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TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Schools
Public School Administrators

FROM: Dr. Santosha Oliver *Santosha Oliver*

SUBJECT: Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023 Relating to Student Governments

On September 7, 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023, which added a [new section 817 to the Education Law](#) relating to student governments.

Effective September 1, 2024, every school district serving high school students grades 9-12 with no districtwide or school building peer-selected student government is required to establish at least one student government organization within such district or school building.

The purpose of Chapter 357 is to ensure that all eligible high school students across the state have the opportunity to participate in student government organizations that enhance civic engagement and leadership preparedness.

Ensuring that all students are civic ready is a chief aim of social studies education. [The New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies](#) and [New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework](#) serve as a consistent set of expectations for what students should learn and be able to do, so that every student in New York State is prepared to be an active and engaged citizen who is ready to pursue college, a career, and/or service.

Civic-ready students use civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets to make decisions and take actions for themselves, their communities, and public good as members of a culturally diverse, democratic society. Schools, therefore, should provide students with meaningful, authentic opportunities to develop civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets.

In addition to the new law requiring high school student government programs, high school administrators should be aware of the following programs promoting civic education:

- The [New York State Seal of Civic Readiness](#) builds on the long-standing foundation of civic education in New York. The Seal of Civic Readiness is a formal recognition that a student has attained a high level of proficiency in terms of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic mindset, and civic experiences. The Seal may be used as a +1 Pathway and/or as a replacement for

a second Social Studies Regents exam to fulfill graduation requirements. To earn the Seal of Civic Readiness, students must complete all the requirements for a local or Regents diploma and earn a total of six points from the options outlined on the [Seal of Civic Readiness Criteria Chart](#), with at least two points in Civic Knowledge and at least two points in Civic Participation. Participation in student government could be used by students to earn .5 points¹ towards the Seal of Civic Readiness if such participation meets the requirements for an extracurricular experience (i.e., minimum of 40 hours and completion of an essay/presentation/product). School districts must apply for approval to NYSED to offer the Seal of Civic Readiness and develop customized plans that allow students to select personally meaningful experiences to earn the Seal. Additional information can be found in [The New York State Seal of Civic Readiness Handbook](#).

- Each year, the [William Randolph Hearst Foundation](#) in cooperation with the United States Senate and the education department of all the states, including NYSED, sponsors the [United States Senate Youth Program](#). Two New York student leaders are selected to participate in a week-long government leadership program in Washington, DC. The students engage in a series of seminars and briefings with Senators and members of the House of Representatives and meet with officials of the executive and judicial branches of government. To be eligible, students must hold a high-level leadership position in a student government, civic or educational organizations during the entire academic year academic preceding the application.

Additional information about the new law may be referenced in the attached *Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023 Frequently Asked Questions*. Information to support schools with instruction around civic education, can be found on the Office of Standards and Instruction's [Civic Readiness Initiative webpage](#). Questions regarding this memorandum and/or civics education may be directed to the Office of Standards and Instruction at P12StandardsInstruction@nysed.gov or 518-474-5922.

Attachment:

[Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023 Frequently Asked Questions](#)

¹ Students may receive these points more than once (e.g., .5 points for each year of participation in student government at the high school level).

Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023 Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the requirements of the new law?

Chapter 357 adds a [new section 817 to New York State \(NYS\) Education Law](#) to require every school district serving high school students in grades 9-12 with no districtwide or school building peer selected student government to establish at least one peer selected student government organization within such district or school building.

2. When do the provisions of the new law go into effect?

New section 817 of NYS Education Law goes into effect September 1, 2024. Therefore, any school district serving grades 9-12 that does not currently have a districtwide or school building peer selected student government organization must establish at least one such organization beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.

3. What are the requirements for creating a student government organization?

The requirements for student government organizations are determined at the local district level.

4. If a school district has more than one high school, are they required by the new law to establish a peer selected student government in each high school building?

School districts may create either a district wide student government or a student government for each high school.

5. Do the provisions of the new law apply to boards of cooperative education services (BOCES), charter schools, religious and independent schools and nonpublic schools with approved special education programs (853 Schools), State-Operated Schools, State-Supported Schools (4201 Schools) (i.e., Approved Special Education Programs)?

No. The provisions of the new law apply only to public school districts in NYS, including special act school districts. However, BOCES, religious and independent schools, and Approved Special Education Programs are encouraged to establish student governments to provide students the opportunity actively participate in student government. Such experiences may be used to earn points toward the [Seal of Civic Readiness](#) and/or apply for the [United States Senate Youth Program](#)