



## GENup Take a Seat Campaign Toolkit

### **What it is/Purpose:**

GENup's model of impact utilizes a two-pronged approach to implement tangible change on a local and statewide level, through community and policy organizing. One of GENup's primary student groups is our association of student board members in districts across California that works with our chapters to pass local resolutions. Thus, the Take a Seat Campaign is one of GENup's oldest and most widespread initiatives, and something that's very important to us as an organization as it aims to get even more students positions on their School Boards. We believe students are the primary stakeholders in education and that should be reflected in the decision-making process for our public schools.

Many districts in California already offer Student Board Member positions open to any student who decides to run and gets the job. This initiative is targeting districts that do not already have a similar program in place and is best suited for the GENup chapters in or near those districts. Once a student board member is established in the district, we can connect them with our network of members across the state so that they can communicate with each other about large-scale projects and initiatives. To learn more about the California Student Board Member Association, visit our website <https://www.generationup.net/csbma>.

### **Specific Advocacy Asks**

- To establish a Student Board Position in a school district, make a petition requesting this development and get at least 10% of your school district OR 500 students to sign on.
- If you share a petition with your district, they HAVE TO establish the position within 60 days.





## **How to Advocate to Your Local School Board**

Your School Board has the power to make decisions and pass resolutions that affect your community and school directly, which is why advocating to them is such a crucial part of any localized education campaign.

### **Petitioning to your school board**

**Creating a petition** about an issue you care about within your school can be an excellent way to show that there is popular support for taking action within your community. The petition for this campaign is unique because collecting the signatures of 10% of your school district OR 500 students is a **mandatory** part of the AB261 bill. See sample petition form above.

### **Meeting with your school board members**

Another important part of effective advocacy in your campaign is School Board delegations. These meetings are when you will have the opportunity to pitch your legislation to representatives who will eventually vote on your campaign. When planning a meeting with your local school board, make sure to reach out using connections like your principals and staff liaisons, who can help you get emails and office phone numbers. When meeting with legislators, make sure to bring a paper copy of your documents as well as toolkit samples, and show your petition. Forward them information about CSBMA, what a student board member would do, or mention some of the many districts where a similar position already exists. School Board members are elected to represent students and families, and so a large group of parents, students and community members signing in support will show them the importance of your issue. If possible, try to arrange a follow up meeting and definitely show up at school board meetings to advocate for your issue.

### **Testifying to your school board**

Many school boards allow any interested person, including students, to offer public comment at their meetings to express their opinion on issues within the school district. The process of giving a public comment to your school board is called **testifying**. Testifying is a great way to voice your concerns about your experiences in schools and ask your school board members to seek solutions.

Though every school board has different processes, here are some tips you can use to testify to your school board:

- 1. Prepare ahead.** Find out when and where your school district's school board meetings are held and the procedures for public comment. Do you need to sign up beforehand to comment? Is there a time constraint for commenting? This information is usually available on your school district's website.
- 2. Identify the issue.** Testifying to your school board is a great way to express your concerns about issues in your school or community to school board members. What issues have you experienced or do you perceive to be a problem in your school? What change do you believe needs to be made? You can testify about any issue you care about that a school board can take action on, which in this case, is the creation of a student board member position on the school board.
- 3. Research the issue.** After you've identified the issue you'd like to testify to your school board about and how you'd like your school board to take action, research the issue to understand it better.

Researching for a school board testimony doesn't have to be like writing a report for English class! Rather, it can be reflecting on your own experiences in education, asking other students for stories about their experiences, or gathering facts and statistics about the issue you'd like to testify about.

It may be helpful to research what other schools have implemented on your issue or how the school board has taken action in the past on the issue. Understanding the history of your issue can allow you to consider possible consequences of changing existing policy and have arguments to counteract them. It also gives you an opportunity to thank the board members who have been advocates for the issues you care about.

Through your research, make sure you're gathering evidence to support your position on your selected issue. This evidence can be either anecdotal (comprised of stories about your school experience) or concrete (comprised of facts, statistics or research about your selected issue).

**4. Propose a course of action.** Once you've researched the issue that you want to testify to your school board about, you can propose a course of action that the school board can take, which they can directly agree upon or reject and compromise on.

This course of action doesn't have to be specific! It can be as simple as asking the school board members to host a follow-up meeting with students to discuss the issue or to convene a taskforce to work through possible policy solutions to the issue. If you've found research about or examples of action other school boards have taken, you can also propose something more detailed.

**5. Write your testimony.** Now that you've identified an issue you're passionate about, found concrete and anecdotal evidence to support your position and proposed a possible course of action, write your testimony. Use confident, powerful language to attract the audience's attention, but keep in mind that comments do not have to sound formal. In fact, your testimony will be more effective if you use first person, convey emotion, and share your personal experience. Write in the way you can imagine yourself speaking—but be respectful! Make sure that if your school board has a time limit for each testimony, that your prepared comments will fit within that length of time.

In general, you should begin your testimony by stating the issue you're focusing on, then support your position with the evidence you've gathered, and end your speech with your call to action.

You can also use this specific format: Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now. Start with your own story—a short bio about yourself and why you're testifying. Then, discuss the issue that the population you're representing is facing using the evidence you've gathered. This will lead you into your conclusion, a call to action or reason to make change now.

**Here is an example of a testimony template you can use:**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a (grade level) at \_\_\_\_\_ school. I'm here today to discuss (issue). I've personally struggled with (issue) when (story, anecdote, description of your personal struggle, etc).

I've seen and discussed (issue) with my peers at my school and others throughout the district. We believe it should be addressed because (evidence about the issue, including anecdotal information about students' experiences, statistics, or other analysis).

I believe (issue) must be changed by (suggestions of ways to address the issue at hand, like starting a taskforce to tackle the issue or making more specific policy suggestions).



**6. Stay calm and confident!** Your school board members are elected to serve you, so they should want to hear what you have to say. Your opinion and experiences are valuable! Stay calm and relaxed—you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain. You got this!

### **Proposing your resolution to the school board**

Customize a resolution that would create a student board member position for your district and try to get endorsements from relevant groups like current Board members, teachers unions, etc. Ask for the resolution to be put on an agenda so that the Board can vote on it. When your resolution is accepted by the board of education, GENup staff can come meet with district officials to cement policy and oversee details related to the establishment of a Student Board position.

### **Social Media Toolkit**

Chapters are encouraged to make their own graphics and campaign posters that they can spread on social media and within their communities.

### **Timeline**

At best, this campaign will take around two weeks to develop and disseminate, and then an additional few weeks for the school board to add a position.

Week 1: Planning and initial canvassing

Day 1: GENup chapter leaders and associated student organizations in a school district meet to plan outreach.

Day 2: Said students send out initial messages to students in the district and print out petitions. Students email their school administrators in order to pass along pertinent information.

Day 3-7: Students email out ActionNetwork petition or pass around petition forms at their school, and teachers forward the petition to their students.

Week 2:

Day 8: If 500 signatures (or 10% of students) have been collected, students can mail their petitions to their district superintendent or associated staff. At that point, more signatures can be collected until the Student Board member arises on the School Board agenda.

Week 3-8

Students should meet with their school board members and speak at the school board meeting to support the passage of legislation in support of their SBM

When the legislation passes, Students can contact GENup leaders to schedule a meeting about the specific policy related to making a board position.

If successful, an SBM will be created within 60 days!