

## STUDENT CONGRESS

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish the district-wide Student Congress as a mechanism for increasing students' voices in the District; enhance the educational experience of students; and allow the Board to gain greater insight into educational needs from the student's point of view.

### II. SCOPE

This policy applies to 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school students and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade high schools students within Shelby County Schools.

### III. POLICY STATEMENT

The Board believes that meaningful two-way communication with students is important to meet the academic and behavioral needs of the student population. Direct student participation and engagement in the Board's governance process provides students with valuable education and training involving civic responsibility. Further, it enhances students' understanding of educational and governmental operations and improves students' group dynamic, problem-solving, communication, and writing skills. Therefore, the Board is committed to considering students' voices in its work and establishes the Student Congress as a mechanism to include students in its governance process.

#### Student Congress

The primary function of the Student Congress is to participate democratically and provide insight into the District's decision-making process as well as provide a platform for students to positively and productively address their educational concerns. The Student Congress fulfills its purpose by presenting the Board with proposals for district innovations/improvements and suggested solutions to district-wide problems as well as relaying Board decisions and district information to students.

The Student Congress is comprised of middle school representation and high school students from all Shelby County Schools high schools. Each high school shall select two (2) students to serve on the Student Congress, in accordance with the administrative rules and regulations to

this policy. Each middle school shall be free to participate in the Student Congress and identify up to two (2) students as its representatives. The middle school representative shall participate in the Student Congress in a liaison capacity between his/her school and the high school congressperson responsible for the school.

The Student Congress will meet with the entire Shelby County School Board one to two times each semester, including a joint convening of congresspersons and their middle school liaisons at least once each year. The Student Congress will meet with the Superintendent, at minimum, once each semester, including a joint convening of congresspersons and their middle school liaisons at least once each year. The membership of the Student Congress will meet up to two times each month, including attending regular meetings with District staff designated by the Superintendent.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITY**

A. The Department charged with student services is responsible for implementing and informing principals about this policy.

B. The Student Congress is responsible for developing by-laws that are consistent with District policy/administrative rules and regulation, and applicable local, state, and federal law

C. The Superintendent is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed.

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Legal References:

1. TCA 49-2-202
2. TCA 49-2-210

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Cross References:

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### Organization

The Student Congress shall include the following positions: Student Ambassadors to the Board; the Speaker of the Student Congress; the Student Congress Secretary; Congresspersons with their middle school liaisons, and Committees of the Student Congress, which shall include a Committee Chairperson and a Committee Secretary.

In collaboration with District staff responsible for supporting the Student Congress, the Student Congress shall develop by-laws that are consistent with District policy/administrative rules and regulation, and applicable local, state, and federal law. The Superintendent (or designee) shall approve the by-laws and any revisions to ensure consistency with directives of the Superintendent, District policy/administrative rules and regulation, and applicable local, state, and federal law. The by-laws, at a minimum, shall address the following: rules of order; method of selection of position holders; processes for committee work; processes for recommending probation or removal from the Congress or a position. The by-laws shall be provided to the School Board and Administration, reviewed regularly, and revised as necessary.

### Criteria for Selection

To ensure that all students may be engaged and represented, there will be no official restrictions placed upon the nominees for any position (i.e., GPA requirements, attendance record, and disciplinary record). However, all nominees must be accepted by the school principal before he/she is allowed to run for congressperson before the school's student body, regardless of the student's GPA, attendance, and disciplinary record. Additionally, subsequent to a student's initial selection, a student's continued participation on the Student Congress may be reviewed in accordance with the section on *Probation and Removal from Office*.

### Selection Process for the Student Congress and Student Ambassadors to the Board

Student Congress: The student body will select the congresspersons and, if applicable, middle school liaison(s). Nominees for the student congressperson(s) or middle school liaison(s) may come from a recommendation from the principal, a teacher, a counselor, or one or more of the student leadership groups at the school (e.g., student councils, student government associations, etc.) (All nominees must be accepted by the school principal before he/she is allowed to run for congressperson before the school's student body). To the extent possible, high schools shall ensure that one (1) of the students selected is enrolled in the college preparatory track (or a comparable course or courses) and one (1) is enrolled in the technology track (or a comparable course or courses). Additionally, a middle school principal may select the middle school liaison(s) for his/her school.

Student Ambassadors to the Board: The Student Ambassadors to the Board shall be selected upon majority vote of the entire Student Congress in accordance with the process outlined in the by-laws of the Student Congress.

## **Description of Student Congress Positions**

Student Ambassadors to the Board: The Student Congress may select congresspersons from its membership to serve as Student Ambassadors to the Board. The Student Ambassadors to the Board will regularly present during the public comment section<sup>1</sup> of the Board meeting a report, verbally and/or in writing, of all research findings and concerns of the Student Congress. The Student Ambassadors to the Board are charged with presenting the official proposals and requests of the Student Congress to the Board. They will also be responsible for informing the Student Congress of the Board's perspective and decisions regarding various issues that pertain to students' educational experience. The Student Ambassadors to the Board are responsible for maintaining and communicating to the entire Student Congress the list of official report items and/or requests presented to the Board and the status of the Board's action regarding each report item and/or request.

The Speaker: One of the congresspersons will be elected democratically to facilitate meetings, call upon different Chairpersons to present their committee's findings, and oversee the allotted time for each presenting committee.

Student Congress Secretary: The Student Congress Secretary will document meetings with details on research done by all committees, issues discussed and debated as well as planning out the agenda of each meeting. He/she will also help the Speaker with minutes and allotting speaking time for each committee.

Student Congressperson and Middle School Liaison: Congresspersons shall actively engage students in their schools, including 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, using several methods, including but not limited to the following: providing their student bodies with district and other information relevant to student; obtaining input from students in their schools; hosting school-wide meetings; fostering responsive two-way communication with their student bodies; and making themselves available to their student bodies by various means such as posting contact information on the school website. Congresspersons shall relay information to the Student Congress from their individual schools and vice versa. Congresspersons shall also present any issues raised from their schools (e.g., student leadership group(s), student body, or individual students) to the Student Congress utilizing a bill format. These proposals will then be distributed to the appropriate committee.

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<sup>1</sup> See Policy 0000 School Board Meetings, Section IV. Public Participation at Board Meetings

Congresspersons are also responsible for representing the interests of their middle school liaisons with the Student Congress and the School Board. The congressperson shall conference with his/her middle school liaisons using various means (e.g., email/internet; phone, in-person meetings, etc) at least once each quarter to discuss issues, become informed of the concerns of middle schools; receive input from middle school liaisons on Student Congress proposals; provide middle school liaisons with information and updates on School Board business; and provide information on the results Student Congress proposals/presentations made to the School Board.

Middle School Liaisons are responsible for remaining abreast of Student Congress and School Board developments. Middle School Liaisons shall actively engage students in their schools, including 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders, using several methods, including but not limited to the following: providing their student bodies with district and other information relevant to student; obtaining input from students in their schools; hosting school-wide meetings; fostering responsive two-way communication with their student bodies; and making themselves available to their student bodies by various means such as posting contact information on the school website. Middle School Liaisons are also responsible for relaying information from their individual schools to the student congressperson representing their schools and vice versa. Middle School Liaisons will present any issues raised from their schools (e.g., student leadership group(s), student body, or individual students) to the student congressperson representing their schools in written form.

Committees: If needed, the Student Congress will form committees, each of which will focus on a particular issue. These committees will discuss, revise, and create policy proposals that fall under their assigned committee issue.

- *Committee Chairperson:* The Committee Chairperson will represent their respective committee and present his or her committee's proposal work to the Student Congress.
- *Committee Secretary:* Each committee will select a member from its group to serve as Committee Secretary who shall document committee meetings and track minutes.

### **Term Limitations**

Congresspersons will serve for two (2) complete school years. In the first year of the Student Congress, for each high school, one (1) junior will be appointed for two (2) years, and one (1) senior will be appointed for one (1) year. In all subsequent years, one (1) new junior congressperson will be selected to replace the graduated senior in each high school.

## **Meetings**

The Student Congress will meet with the entire Shelby County School Board one (1) to two (2) times each semester, including one (1) joint convening of congresspersons and their middle school liaisons at least once each year.

The Student Congress will meet with the Superintendent, at minimum, once each semester, including one (1) joint convening of congresspersons and their middle school liaisons at least once each year.

The membership of the Student Congress will meet up to twice each month, including attending monthly meetings with District staff designated by the Superintendent. The first meeting of the year must be held during October of each school year.

The Student Congress shall hold at least one (1) meeting per semester devoted to recognizing, inducting, informing, and providing training to all middle school liaisons for service on the Student Congress.

## **Training**

Congresspersons are to participate in training, sanctioned by the District. Such training will include training in research, policy, teamwork building, and problem-solving skills. The Student Congress may also participate in facilitating trainings on student engagement to the District's schools and internal/external stakeholders.

## **Probation and Removal from Office**

A recommendation of the Student Congress regarding probation or removal from office shall be determined by the Superintendent (designee).

Probation: If a congressperson/liaison experiences academic or behavioral difficulty as determined by the school principal (or designee), their ability to continue participation on the Student Congress shall be reviewed by the Superintendent (or designee). In accordance with the Student Congress by-laws, a plan of academic and/or behavioral improvement shall be implemented for the student in order to ensure their educational success while serving on the Congress.

Removal: Congresspersons/liaisons may be removed from participation on the Student Congress if they change schools.

Additionally, congresspersons/liaisons may be removed from participation on the Student Congress if they receive a suspension of ten (10) or more days or, with written justification of the school administration, have exhibited severe and/or continuous behavior or academic problems warranting removal.

Congresspersons/liasons may be recommended for removal from participation on the Student Congress if there is a two-thirds majority vote of the Student Congress to remove the student due to lack of commitment or disregard of Student Congress by-laws.

Removal of Student Ambassadors to the Board: If a Student Ambassador to the Board loses his or her position as a congressperson, he or she will lose both positions as Student Ambassador to the Board and congressperson. Another congressperson of the same grade level will replace him or her. The by-laws of the Student Congress will determine replacement when a position is vacant.

If a Student Ambassador to the Board loses his or her position as a Student Ambassador, he or she does not necessarily lose their position as a congressperson. The by-laws of the Student Congress will determine the student's continued participation as a congressperson.