


2008

Student Government: Developing a Student Government in an Urban Elementary School

Nicole Lenee Sykes
Central Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate_projects

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sykes, Nicole Lenee, "Student Government: Developing a Student Government in an Urban Elementary School" (2008). *All Graduate Projects*. 133.

https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate_projects/133

This Graduate Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Student Projects at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact pingfu@cwu.edu.

NOTE:

SIGNATURE PAGE OMITTED FOR SECURITY REASONS

THE REGULATIONS FOR SIGNATURE PAGES CAN BE

FOUND ON CWU'S GRADUATE STUDIES WEBPAGE:

CWU.EDU/MASTERS/

DC. 52900
(c.2@DesMoines)

STUDENT GOVERNMENT:
DEVELOPING A STUDENT GOVERNMENT
IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Project Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

Master Teacher

By

Nicole Lenee Sykes

February 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing my Master's Degree would not have been possible without the help and support of my husband. He encouraged and supported me throughout my education. He was often left to fend for himself and patiently listened to me on days when I felt overwhelmed. I also received support from my mom and dad who instilled in me the importance of an education, and who have financially supported my education, while sacrificing many of their projects and vacations until my completion. I would also like to thank my friends and fellow peers who have contributed great moral and motivational support that kept me going.

In addition to my family and friends, I would like to thank Dr. Nourse, Dr. Thyfault and Dr. Gann for being on my committee and supporting me. My project would have not been possible if it was not for Prairie Brown who spent countless hours with me perfecting my writing skills. The classes, professors and peers I have met through CWU have had an impact on me that will last a lifetime. I have gained knowledge, friendships and support that will be valuable for years to come.

ABSTRACT:

STUDENT GOVERNMENT:

DEVELOPING A STUDENT GOVERNMENT

IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By

Nicole Lenee Sykes

February 2008

School community is critically important for healthy adolescent development. School connectedness has been found to be even more powerful than family connectedness in terms of protection against acting out behaviors in adolescence (Harrison & Narayan, 2003). Increasing student involvement in urban elementary settings through student government would unify students, communities, parents and staff.

Establishing a student government in an urban school setting promotes student voice, student interest and helps tie community and staff together. The importance of belonging is essential in providing a safe and productive educational environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the project	2
Limitations of the project.....	3
Research.....	3
Definitions of Terms.....	3
II REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	5
III PROCEDURES/METHODOLGY	14
Rationale for the project.....	13
Planned implementation of the project	15
Limitations	15
IV PROJECT.....	16
V SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	19
REFERENCES	21
APPENDIX.....	24

CHAPTER I

Background of the Project

Introduction

Student involvement has been a focus for educators throughout time.

Student involvement means a student is highly involved school wide, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time at school, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (Astin, 1984). Increasing student involvement in urban elementary settings through student government is a powerful tool used by the learning community to increase student connectedness. Research has shown that increased connectedness in elementary schools reduces negative behavior, improves academics, and establishes a healthy learning environment (Warren, 2005). Student voice provided through a democratic system helps tie community, staff and students together. In schools where race, class and ethnicity may be increasingly diverse, lack of communication leads to low parent participation, or unequal relationships between community and staff (McNelley, Nonemaker & Blum, 2002). Parent and community connectedness with the school is necessary to help establish a positive environment for students. Through an active student government, elementary schools can establish student voice, increase student interest and tie community, staff and school together.

This project explains to educators the benefits of student government, as well as best practices, and provides tools and helpful handouts educators need to establish a productive urban elementary student government.

Statement of the Problem

Student involvement in elementary settings is decreasing as a result of the lack of connectedness in schools. Research indicates that communication among staff, students and communities is decreasing, resulting in less student involvement and the lowered ability to create a healthy learning environment (Eccels & Barber, 1999).

The Purpose of the Project

This project provides educators with the background information and tools they need to establish an elementary student government. The literature review provides evidence that creating a student government increases school connectedness among students, staff and community, thereby enhancing student interest and creating a safe and stable school environment. This project provides educators with resources and guidelines they can use to establish an effective student government in an elementary setting.

Limitations of the Project

This project was designed during the 2006-2007 school year in an urban school setting at Hazel Valley Elementary. The school's demographics consisted

of 61 percent of students on free or reduced lunch and a 45 percent mobility rate (Hazel Valley Elementary, 2006). The student government is designed for intermediate students in an elementary setting with limited parent and community involvement.

Research

The review of literature for this project was obtained from articles, books and websites. The author's personal experience with establishing the student government is also documented.

Definitions of Terms

For clarification of this project the following terms are defined:

Advisor- A faculty member in charge of a group (Theisen, 2000).

Agenda- The program or plan for a meeting (Parliamentary Procedures, 2006).

Parliamentary Procedure- A set of rules that ensure meetings are conducted smoothly (Parliamentary Procedures, 2006).

Representatives- Those group members who represent all of the student body by attending meetings and reporting business discussed to other students (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 20006).

Roberts Rules of Order- A book that outlines the rules of parliamentary procedure (Roberts Rules of Order, 2006).

Student Government- Serves as a democratic way for students to have a voice in the school and give back to the school and the community. Student government allows every student's ideas to be heard (National Association, 2006).

Student Involvement/ connectedness- The characterization of a highly involved student who devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time at school, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students (Astin, 1984).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of school community has been established as a key factor in students' success in schools (McNeely, 2002). Bringing schools and communities together is not easy and often reflects school environments that have found it hard to engage with students' families (Hong, 2006). Student involvement or connectedness with their schools reduces negative behavior, improves academics and creates a positive learning environment (Warren, 2005). To increase school community research has shown that learning environments need to tie students, staff and community together (Lareau, 1989). Establishing a voice for students through student government increases the opportunity to enhance student interest and connect the learning community together.

Student government is first and foremost about enhancing student learning, and therefore it is important to include students in the creation process. Students are an untapped source of creative ideas for improving their schools, and they can offer recommendations for how to improve or restructure their schools to increase the level of student interest and participation. Student voice can be a powerful tool when students are engaged in the process and believe that their work and effort will result in positive change (Smith & Petralia, 2006). Through student government, students have an outlet to express their concerns

and ideas in a structured manner. Students feel empowered and involved, which not only benefits the students who are actively involved in the student government, but benefits the overall student population by providing an outlet for students to voice their opinions (Eccles & Barber, 1999). When students have a voice in their school they feel more connected.

Warren (2005) indicates that student connectedness in schools is a primary foundation for effective schools. It often has been found to be even more powerful than family connectedness in terms of protection against acting out behaviors in adolescence (Harrison & Narayan, 2003). Students who are connected to their school community have less behavior problems and are more likely to ask for help when struggling academically. Students who feel they are connected and heard tend to feel less anxiety when asking for help (Mahoney & Sattin, 2000).

One way to encourage student connectedness is to instill “universal values.” Student government is the perfect vehicle to infuse basic universal values in all aspects of school and student life. Educating young learners about values should be a collaborative effort between home, school and community. Student government’s adaptation of character education helps promote good citizenship and behavior (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2006). Universal values are words that impact the school’s daily culture. Words such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and hard work can be promoted monthly by

highlighting each word and its characteristics through student government (National Association, 2006).

The primary role of student government is to enable students to communicate with all the members of the learning community, so that principals and teachers are informed of each other's ideas, needs and opinions. Student government ensures that everyone in a school setting contributes to the school community, enjoys projects and special activities, and works together to solve school problems. Student government gives students a chance to learn about the democratic process, citizenship and leadership (National Association, 2006).

Every student in the school needs to learn about the democratic process. Best practices, including Berg Elementary Student Council (2006), suggest involving the whole school, even the primary students. Primary students might not sit in on actual student government meetings, but they can be informed of events that are happening around the school. Hershey Student Council (2006) has their intermediate students report to the primary classes, keeping the primary teachers, as well as the primary students informed of what is happening in their school. Once age criteria is established program administrators should determine other standard criteria.

Student governments are only as productive as the students who are elected and should follow standard criteria (Thiesien, 2000). Many student governments such as Hershey Student Council (2006) have guidelines and expectations that students must follow in order to serve as student government representatives.

Student representatives should be elected by their peers and have little influence from the administration or staff (Smith & Petralia, 2006). Student governments should have formal meetings and follow formal parliamentary procedures to establish the importance of the student government (National Association, 2006). Students need to take an oath of office and sign a contractual agreement in regards to their duties and responsibilities to understand the importance of their commitment. Students who are committed tend to be positive influences on others (Thiesen, 2000).

Thiesen (2000) suggest that students be good role models for others. Students who do not follow school rules can be placed on probation or be removed from their position. It is evident to most students the importance of the student government and the high standards it requires. Students who work with the student government are expected to follow all school policies and rules and be positive role models to their peers (Union Elementary, 2006). While students are the primary focus of the student government, without the guidance of staff members the government can not function properly.

Student government is the voice of the school, which helps to inform staff members of important events and activities that are happening around school and in the community. A. Stevens (Personal Communication, January 09, 2007) and other staff members are sometimes put off by student governments in elementary settings because they see it as another obligation they will have to fulfill in order for it to work. According to Berg Elementary (2006), student

governments can run effectively with little assistance needed by staff members. However, many staff members find it beneficial to participate and help out with student government activities. They often use student government to promote their own projects, as well as voice their concerns or ideas about the environment around the school.

To build strong communication amongst the students and staff members' Union Elementary Student Council (2006) and several other elementary governments do encourage staff members to be involved in the student government. Most teachers set aside a time for student government members to share what they talked about at their meetings. K. Tracy (Personal Communication, Jan 9, 2007) and other teachers also encourage classroom discussion around issues related to the school environment. Staff members have found when students' sense they are being heard they are more likely to participate and become an active part of the school community. When a school community is established, there is still a need to reach out to the larger community.

Bringing schools and communities together is not easy and often reflects school environments that have found it hard to engage with students' families. Urban schools in particular have grown increasingly distant from the families they serve, leaving those schools as isolated institutions unable to communicate effectively with students and their families (Hong, 2006). In addition, many of these schools' students may be increasingly diverse in race, class and ethnicity.

These situations can often result in schools having low parent participation, or unequal power relationships between parents and school staff can leave families feeling unwelcome or uninvited to participate in their children's education (McNelley, Nonemaker, & Blum, 2002).

Research demonstrates that family involvement is a key factor in students' success with school; the education of students is the shared responsibility of teachers, school staff, families and communities. "This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ ethnic and educational backgrounds and students at all ages." The benefits for students include higher GPAs, enrollment in more challenging classes, better attendance, improved behavior, and better social skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002 p. 24). Family communication can be increased through student government by promoting school events and community activities.

Studies show that parents are most likely to become involved if they

- Understand they should be involved
- Know they are capable of making a contribution
- Feel Invited by the school and their children (Common Wealth, 2007).

Student government can communicate repeatedly to parents that their involvement can greatly enhance their child's school performance. They can send home parent information on upcoming student events and social activities, invite parents to sit on a range of school committees, have meeting where parents are invited, represent all backgrounds and cultures by making special

efforts to involve racial/ ethnic minority, special needs and language minority students(Matton, 1990).

In addition to student outreach to families, student participation through student government helps students get involved in their schools as well as communities. Active student governments often involve their communities in projects or activities to help create public awareness of events that are beneficial for both the school and community (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Students learn how to become active members of their community as well as voices for their school.

Community involvement also appears to “benefit schools, families and students, including improved achievement and behavior,” however, there is less research on the effects of community involvement” compared with family involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002p. 24).Through student government a range of programs can support student learning and community involvement. Businesses may provide resources, such as people, equipment and or money, to assist with school programs developed by the student government. Informal relationships may occur when adults volunteer as role models, mentors, or for other activities (Hong, 2006).

Students benefit from adults in schools and communities serving as models and mentors. Clark (1990) described community- based constructive learning activities such as professionally guided learning activities, leisure activities including reading, writing, conversation and recreational activities. With the

guidance of the student government, activities can be set up that promote community engagement with student learning. "Integrate some of the different parts of students' lives, so that students feel rooted in the community and the school at the same time nurtured in communities of caring (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 146).

Several authors suggest practices for student governments for expanding engagement to include community members, such as

- Sponsoring and coordinating family and community education programs
- Integrating community service programs into student government
- Developing partnerships with youth-serving agencies (George, McEwin, & Jenkins, 2000).
- Acting as a community resource
- Forming partnerships with local businesses and civic groups
- Using parent and community expertise in the classroom and school based activities.
- Collaborating with local colleges and universities for community projects
- "Involv[ing] community members in school wide and classroom activities, giving presentations, serving as information resources, serving as a reader/ responder for students' published writing, " and so on (Cotton, 2000, p. 20).

Consistent monitoring from the student government on family, school and community partnership programs is necessary for success. Hong (2006) suggests reviews of the partnerships to measure progress and for accountability.

Student government benefits the school community. When utilized and supported by the learning community it can have a tremendous impact on the overall school environment (Harrison & Narayan, 2003). Research shows that high performing schools encourage strong communication amongst their staff, students and community. Student government is a great resource in helping establish communication amongst the learning environment.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

Rationale for the Project

After teaching at Hazel Valley elementary for one year the author gained interest in trying to establish a positive learning environment by increasing communication amongst staff, students and community. Hazel Valley had increased its staff and student population by half and there were no programs in place to help increase communication. Through recent research and best practices on the subject of student government, the author established a guidebook that is set up to enable educators to initiate a student government in an elementary setting.

The project highlights the benefits of student governments amongst students, staff, and communities and ties in the importance of school environment. The guidebook is meant as a tool to help educators create their own self sufficient student government. The project, as well as the guidebook shows the benefits that a student government has on an elementary setting and gives easy to follow procedures on starting a student government and increasing communication.

Planned Implementation of the Project

In 2006- 2007 Hazel Valley established a student governments based on best practices and research on the subject of student government. The author's vision was to create a positive learning environment by increasing collaboration in the learning community. The role of the student government was to establish a student voice in the school and allow every student's ideas to be heard. In response students were expected to give back to their school and community.

Since Hazel Valley had no recent student government to identify with the author decided to document her experiences and create a guidebook to help other educators establish a productive and proactive student government in an elementary setting. The guidebook is available for all educators to access when questions occur around student government.

Limitations

The guidebook is strictly a suggestion and meant only as a starting point for educators to begin the process of implementing a student government in their elementary school. The project is intended to be in a draft stage and should be revised and added to as necessary. It is intended to be used for elementary schools and would need some revision for middle and high school settings. It is recommended that educators who choose to utilize this guidebook adapt it to meet the needs of their students and staff. In addition, they are encouraged to note the project's successes and failures so the guidebook can be improved upon in the future.

Chapter 4

THE PROJECT

The intent and purpose of this project was to provide research-based practices for student government in the form of a guidebook for educators. The guidebook was written for elementary educators who are interested in establishing a student government with intermediate students.

This guidebook is designed to give educators an outline for quickly setting up a student government. The guidebook is divided into several steps for educators to reference.

- Shaping your student government
- Election procedures
- First student government meeting
- Agenda guidelines
- Helpful websites

With adequate literature suggesting the importance of school connectedness, the intent of this guidebook is to give educators a starting point to increase school and community communication through student government. The guidebook is a tool educators can reference, but educators are encouraged to alter and establish their own norms for student government to meet the needs of their learning communities.

Roles of the Advisor

The guidebook's purpose is to help the advisor structure a student government in a timely manner. Best practices suggest that advisors research as much as they can on parliamentary procedures and past practices in their school, if there were any. It is also suggested that advisors include the principal and staff in the process of establishing the student government to increase the overall importance of the government (Theisien, 2000). The advisor is expected to keep all lines of communication open between students and staff directly related to student government issues. The guidebook offers advisors examples of student government procedures as well as quick references such as web sites for advisors to utilize.

Advisors' tips for student success:

- Make sure you know each member of your student government
- Create an environment that will provide for organization, productivity, and innovation
- Be willing to listen to your student government and student population
- Communicate with your student government and staff so that all will know what is happening.
- Delegate- Make sure everyone is doing their fair share. Keep a record, checklist or chart of projects.
- Give constructive suggestions to improve your student government

- Be knowledgeable about all aspects of student government and the activities and projects it sponsors.
- Celebrates success- Appreciate both effort and excellence. Look for opportunities to reward positive performance by student government officers, representatives, other students and staff members.
- Have Fun- Everything runs better when you are smiling and having fun (National Association, 2006).

Summary

As a result of this project, elementary educators will have a guidebook with references to help implement a student government in their elementary schools. As shown in chapter two, student governments have been proven to increase school connectedness and communication amongst staff, students and the community. Student government enables students to contribute positively to their school environment. The steps laid out in this handbook will assist educators in promoting student success through student government.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

It has been shown that school community is important for healthy adolescent development. Students who feel a connectedness with their school community are less likely to engage in negative social behaviors (Warren, 2005). Through student government elementary schools can increase student voice, student interest, and help establish a connection between community and staff.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this project, educators will have a tool for implementing a student government in an elementary school. The guidebook is designed in straightforward steps to help educators meet the needs of their staff and students. The guidebook was created with busy schedules of staff and students in mind. The intention of the author was to create a quick and simple guidebook to follow for educators to follow when establishing their own student government.

Implications

Student involvement at Hazel Valley increased school wide in the 2006/2007 school year. Hazel Valley successfully established school wide projects including a school clean up day, a recycling program, a spirit committee, and a teacher support group. Each of these projects were successfully sponsored and promoted by the student government. The student government also successfully established communication amongst its community by creating relationships

within the community. Students offered services as well as promoted school projects within the community to establish community support. Parents and families were encouraged to volunteer and participate in several student government activities. Staff and students utilized the student government at Hazel Valley to help accommodate the needs of its learning community.

Recommendations

It is recommended that in the beginning of creating a student government advisors get the school's staff and Parent Teacher Association involved immediately. The school should keep staff informed of the process and ask for parent and staff volunteers. The advisor has many roles to fill and would benefit greatly with extra help. Staff, parents, and the community are tremendous resources for helping establish productive events led by the student government. Teachers should not be afraid to ask for help.

REFERENCES

- Astin, A. (1984). A developmental Theory for Higher Education. *Journal Of College Personnel*, V25, pg.297-308.
- Berg Elementary Student Council retrieved on September 6, 2006
www.newton.k12.ia.us/schools/berg_wl/council.html
- Clark, S.M. (1990). *Schooling Practices That Matter Most*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership retrieved on September 7, 2006
www.cipl.org
- Cotton, K. (1995). *Research You Can Use to Improve Results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD and Portland, Or: NWREL. See Chapter 8, Parent and Community Involvement.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Eccles, J. S., & Barber, B. L. (1999). Student council, volunteering, basketball, or marching band: What kind of extracurricular involvement Matters? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14, 10-43.
- George, P.S., McEwin, C.K., & Jenkins, J.M. (2000). *The Exemplary High School*. New York: Harcourt College Publisher
- Harrison, P., Narayan, G. (2003). Differences in Behavior, Psychological Factors, and Environmental Factors Associated with Participation in Extra Curricular Activities in Adolescence. *The Journal of School Health*, 73(3), 113.
- Hazel Valley Elementary OSPI Statistics retrieved on September 5, 2006
www.hsd401.org/ourschools/elementaryschools/hazel/
- Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). *A new Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin, TX:
- Hershey Student Council retrieved on September 7, 2006
www.wveck12.in.us/hershey/council.html

- Hong, S., (2006). Building School-Community Partnerships: Collaboration for Student Success. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76(2), 271.
- Lareau, A. (1989). Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary Education. Philadelphia: Falmer Press
- Lisella, L. C., & Serwatka, T. S. (1996). Extracurricular participation and academic achievement in minority students in urban schools. *Urban Review*, 28, 63-80.
- McNeely CA., Nonnemaker JM. Blum RW. (2002). Promoting school connectedness: evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of School Health*, 72(4):138-146.
- Mahoney, J. L., & Stattin, H. (2000). Leisure activities and adolescent antisocial behavior: The role of structure and social context. *Journal of Adolescence*, 23, 113-1.
- Maton, K. (1990). Meaningful involvement in instrumental activity and well being. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18, 297-320.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals retrieved on September 7, 2006
www.naesp.org
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2003). Quick Tables and Figures, Assessments. <http://nces.ed.gov>.
- Parliamentary Procedures retrieved on September 14, 2006
www.parlipro.org
- Roberts Rules of Order retrieved on September 14, 2006
www.robertsrules.com
- Smith, P. Petralia, J. (2006). Tuned in: Listening to Student Voices. *ProQuest Educational Journals*, pg 28.
- Theisen, R. (2000). Student Government: As Real as it Gets. *Principal Leadership (Middle School Ed.) No2, 10-17.*
- Union Elementary Student Council retrieved on September 7, 2006
<http://206.180.106.23/brochure/elementarysc.html>
- Warren, M. R. (2005). Communities and schools: A new view of urban education reform. *Harvard educational Review*, 75, 133-173

Youniss, J., McLellan, J.A., Su, Y., & Yates, M. (1999). The role of community service in identity development: Normative, unconventional, and deviant orientations. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 14*, 248-261.



Educator's Guide

Please note:
Four images have been redacted due to copyright concerns.

Establishing a Student Government In an Elementary School

Nicole Sykes





Welcome to Developing a Student Government!

School community is critically important for healthy adolescent development. School connectedness has been found to be even more powerful than family connectedness in terms of protection against acting out behaviors in adolescence (Harrison & Narayan, 2003). Increasing student involvement in urban elementary settings through student government would unify students, communities, parents and staff.

Establishing a student government in an urban school setting promotes student voice, student interest and helps tie community and staff together. The importance of belonging is essential in providing a safe and productive educational environment.

This guidebook is designed to provide educators with references and suggestions for implementing a student government into an elementary setting. The guidebook is set up in easy to follow steps for educators to utilize. This guidebook is meant only as a starting point and is intended to be in a draft stage. It should be revised and added to as necessary. You are encouraged to note the project's successes and challenges and to adapt it to meet the needs of your school community for future referencing. Good luck and please turn to the following page to see the table of contents. Enjoy the process!

Table Of Contents

Shaping your Student Government.....	4
Send an Outline of the Student Government to all Staff	5
Example	5
Election Procedures	6
Step 1	6
Example of Written Job Descriptions.....	6
President.....	6
Vice President	6
Secretary/Treasurer	7
Step 2	7
Hazel Valley's Elections Procedures.....	7
Step 3	8
Step 4	8
Example of Letter	9
Ballots	10
Example Ballot.....	10
Step 5.....	10
First Student Government Meeting.....	11
Step 1	11
Examples:.....	11
Step 2	11
Step 3	11
Step 4	12
Step 5	12
Example of Pledge	12
Agenda Guidelines for all Meetings that Follow.....	13
Helpful Websites.....	14

Shaping your Student Government

Previous Student Government- If your school has had a student government in the past, discuss with your principal and the last advisor how the government was set up and what the responsibilities of the advisor were. Request any material the old advisor may have used. You may need to change some of the advisor's duties to suit your school's needs.

First Year for Student Government- Set up a meeting with the principal, teachers, parents or administrators who have expressed interest in participating in a student government. Discuss items such as what student government means to your school and its staff members, what kinds of experience in student government you would like the students to have, and how you plan to structure the government. If you are not sure how you are going to structure the government this is a great time to ask for suggestions. Getting people involved will make your life easier.

Send an Outline of the Student Government to all Staff

Quick overview of your student government gives staff a preview of what is to come.

Example

<p>Student Government Hazel Valley 2006-2007</p>
<p>Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4-6 graders• 2 students from each classroom• 6th – President, Vice President, and Secretary Treasurer
<p>Elections (September)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class votes for 2 student representatives (An intermediate rep will be assigned to each primary classroom.)• 4-6 grade vote for President, Vice President, and Secretary
<p>Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classroom representatives will meet once a month during designated teacher's planning time• They will also meet during recess
<p>Representatives Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report back to their classrooms about the meetings• Report to primary grades• Bring ideas from their peers to the meetings• Work on special projects• Be an active listener and strong communicator• Be a role model
<p>Projects or Jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morning announcements• Spirit Days• Recycling• School improvements projects• Teacher support
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once a month have class meetings where representatives can share out• Input ideas• Anyone can contribute

Election Procedures

Step 1

Generate interest: To get students involved and interested in student government, stage an assembly or have a meeting about student government and the upcoming election.

Have written job descriptions for representatives as well as each office. Discuss what is expected of each representative and officer, who can run for what, and how long each term will last.

Example of Written Job Descriptions

President

As the leader of the Student Government, the president is responsible for announcing meetings, preparing the meeting room, having the necessary papers/supplies at each meeting, and conducting the meeting. He or she must prepare the agenda, lead the discussion, refrain from taking part in the discussion, be able to summarize the discussion for others, vote only when there is a tie, count votes and announce vote results to the government. The president also serves as spokesperson for the school and government.

Vice President

The vice president serves as the president's chief assistant and must therefore know the president's job thoroughly and be able to replace him or her in case of absence. The vice president also coordinates various student government committees.

Secretary/Treasurer

The secretary/treasurer is responsible for keeping the minutes (a written record of each meeting) including the wording of each motion and the number of votes for and against each motion. He or she must read the minutes from previous meetings, write/respond to correspondence pertaining to student government business, and publicize all meetings.

He or she is also responsible for keeping neat and accurate records of all student government funds and how the money is spent.

Step 2

Election Procedures- Each schools student government may establish its own set of election procedures- the rules and regulations by which student government officials are nominated and elected.

Hazel Valley's Elections Procedures

Classroom Representatives- Intermediate students will nominate and vote in two representatives from their class for each grade level.

School Officers- Must be in the sixth grade and must have approval from teacher to run.

Campaign Week- Students who are running for school offices will campaign by hanging up posters around the school and promoting themselves in unique and creative ways.

Step 3

Primary Election- At the end of the week gather a group of teachers and staff together to listen to all the speeches of the candidates that are running for office. Staff will then narrow the field down to three candidates per office for the final election.

Step 4

School Election- Hold an election assembly for 4-6th graders where students read their speeches to the school. Send out a letter to teachers before the assembly on voting procedures and expectations of students during the assembly.

Example of Reminder Letter to the Staff

September 28, 2006

Good afternoon,

This is just a quick reminder about the election assembly tomorrow at 11:15. It should only last about 20 to 30 minutes. Please remind students to be respectful of all candidates that are running. We have had a few problems with students being cruel about who they are voting for and who they are not voting for. Talk up all the hard work and courage it takes to run for an office.

Ballot process- Your class will be delivered a manila envelope with enough ballots for each student to have one. Have students vote for one candidate per office. (They will check the box of the candidate the want.) Collect all the ballots and place them back in the manila envelope. Keep them secure until someone comes by to pick them up. You do not have to count the ballots. Any questions please let me know.

Thanks for all your patience,

Nicole

Ballots

Ballots- Ballots can be made easily on Microsoft Word or Publisher

Example Ballot

Hazel Valley 2006-2007 Election	
President:	
Zoe Mernandez	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sergio Zomore	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vice-President:	
Jazmin Trisp	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abby Bagee	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secretary/Treasure:	
Morie Schwinger	<input type="checkbox"/>
Briana Black	<input type="checkbox"/>

Step 5

Counting Ballots and Announcing Results- Recruit staff to count ballots and at the end of the day announce results over the intercom. Before you announce results, gather all students who ran for office and let them know who won before the announcement is made. This is a great time to congratulate everyone that ran and give them positive feedback for all their hard work.

First Student Government Meeting

Step 1

Explain What a Student Government Does - Take this opportunity to make some comments about what student government is all about. Review what student governments do. If your school has had a prior student government, you can include what kinds of projects students have worked on in the past. If this is the first year for student government have some ideas already established on what the students are going to do.

Examples:

- Morning announcements
- Spirit Days
- Recycling
- School improvements projects
- Teacher support

Step 2

Review the Responsibilities of Student Government Members - Since students have just been elected, this is a good time to talk about their jobs and responsibilities. You can do this separately with the officers, since they are going to have more responsibilities.

Step 3

Schedule Meetings and Talk about Class Meetings - Discuss when the next meeting will be and how long student have to meet with their class. This is a great opportunity to address issues concerning how to hold a meeting with their class.

Step 4

Introduce Principal - Introduce your school principal and let him or her say a few words about student government and the importance of having one. Students should sense they are an important part of the school dynamics.

Step 5

Have Students take and Oath of Office - Swear in each officer individually and have all the representatives pledge and sign an agreement.

Example of Pledge

As a representative to the student government of Hazel Valley I pledge to represent my fellow students as well as I am able, to be fair and honest, and to uphold the rules and regulations of my student government constitution. I will attend all Student Government meetings. I will be prompt and prepared (NAESP 2005).

Agenda Guidelines for all Meetings

1. Call to order

The president calls the meeting to order. The secretary writes down the time the meeting started.

2. Roll Call

The secretary performs the roll call by reading the names of members and marking in the record book if they are present or absent, or by distributing a sign-in sheet.

3. Approval of the minutes

The secretary reads the minutes of the last meeting. The president asks for corrections or additions.

4. Officers' Reports

The president makes announcements, if there is any. The vice president reports on any special projects (other than committees) on which he or she is working. The secretary reads correspondence received by the Council and reminds members of any correspondence written during the last meeting. The treasurer reports on the council funds.

5. Committee Reports

The chairpersons of each committee (such as publicity, spirit, events) report on their committees' work.

6. Old Business

Any unfinished business from earlier meetings is discussed.

7. New Business

Representatives and officers present new ideas for projects or Council activities. These ideas are usually presented in the form of motions. If there is enough interest, these motions are discussed and voted on.

8. Program

If a program is planned (such as a guest speaker or film), Council members take time to listen and watch. If time is limited, have programs at the beginning of the meeting.

9. Adjournment

After a motion, a second motion, and a vote, the meeting is adjourned or ended. The secretary writes down the time the meeting ends. (NAESP)

Helpful Websites

- Character Education for Students and Educators- www.character.org
- Constitutional Rights Foundation- www.crf-usa.org
- National Association of Elementary School Principals-
www.nafsp.org
- Parliamentary Procedures- www.parlipro.org
- Roberts Rules of Order- www.robertrules.com
- United States Constitution- www.archives.gov/nationalarchives-experience/charters/constitutional.html

Notes

Lined area for notes with horizontal lines.