

The Student Trustee

State law (Education Code 72023.5) requires the board of trustees of each community college district to have at least one non-voting student member to be chosen by the students in a manner determined by the board. To be eligible, the student must be enrolled in a community college of the district for at least five semester units. The term of office for the student trustee is one year, commencing on May 15 or June 1 of each year. Student trustees have the same general responsibilities as all trustees to represent the interests of the entire community; however, they also provide a student perspective on the issues facing the board.

Student trustees are not necessarily advocates for specific student issues, just as other trustees are not advocates for single interests. Student trustees provide their perspective to ensure that the students of the future will be served well.

Student Member Rights

1. Right to attend all meetings. The student trustee has the right to attend all meetings of the governing board, with the exception of closed sessions.
2. Participation. During all meetings, the student member has the right to participate in discussion, ask questions, and be seated with the board. As an official member of the board, the student member is entitled to receive materials furnished to regular board members with the exception of materials related to closed sessions.
3. Mileage Reimbursement. The nonvoting student member is entitled to mileage reimbursement to the same extent and under the same policies as other governing board members.

Student Member Privileges

Each local board has the discretion to grant certain privileges to the student trustees. These privileges must be approved for continuation on a year-to-year basis prior to May 15 and include:

1. Make and second motions. The board may grant the privilege of making and seconding motions.
2. Compensation. Receiving compensation for board service (Education Code 72425) is at the discretion of the governing board.
3. Advisory vote. The student trustee does not have the right to vote and shall not be afforded the right to vote by a district. However, although not referenced in statute, many districts have established an advisory vote for the student trustee. This advisory vote does not count in determining if an item passes, but may be logged in the official minutes.
4. Attending some closed sessions. The privilege to attend closed sessions other than those on personnel and collective bargaining may be granted by the board.

Responsibilities

The extent to which the student trustee is viewed as an advocate for and representative of the current student body varies from board to board, and depends somewhat on the attitude of the person holding the position. Some feel the student trustee plays a similar role to the Associated Students organization and represents current students – in this case, the responsibilities are similar to A.S. leaders. However, as a trustee, the student member of the board has the same responsibility as all trustees – to make board decisions that benefit the community as a whole and students of the future, as well as the current student body. The League has published a paper, *Perspectives on the Role of Student Trustees*, that further explores the different views.

Student trustees have the following responsibilities to become acquainted with the issues, successfully perform the duties of their position, and be a contributing member of the board. Student trustees should be aware of current issues and prepare themselves for board meetings. Effective decision-making also requires understanding the role of a governing board member.

As with any obligation, the ability to be heard and to influence others depends on taking seriously the responsibility as a student board member. “Doing one’s homework” about the issues before the board enhances effectiveness. Following are other specific responsibilities:

Become educated about board and district issues by attending:

- Board meetings prior to taking office.
- College and state conferences.
- Campus committee meetings.
- Meetings of the student association(s).
- Meetings of community groups.

Carefully read:

- All board agendas.
- The board policy manual.
- Important district materials such as the most recent accreditation report and long-range planning documents.
- Material on trusteeship and the role of boards, including the League’s Trustee Handbook.

Periodically meet with:

- Chancellor or district superintendent/president.
- Board president and other board members.
- The advisor to the position.
- The Associated Student President and/or Council.

Study the role and responsibilities of being a member of the board:

- Meet with the past student trustee.
- Attend conferences and workshops on trusteeship.
- Learn from other trustees about how to be a good board member.
- Seek a mentor on the board.

Support for the Student Trustee

In order to succeed, student trustees require support and assistance from the CEO, other trustees and college leaders. An orientation process similar to that of other newly elected trustees should be offered. Student trustees in multi-college districts have the challenge of learning about colleges other than their own, and need an introduction to district-wide issues and practices.

Student trustees will benefit from the same communication and assistance other trustees receive from the CEO and board secretaries. That support ensures they will receive the same information as all trustees.

A “mentor” on the board may be assigned to help the student trustee learn about how the board works and to review the agenda and related issues. Student trustees should be encouraged to talk with other members of their boards, attend conferences for trustees, and participate in community events and meetings as a trustee.

Advisors to student trustees should understand the unique role of governing boards and the trustees who serve on them. There are different expectations for the student trustee role than for student body officers.

Trustees and CEOs help student trustees balance their dual roles as students and as trustees by clarifying their assumptions about who the student trustee represents. Student trustees provide a student perspective and can contribute a great deal in their role as representatives of those who are central to the mission of the college.

District Practices

Districts are required by law to annually adopt rules related to the privileges, and vary widely in their approach to granting privileges to student trustees. The League conducts and publishes a biennial survey of district practices related to number of student trustees, selection/election processes, compensation, motions and advisory votes, and attendance at closed sessions. The following is a summary of the 2011 survey; district-by-district results can be obtained by contacting the Community College League.

72 Total Districts

# of Student Representatives	
63	districts 1 representative
9	districts 2 representatives

Selection Process	
66	districts Elected by student body
1	districts Student body president, VP or designee
1	districts Selected by student leadership panels
4	districts Other

Associated Student (AS) Role	
14	districts Student trustee and AS president are the same person
58	districts Student trustee and AS president are separate roles

When Selected	
3	districts March
21	districts April
45	districts May
3	districts Varies

When Seated	
17	districts May
45	districts June
5	districts July
4	districts August
1	district September

Make Motions	
35	districts Yes
26	districts No
1	district Yearly decision
6	board decides
4	seconds only

Attend Closed Session (within legal limits)	
5	board decides
3	districts Yes, by invitation only
64	districts No

Advisory Vote	
50	districts Yes
17	districts No
5	board decides

Primary Staff Contact or Advisor	
13	districts CEO
11	districts Student activities advisor
5	districts Chief student services officer
6	districts CEO and another administrator
12	districts CEO assistant
25	districts other administrator

Compensation for Board Service	
20	maximum allowed by law
18	less than maximum
9	no compensation
25	stipend and/or mileage

Additional resources for and about student trustees are available on the League's Web site, www.ccleague.org, and from the Community College League of California.