

# NCSBEE Voice

## *Harnessing Students' Expertise in Communications*

Our students are capable of more than we know. When they have agency in their learning, they lean in to educational experiences that reflect who they are, who they want to be, and what they want to do after graduation. One way Washington students show us what they know is through the Washington State Board of Education's Student Communicators internship program, launched this year. We received over 100 applications from students passionate about communications, outreach, and storytelling. In January 2023, the state board hired two of them as paid interns to help reach their peers:

**Star Mendoza.** Star's love of film, video, and anchoring her school news drew her to this internship. She is practiced in social media and has achieved over one million views on one of her short TikTok videos. Wallaroo media reports that TikTok has about 80 million monthly active users in the United States. Sixty percent are between the ages of 16 and 24. As the state board applied Star's talent and passion for outreach, we found more and more students were engaged. In one project, Star interviewed state board members so the public could get to know them in a more personable way—and in a way in which students can relate. The video had over 2,000 views in its first few weeks. Star has featured students as well: one who is an aspiring tattoo artist, and another who wants to be a pediatric travel nurse. Both videos get to the heart of meaningful education: engaging, personalized, hands-on experiences.

**Indiana Hilmes.** Indiana got a front-row seat for policy discussions and government processes, and her ability to translate complicated policy materials into easy-to-understand copy was an asset to our team. Indiana learned that she wants to be involved in public policy—that a career in communications might not be her first choice. She worked on the state board's "elevator speech"—a plain, succinct way to explain who we are and what we do. Indiana is also interested in the board's work on mastery-based learning.

Our inaugural intern cohort demonstrates the program's dual benefits: It enhances interns' understanding of the state educational system, and it gives them the hands-on, personalized experiences they need to achieve their goals after high school.

I would encourage any state board that considers hiring interns to ensure they are compensated. Their perspectives are valuable. Also, consider removing GPA requirements or other qualifying barriers for potential interns.

Because of the impact our interns have, we plan to continue this program, with Star and Indy sitting on the interview panel for the next interns. We see an increase in "likes" and "shares" on teen-facing platforms and in the number of students attending our webinars. Most important, we feel we are authentically engaging with students. When they help us create and when we collaborate, we are inspired, and we are more knowledgeable when we write policy and advocate on their behalf. ■



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