a “Pupil Representative”, now referred to as a Student Trustee. This marked the first time in Canadian history that political representation by youth was legislatively assured. Pupil Representatives were to provide student representation on district school boards, but the legislation specifically prohibited Student Trustees from acquiring voting rights or attending meetings closed to the public.

The legislation also permitted boards to design and implement policies that reflected their own visions of the Pupil Representative. Although the bill laid out guidelines and restrictions, school boards were given a great deal of flexibility to meet these new requirements. As a result, the position of Student Trustee varied across the province and is presently unique in every board.


2 Although this was the first official government document to mention the creation of Student Trustees, several school boards in Ontario had already established the position independently. The first board to do so was the Kenora Board of Education in 1989.
By the start of the 1998/1999 school year, every school board in Ontario had chosen a Student Trustee to represent the student population at their board table. While some boards welcomed Student Trustees, others were more reluctant to listen to students. As time went on, policies evolved in each board to best accommodate Student Trustees and provide opportunities to consult the student body. Although much of the uncertainty surrounding the inclusion of Student Trustees in the education system had eventually dispersed, some inconsistencies still existed between different school boards.

When the 2000/2001 school year began, the need for student representation at the board table was increasingly evident. Labour disputes between teachers’ unions and the provincial government were deteriorating the quality of school communities in Ontario. Students’ voices were being lost in the political rhetoric and jargon.

By the end of September of that year, several Student Trustees who had been re-elected in their respective school boards discussed the need to create an association of Student Trustees either with or without the guidance of the Ministry of Education. Early on in the process, it was decided to invite Student Trustees from the Catholic and Francophone district school boards to a founding meeting despite no formal contracts in any of those boards. It was thought that representation from all branches of publicly funded education would expand experience and understanding. By providing a unified voice, the movement was a contrast to the deteriorating situation amongst other education groups in the province. Such an association would stand out because it would be the only organization to represent students from French, English, Catholic, and Public school boards.

In 2011, three former Student Trustees from Ontario realized the need for Student Trustees to be nationalized. These alumni began consulting with policymakers and academic experts across Canada. It became clear that there was an inherent gap in the policymaking process in provinces without a student representative sitting at the board table. Thus, Student Voice Initiative was born.

Since its inception, SVI has advocated both locally and provincially for the position of a Student Trustee to be implemented. SVI’s vision is to see the eventual rollout of Student Trustees in every school board in Canada. Upon creating a Board of Advisors of reputable education advocates, entrepreneurs, and policy experts as well as seeking the advice of education thought leaders, we have been successful in working with the Vancouver School Board (School District No. 39) and the Sunshine Coast School District (School District No. 46) to implement the role in British Columbia. SVI has also supported the creation of a democratically-elected student representative in Quebec at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, and in Alberta at the Edmonton Public Schools board.

Scaling quickly to support the national enthusiasm and dialogue around Student Trustees, we are a team comprised of an Executive Council of five members, a Board of Directors, and Student Ambassadors within many provinces in Canada.
THE ISSUES

What are the issues?

- Students are not empowered in a way that encourages them to be civically active. Engaged students who are already involved in their communities do not have a platform to share ideas and best practices.
- Students play a crucial role in the education system yet do not have a voice in the boardroom decisions that directly affect them.
- Decisions made within the boardroom are rarely effectively communicated with students.
- There is a lack of formal outlets through which students can have their voices heard.
- Issues regarding youth are often discussed without youths’ input themselves.

What do we know?

- Student input can improve education policy decision-making as well as lead to youth having a better understanding of how public policies are crafted.
- Ontario’s Student Voice Framework (which consists of Student Councils, Student Senates, and Student Trustees), while continuously undergoing improvements, has worked and bettered public education for the past 13 years.
- Ontario (since 1998) and New Brunswick (since 2009) are the only two provinces in Canada which have provincially mandated student representatives in all school boards.
- Civic engagement is the heart of a healthy democracy, but fostering a culture of civic engagement must begin at an early age, and civic education must be practical and experiential.
- Students are conscious of their own needs and can hence improve boardroom decisions.
- Student leadership allows youth to develop soft skills such as decision-making, critical thinking, and public speaking that cannot be learned from a textbook.
- Involving students in their own education can improve student satisfaction.
- Celebrating the successes of youth who make an impact on their communities will encourage more young people to do the same.
- Student leadership is becoming an increasingly important area of education research around the world.
**BENEFITS OF STUDENT TRUSTEES**

*What are the benefits?*

- Decision-making processes become more efficient when students, as primary consumers of education, are consistently consulted
- Student engagement correlates positively with civic engagement
- Involving students in their own education improves student satisfaction as well as communication with students
- Sparks early political engagement in youth prior to reaching legal voting age
- Cost-free for school boards

*A Summary of Successes*

In recent years, Student Trustees across Canada have:

- Authored a mental health policy
- Urged schools to act on cyber bullying
- Eliminated bottled water in all schools in a school board
- Assisted policy makers in developing classroom curriculum
- Made the collection of student activity fees more transparent
- Produced province-wide student surveys
- Supported the Haiti earthquake redevelopment effort
- Collected socks for the homeless in Toronto
- Spoke against frivolous spending by school boards
- Influenced standardized religion test development in Catholic Schools
- Raised funds for needy families
- Influenced school board meeting procedures
- Advised the Minister of Education on Civics curriculum development
- Published recommendations on how to revamp the Civics and Careers curriculum
- Sought more student representation in school community councils
- Influenced nutritional standards in school cafeterias
- Influenced uniform requirement policies in schools
- Promoted non-profit organizational fundraisers and campaigns
- Supported cost-cutting efforts
- Stopped a school board-wide vending machine ban and fixed all water fountains
- Led fundraising efforts for nutritional programs in schools
- Advocated for healthier options in school cafeterias
Previous Student Trustee Successes

NICHOLAS MILUM

Nicholas Milum served as the first Student Trustee of the Vancouver School Board. In 2013, the Vancouver School Board became the first school district in British Columbia to add a Student Trustee to their boardroom table as a result of Vancouver District Students’ Council and SVI advocacy efforts. Within his first year as a Student Trustee, Nicholas focused on the key issues of education funding, curriculum planning, and sustainability. Some examples of how Nicholas provided valuable input to the board are by changing the school calendar, influencing a motion to Port Metro Vancouver to conduct health impact assessment of coal exports, and mediating between student bodies and administration in schools.

GORICK NG

Elected to represent the largest school board from 2009 until 2011, Gorick was a Student Trustee for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). With a mission to give every high school in the TDSB with a functioning student council, Gorick authored the TDSB Student Leadership Policy and supported its ratification within every school in the board. Gorick served as President of the Ontario Student Trustees’ Association where he worked with the Minister of Education on revamping the Civics and Careers curriculum, making changes to the mandatory course to make it more relevant and engaging for the students of Ontario.

MAYA TREUHEIT

In the 2013/2014 school year, Maya Treuheit became the Sunshine Coast School District’s first ever Student Trustee. She served as the official student liaison between the District Student Leadership Team, which represents students’ voices across the district, and the board, presenting their recommendations to influence projects and policies. Maya was instrumental in helping further develop and enhance the school district’s Student Trustee position and participated in education conferences across the country to highlight the importance of the role.
To adequately and appropriately receive the opinion and insights of students within the school board, SVI recommends that boards seek to adopt the Student Voice Framework. The Student Voice Framework is a proven model that starts with individual students at local schools reaching out to their Student Council. Those discussions are then taken to the board’s Student Senate who provide the Student Trustee(s) with input on topical issues within the school board. This widespread model has existed within New Brunswick, Ontario, and various parts of British Columbia for many years, and SVI views it as the most democratic method for achieving thought student voice.

Student Council

- **Who:** Elected students from all grades
- **What:** Representative body of students who both plan events and activities as well as provide input for key decision-making processes within their school
- **Where:** Schools

Student Senate

- **Who:** Elected students from senior grades
- **What:** Comprised of students, that also take part in Student Councils, who are elected to represent each high school in the district
- **Where:** District

Student Trustee

- **Who:** 1~2 elected senior students from any high school in the district
- **What:** A Student Trustee liaises with the Student Senate and Board of Education to ensure students’ voices are heard in decision-making at the boardroom table. The Student Trustee acts as the district’s official student representative.
- **Where:** District and Board

Provincial Student Trustees’ Association

- **Who:** Student Trustees from all school boards across the province
- **What:** A Student Trustees’ Association is a union of students which serves to ensure that students’ voices are collectively being heard at the province-level and also works actively with the Ministry of Education to do so
- **Where:** Province
Student Voice Framework

District School Board

Provincial Student Trustees Association

Student Senate
The Senate provides supports and resources to Student Councils through conferences, and meetings. It works with Student Trustees to represent the voice of students.

Student Trustees
Student trustees sit on the Board of Education to represent the student voice, address educational issues from the student perspective, and liaise with the Student Senate and schools.

Student Activity Council
Student Councils provide student leadership in schools, work in collaboration with school staff and administrators, and receive support from the Student Senate.

All students are encouraged to seek leadership opportunities through their Student Activity Council (SAC) and participate in SAC activities at their schools.
Student Trustees are democratically-elected by their Student Senates, a body that is comprised of representatives from every secondary school in the school board (please refer to Student Voice Framework for more information). This section seeks to provide a broad overview of how the election process is administered:

- A candidate for Student Trustee can be any full-time senior (grade 11 or 12) student who attends a high school within the school district

- Each Student Trustee can serve a maximum of 2 years in their position. Previous Student Trustees must run for re-election every year

- Student Trustees are elected through district-wide voting. Although it is typically more efficient to conduct voting through Student Senates, some boards may prefer to allow every high school student in the school district to cast a ballot

- Given that the typical term of a Student Trustee is from August 1st until July 31st, it is advised that boards conduct the elections in April or May to begin transitioning the newly-elected student into the role

- The election process is managed by school board officials (either a Trustee or Superintendent) or an educator. The adult administrator is responsible for organizing the All Candidates Meeting, distributing and counting ballots, and notifying the board of the newly-elected Student Trustee

- Candidates interested in running to become their board’s Student Trustee are typically required to complete a written application and submit letters of references to the election administrator as the first step. Upon completing the written submission, candidates will then prepare a speech or presentation on themselves and their platform and present at the All Candidates Meeting
Student Trustees typically receive support and resources from their school board in order to adequately fulfill the large mandate vested within them.

*Compensation*

Similar to a Trustee, a Student Trustee requires an incredible amount of time and dedication to provide insights to the school board. As compensation for their work, Student Trustees in Ontario and New Brunswick receive an honourarium for their service. As a member of the board, this honourarium is typically equal to the compensation received by Trustees. Though the honourarium is a great way to reward the student’s hard work, it is recognized that, given board budgetary constraints, this is may not be possible. Some boards may then alternatively opt to give the student academic credits, rather than an honourarium, for compensation. However, the rewards of having student input in policy discussions significantly outweigh the costs of having a Student Trustee(s).

*Student Trustee Mentors*

Prior to the election of a Student Trustee, the board will assign a Trustee sitting at the board table with the role of Student Trustee Mentor. The Mentor will act as a guide for the Student Trustee, sit beside the Student Trustee at the board table, discuss board issues with them, and answer any questions that the Student Trustee may have.

*Student Trustee Policy*

A Student Trustee Policy is highly recommended for school boards to use in order to regulate Student Trustees and communicate the purpose of the Student Trustee to interested stakeholders, including the public-at-large. The Student Trustee Policy should contain the roles and responsibilities of the Student Trustee, the qualifications for the role, selection and vacancy for the role, as well as the honourarium amount.

To view a sample Student Trustee policy, please refer to Appendix (page 18) or the following link:

“I am honoured to support an organization so focused on pursuing student collaboration in policymaking and providing formal opportunities to young people with the resources need to reach their potential as civically-engaged citizens”

- The Honourable Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Q.C., Senator for British Columbia

“I am humbled and moved by the Student Voice Initiative’s commitment to providing students with the proper channels to speak and be heard on matters that will effect on their peers.”

- Marc Kielburger, Co-founder, Free the Children

“It is my hope the Student Voice Initiative will be the impetus of student representation in more jurisdictions in Canada and indeed around the world”

- Jun Hirata, Associate Professor, Hirosaki University

“By helping students become self advocates for both themselves and for the issues that matter to them locally and globally, students have had the opportunity to co-construct their own educational learning environments, nurture the skills that will act as a foundation for their future, and build a sense of efficacy”

- Karen Grose, Coordinating Superintendent, Toronto District School Board
“I commend the Student Voice Initiative for the important work you have undertaken to give students a stronger voice in their education. I applaud and support your goal to have all provinces follow Ontario’s lead in having legislation to mandate every school board have a student trustee.”

- Laurel Broten, Ontario Minister of Education

“The groundbreaking work of the Student Voice Initiative has been very helpful to our Board as we move ahead with BC’s first Student Trustee Policy and implementation. We are grateful for The Student Voice Initiative’s leadership on this issue and look forward to working together to expand the student voice in British Columbia.”

- Patti Bacchus, Chairperson, Board of School Trustees, Vancouver Board of Education

“Initiatives like the Student Voice Initiative are so important for young people, for our schools and for our communities. I am confident that policymakers will make better decisions if they are more fully aware of the opinions of students. I am equally confident that our students will perform better in the classroom, and in life, if they know that their voices matter. That is why it is so important that the Student Voice Initiative succeed.”

- Trey Grayson, Director, Institute of Politics, Harvard University
Student Voice Initiative would like to thank the following people for their contributions to their assistance in creating the Student Trustee Handbook, as well as their continued support in advancing the student vision.

**The Student Voice Initiative Executive Council**

- Chris Grouch, Executive Director
- Leah Bae, National Ambassador
- Rohan Nuttall, Director of Operations and Research

**Board of Directors**

- Jaxson Khan, Chair of the Board

**Partner Stakeholder Organizations**

- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- British Columbia Student Trustees Association (BCSTA)
- Ontario Student Trustees Association - l’Association des Élèves conseillers et conseillères de l’Ontario (OSTA-AECO)
School Boards

The following school boards/districts were mentioned in the Student Trustee Handbook for their work in supporting student voice. We would like to acknowledge those boards here:

- Edmonton Public Schools
- Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
- Lester B. Pearson School Board
- Sunshine Coast School District
- Toronto District School Board
- Vancouver School Board

For more information on the Student Trustee Handbook or Student Voice Initiative please contact:

Chris Grouchy, Executive Director
chris@studentvoicei.org

For general inquiries, including information on the Student Trustee position, academic support, and for updates on Student Trustees in Canada, please visit our website at:

www.studentvoicei.org
REFERENCES


ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2268770&archive=true


REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

Below is an excerpt from the Vancouver School Board Trustee Pilot Project Policy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BK-R: Student Trustee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classification:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Board Governance and Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BK-R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REGULATION: STUDENT TRUSTEE**

1. **ROLE DESCRIPTION AND EXPECTATIONS**

The Student Trustee:

1.1 is not a member of the Board, is not entitled to vote on any matter before the Board or any of its committees, and does not have the statutory powers or duties of a school trustee under the *School Act*.

1.2 will attend all regular public meetings of the Board but is not entitled to be present at any meetings that are private and/or closed to the public.

1.3 may attend all meetings of the Board, including standing committee meetings, except private/closed meetings or at which persons other than trustees are excluded.

1.4 will participate with other trustees in discussions, and provide a student perspective on matters before the Board.

1.5 will comply with the Student Trustee Conflict of Interest Guidelines in Appendix 1.

1.6 is not entitled to move a motion, but may suggest a motion on any matter at a meeting of the Board or a committee on which he/she sits.

1.7 shall have access to all information and resources provided to Board members (e.g.: reports, training sessions, etc.) with the exception of information related to matters which are being considered at a private/closed meeting or from which persons other than trustees are excluded.

1.8 will present a Student Trustee report at the first regular Board meeting of each month.

1.9 will report regularly to the students of the VBE, through the Vancouver District Student Council (VDSC), the activities of the Board pertaining to public meetings of the Board and its committees.

1.10 is encouraged to visit and meet with secondary school students in schools within the Vancouver School District.

To read more, please visit: [http://www.vsb.bc.ca/district-policy/bk-r-student-trustee-vancouver-board-education-pilot-project](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/district-policy/bk-r-student-trustee-vancouver-board-education-pilot-project)