



To: House Education Committee

From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director and General Counsel, VSBA
Flor Diaz Smith, President, VSBA Board of Directors

Re: H.640 - Adding Voting Student Members to School District Boards

Date: February 12, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.640, a bill that would require the addition of voting student school board members. The VSBA highly values student voice and has a long-standing resolution, which was adopted by our membership in 2001. The resolution reads:

“VSBA believes that local school boards benefit from having an ongoing student voice in their discussions of all school matters that are not subjects of executive sessions. The VSBA encourages its members to include students as active participants in the consideration of educational issues, and favors the participation of students as board members. The VSBA will provide guidance and support to boards to achieve this objective.”

In response to this resolution and the VSBA’s values, we developed and recently revised a [Guide to Student Voice](#) and partnered with the National Student Board Member Association (NSBMA) to provide a workshop on this topic at our annual conference in October, 2025. We also have a webinar scheduled for April, 2026, titled “Elevating Student Voices on the Board,” which will explore the growing role students can play in school board governance—and why their perspectives matter.

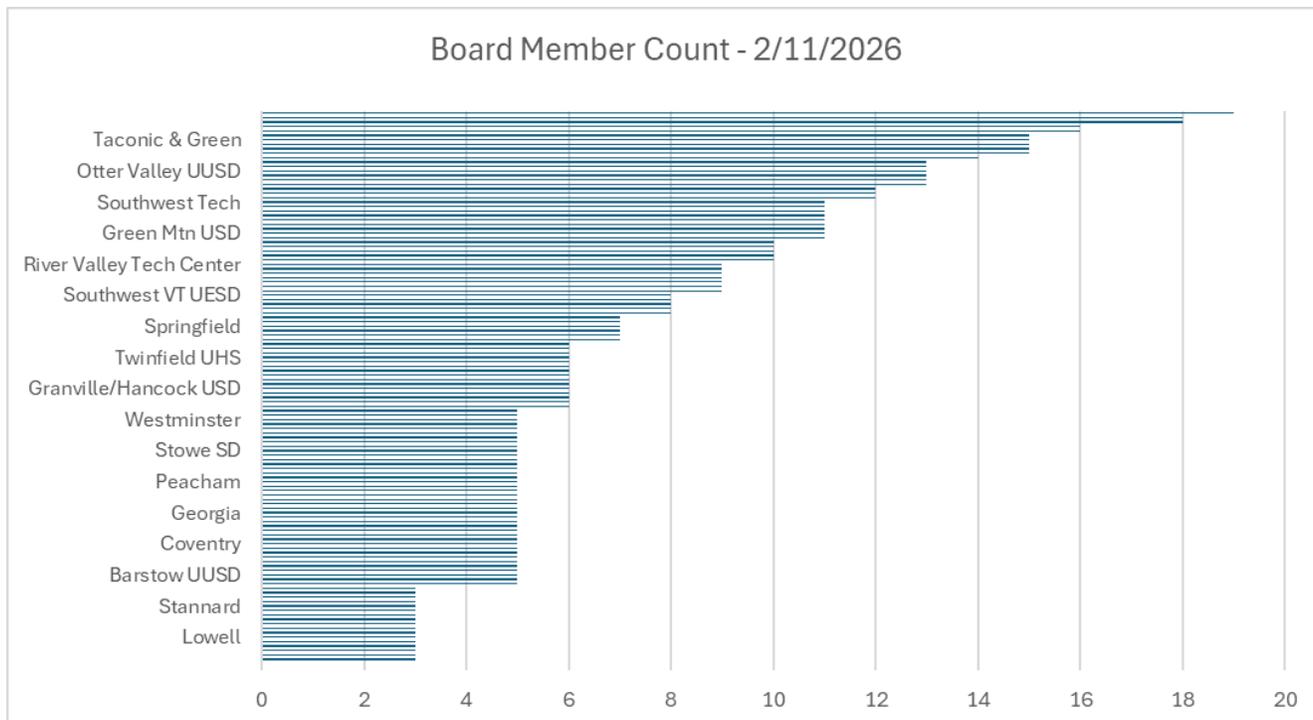
As the people most directly impacted by board decisions, students bring insight, creativity, and honesty that can strengthen decision-making and school climate. More Vermont school boards are recognizing that when students are meaningfully included, boards benefit from fresh thinking, clearer connections to school communities, and stronger trust.

Because data on student school board members in Vermont is not comprehensive, the VSBA surveyed all school board chairs to collect information about the current status of student school board members in Vermont. Here are some data points (N=37):

- Nineteen boards indicated they have student board members (51%)
- Four indicated that seats are sometimes unfilled
- The median number of student school board members was 2
- Grades eligible for role: 9-12, with junior and senior year being most common

- Selection is most commonly done by the school principal (application and interview process)
- All 37 respondents indicated that students do not have full binding voting rights. Some boards allow students to cast an advisory vote
- Only one respondent indicated that the student board member attends executive sessions
- Only two respondents indicated that that student board member receives remuneration

Vermont school boards vary across the state, both in their structure (ie: supervisory union, school district) and in the size of the board. To highlight the variation in board member count across the state, the graph below shows several boards consisting of 3 members and others having a count in the upper teens:



As introduced, [H.640](#) would require every school board that is organized to provide education for its students in grades 9-12 (both operating and tuitioning) to have four voting student members on the school board (one each from grades 9, 10, 11 and 12). Additionally, the bill requires every school board that is organized to provide education for its students in grades 7-8 (both operating and tuitioning) to have two non-voting student members on the school board (one each from grades 7 and 8). Therefore, in a small district that operates or provides tuition for students in grades 7-12, there would be six student board members, four of whom have the power to vote, and this group of students could join a board of five locally elected board members.

States that currently require student members on school boards include [Massachusetts](#), [New Hampshire](#), [New Jersey](#), and [New York](#). None of these states require more than one student board member.

Maryland does not require a student member for every local school board but it is a leader in allowing student participation. Eight of Maryland's 24 local school districts have student board members with

voting rights, covering over three-quarters of the state's public school students. According to the NSBMA, only one of those eight has full voting rights.

The VSBA and the NSBMA share the recognition that to be successful, boards will need to have several practical questions resolved. These concerns center around training and onboarding, confidentiality (especially in executive sessions where superintendent evaluations are discussed and student hearings are held), fairness and accessibility to all students, appointment/selection process, continuity year to year, and clarifying the student board member's role. We also wonder if student board members' emails would be subject to public record requests.¹ Some of these issues might be addressed by the Voting Ward Work Group which was created under Act 73 to consider how school boards would be created, elected, and operated in newly formed districts; that Working Group has already discussed its general interest in incorporating student voice into new boards.

In closing, we must remember that student voice matters because students are not just participants in our schools, they are the primary stakeholders. Decisions about students should not be made without students. When we intentionally create space for student representation, we strengthen trust, increase transparency, and improve decision-making. Students bring lived experience, insight, and urgency that adults alone cannot replicate.

To summarize, the VSBA fully supports student representation as an important and meaningful way to elevate student voice within school communities. We believe that the number of student school board members should align with the structure currently used by the State School Board – two members with 2-year terms; one in 11th grade and one in 12th grade, with the 12th grader having voting rights and careful consideration given to the unique context of each local board. We also believe that the law should not be overly prescriptive. Student representation on a board is one important pathway but it is not the only one.

We must be intentional about giving students real agency in our decision-making processes. That means engaging not only student board members, but also student councils, student clubs, and other student leadership groups. It means building structures that invite feedback, dialogue, and partnership. When we do this well, we model civic engagement, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.

If we are serious about strengthening our schools, then we must be serious about listening to the voices of those we serve. Empowering students is not symbolic, it is essential. As consideration of this bill progresses, we urge the general assembly to consider important factors, such as fairness and representation in student appointment/selection, sensitivity of topics discussed in executive session, training needs of both students and full boards, and student protections.

¹ Allowing voting student school board members under the age of 18 may raise complex legal, constitutional, and liability issues. This testimony does not analyze or address those issues. The VSBA encourages the Committee to consult with Legislative Counsel for this analysis.