

Guidelines and Principles for Student Government

Developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

Student governments are communities with characteristics similar to the broader communities in which most of us live. Political, social, and economic decisions are constantly being made regarding schools that have a direct impact on the members of that community – students, faculty, administration and other staff. It is essential that students be given meaningful opportunities to participate in the governance of the school community. The National Council for the Social Studies believes that such opportunities can best be created by establishing of an effective student government in every school. The following principles and guidelines are put forward to assist schools in the creation of effective and meaningful systems of student government.

Guidelines and Principles

1. All students should be participants in the governance of their school community.
2. Every student government should be based on a written constitution that includes an orderly appeal process for resolving conflicts between students and the school administration, faculty, or other staff.
3. Every student government should have a written code of ethics, which includes a process for removing students who violate that code.
4. Students participating in student government should be representative of the student body.
5. Students participating in student government should be advocates for the ideals and interests of students first and foremost.
6. Student participating in student government should work for the common good of the school community.
7. Students participating in student government should serve as members of substantive decision-making bodies at the school and at other levels of the school community where students' interests are at stake.
8. Students participating in student government should be taught how to access and utilize the channels of power to affect decision making within their school community.
9. Students participating in student government should be taught how to obtain and use the information they need to become informed and effective advocates of student ideals and interests.
10. Students participating in student governments should understand and be encouraged to exercise their legal rights and responsibilities as both students and citizens.

11. Students participating in student government should have a working knowledge of the constantly evolving constitutional principles that apply to student and school communities.
12. Student participating in student government should develop and practice the values, attitudes, and habits of mind and heart that are essential to the democratic process.
13. Students participating in student government should be encouraged to practice and develop their skills as decision-makers and community organizers.
14. Students participating in student government should learn how to communicate the problems, concerns, goals, and successes of their governing body to others.
15. Students participating in student government should have regularly scheduled opportunities to communicate with and seek input from their fellow classmates.
16. Student participating in student government should be taught the principles of substantive and procedural due process and be expected to use these principles and procedures appropriately.
17. Student participating in student government should learn to distinguish appropriately between their twin roles as leaders and trusted servants.
18. Faculty advisers working with student government should be qualified to teach students the skills, values, attitudes, and habits of mind and heart that will enable them to grow and develop as both leaders and trusted servants.
19. School administrators should work with and support student government.
20. Meetings and workshops with student governments from neighboring schools should be scheduled regularly to provide students with opportunities to share ideas, concerns, and experience.