

New Hampshire School Administrators Association

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Spotlighting Excellence: Newfound High School Student Plays Vital Role as School Board Representative



Newfound Regional High School student Tess Sumner serves as student representative to the School Board. (Photo Courtesy Newfound Area School District)

At each Newfound School Board meeting, student Tess Sumner updates the committee on news and events at Newfound Regional High School.

For the rest of the meeting she takes an active role, co-equal to elected members, offering student perspectives on important topics including the budget and district policies.

It's a much larger role than she expected.

"I was surprised by how much responsibility I have," says Sumner. "I thought I'd just sit in meetings and listen, but I've been encouraged to share my opinions, ask questions, and engage in real discussions."

While many school boards have had student representatives for years, the state formalized the process in January 2023. Now, each school board must have one non-voting student representative for each high school they represent.

Sumner represents the interests of about 1,100 students across the district's seven sending communities: Alexandria, Bridgewater, Bristol, Danbury, Groton, Hebron,

and New Hampton.

"Tess has been a great addition as the student School Board representative this year. She brings a well-rounded report of the high school happenings, events coming up, and any concerns that may be arising within the school," School Board Chair Melissa Suckling says. "She has been professional and authentic in her presentations to the board and always willing to give a student perspective if or when needed."

She shared her role as student representative with the state Board of Education meeting on Thursday, Jan. 9, as part of the New Hampshire School Administrators Association's efforts to highlight programs and individuals who have a positive impact.

Growing up in Danbury, with a population of about 1,300, Sumner learned about the importance of actively serving one's community. She sees education as a critical issue and wanted to play an active role in Newfound's future.

In learning more about government, Sumner views the District leadership and School Board members as strong advocates for public education, who work collaboratively while allowing room for differing viewpoints.

Superintendent Paul Hoiriis shares a comment about Sumner made by his wife: If you didn't know Tess was a student, you'd assume she was an elected adult member.

"Tess brings a lot to this role -- thoughtfulness and tactfulness yet still managing to communicate clearly and fairly," Superintendent Hoiriis says.

Sumner also has used her voice to amplify other important issues. She has written several published letters to the editor advocating for student viewpoints on District issues and statewide legislation.

She loves the feeling of contributing to something important.

"I've realized how important local government is. It might seem small, but the decisions made at this level shape entire communities," Sumner says. "This

experience has shown me the power of advocacy, the complexity of governance, and the importance of stepping up, even when it feels intimidating.”

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**A message from the New Hampshire School Administrators
Association**

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