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A STUDY OF STUDENT COUNCILS OF LARGE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN MONTANA

by

GEORGE ARTHUR SHELTENS

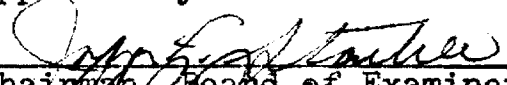
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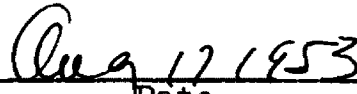
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The term "student council" is a derivation of the older and now quite obsolete terms of "self government" or "student government". Since about 1915 the trend has been away from imitative and complicated "self-government plans and the use of this inaccurate expression, toward the simpler and more practical "participation in school control idea" and more accurate and attractive designations such as "student council", by far the most popular of all titles.¹

If pupils are to learn to participate in the activities of life, now and in the future, and to do so intelligently, they must be given the opportunity for actual participation under wise guidance. If pupils are to be trained to function in a democracy, they must be given an opportunity to participate in a democratic form of life that will fit them for the kind of participation so necessary if democracy is to remain a safe form of government for our country.²

Students should feel that they are sharing in the administration of school functions affecting students

¹ Harry Charles McKown, The Student Council (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1944) p. 22.

² Charles Forrest Allen, T.R. Alexander, and H.W. Means, Extra-Curricular Activities In The Elementary Schools (St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1937) p. 152-158.

and that the student council is a voice for student body opinions. If students are led to believe that their student council gives them more power than is actually possible for them to have, they are apt to pass unwise legislation that will have to be vetoed by the principal. This will cause them to believe that their student council is merely another implement for manipulation by the principal. A student council should mean sharing and participation on the part of the students.

During the school term of 1952 and 1953, a group of the faculty members of Garfield School located at Billings, Montana, decided that the students of their school were being denied the educational opportunity of leadership and self-direction. This group of interested faculty members felt that this need on the part of the students could be fulfilled by a student council which represented all of the students from the first grade through the eighth grade and each of the thirty two home rooms. The entire faculty was invited to attend the meetings to discuss the merits and advantages of student councils. These meetings were held on Thursday of each week and continued for a period of about three months of the latter part of the school year. Usually about one-third of the faculty members attended these meetings and some interesting discussions were held. Each teacher attending was asked to locate and contribute information to the group concerning student councils. Student

members of the Billings Junior High School student council were asked to attend one of these meetings and informed the group of the advantages and problems of their student council.

By the end of the school term in June of 1953, the faculty members had compiled an outline of their conception of a good student council. This outline was presented to the remainder of the faculty and they decided to work with the students in initiating a student council the following year.

This professional paper is an outgrowth of an interest in these discussions held at Garfield School concerning student leadership.

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this paper is to study the existing student councils in operation in the larger elementary schools of Montana and the available literature on elementary school student councils for the purpose of devising a good workable plan for organizing a student council for the Garfield School in Billings, Montana.

Procedures

1. A survey was made of the current literature concerning elementary school student councils with particular attention given to their history and reasons for their failure.
2. The survey was conducted among sixty elementary

schools of the state having an enrollment of over three hundred students. This study was particularly concerned with the following phases of organizing a student council: teacher planning, pupil-teacher planning, building the constitution, making the constitution effective, and evaluating and supervising its operation.

The study was made to secure the following information:

- a. First of all, the number of large elementary schools having student councils in operation at the time of the study.
- b. Kinds of activities engaged in by the student council and the services rendered to the school.
- c. Advantages of having a student council.
- d. Imperfections and shortcomings of the student council as it was operating in each particular school.
- e. Processes by which the student councils were brought into being.

Importance of the Study

1. The results of this study helped in establishing a student council at the Garfield School at Billings, Montana.
2. Such a plan might be followed by other teachers and principals in establishing a student council in their schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The student council may be defined as that duly constituted organization of students which represents the entire student body and is recognized by that student body and by the professional staff and the adult community as having the authority to represent student opinion and to accept responsibility for the student body.¹

Brief History Of The Student Council

The student council is not a new idea in educational circles. McKown² states that Plato, in 386 B.C., gathered a group of young philosophers around him and established his "Academy", an unique institution, in which the teachers and students together owned and operated the schools' property, chapel, library, lecture and discussion rooms. The main purpose of student participation in the academy was educational; it was not, as it was in some of the latter schools, for economy of administration.

¹ Joe Smith, Student Councils For Our Times, Principle And Practices (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), p. 1-2.

² Harry Charles McKown, The Student Council (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1944), p. 1-2.

In 1531 at Goldberg, Germany, Valentino Trotzendorf organized a plan of participation that was built around a senate of twelve elected representatives, a larger council, and the necessary administrative and recording officers. Very formal and dignified court trials were held for students who were unmannerly at the table, tardy, unnecessarily absent, lazy, etc.³

Martin Planta, before he was twenty, had begun to plan a new kind of school which received government approval in 1760 and which was opened the following year at Haldenstein in Switzerland. A system of student self-government was used in the school to prepare pupils for participation in democratic political life. Under Planta the school was successful; under his successor it languished and closed.⁴

In America during the year 1777, the boys of the William Penn Charter School established a constitution with an "assembly" chosen every month. This assembly was empowered to make such laws as they thought necessary. Judges and other necessary officers were elected by the student and all the offenders were tried publicly. This early example of student self-government was soon followed by schools using the monitorial system which was characterized by student participation in the handling of many of the school affairs. Student participation was introduced into the New York High

³ op cit. p. 3.

⁴ H.G. Good, "Early Examples Of Student Self-Government", Educational Research Bulletin, 24:113-118, May, 1945.

school in 1825; into the Temple School, Boston, by Bronson Alcott in 1834; into her Hartford, Connecticut, private school for girls by Catherine Beecher in 1830; and into the Mattakesett School, Duxbury, Massachusetts in about 1840.⁵

Although the student council had an early beginning, Jones⁶ found that it was used very little in public schools until after 1920. In a study of 269 secondary schools, Jones found that there were no student councils in these schools before 1900, twenty-five councils were started before 1920, while forty seven were started during the five year period from 1920-1924, and that forty councils were organized in the following five year period. From this survey it would seem that the greatest growth in the number of student councils took place from 1920 to 1929.

Originating A New Student Council

Many administrators have made the grave mistake of telling their faculty and student body that, "beginning September first, we are going to have a student council, which will take over and supervise many of the functions of the school". As many administrators have found, this type of beginning can come to but one end, failure.⁷

⁵ McKown, op. cit., p.5.

⁶ Galen Jones, Extra Curricular Activities In Relation To The Curriculum (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1935), p.17.

⁷ O. Rankin, "How To Begin A Student Council." School Activities, 13:91-92, November, 1941.

Among the questions that should be considered carefully and thoughtfully before attempting to organize or plan a student council program are the following:

1. Is there a need for a student council?
2. What are the purposes of a student council?
3. How can the cooperation of the teacher staff and the student body be obtained?
4. What is the relation of the home room in regard to the student council?
5. Should the principals always have the power to veto proposals?
6. Can the sponsor give school time to the student council meetings?
7. How far should the sponsor exercise his authority?
8. Should the council deal with discipline problems?⁸

McKown⁹ states that a democratic form of government cannot be imposed from without; it can come only in response to a definite demand from within the group. The first step a school should take in originating a student council is the education of the faculty. This can be accomplished by first forming a faculty council committee. This group should collect constitutions, hand books of other schools, bulletins, books and magazines. This information is then passed on to the entire faculty to be discussed and revised.

After the faculty has become thoroughly acquainted with the council idea, it should be presented in various ways to the student body. The student body might be best informed by working with a small group of student leaders

⁸ V.A. Teetler and W.W. Norris, "Organizing The Student Council," School Activities, 13:9-10, September, 1941.

⁹ McKown, op. cit., p. 96.

which would visit other councils, meet with the faculty committee and then with student representatives, the next logical step in organizing the council would be the education of the entire student body by the representatives.

Fretwell¹⁰ maintains that the council must grow out of the life of the school. A council does not stand transplanting but it can be grown, and in the experience of the junior high school, the home room is the place to begin cultivation. After the home room system is working fairly well, then the development of the council can be undertaken. The home room and the council are not ends in themselves, however. They are, rather, the means the school uses to help its citizens to become increasingly self-directive.

Probably the most healthy beginning for a student council is to allow the council to grow from some smaller organization already existing within the school. A common organization from which the council frequently originates is the safety patrol club of the school. This group has already dealt with problems similar to those of the student council.¹¹

Many successful student councils have been originated by and under the direction and supervision of the school

¹⁰ Elbert K. Fretwell, Extra-Curricular Activities In Secondary Schools. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), p. 129.

¹¹ Thorston R. Carlson and Edwena M. Moore, "A School Council Aids Learning", Educational Leadership, 9:438-43, April, 1952.

principal. The council at Four Corners School, Silver Spring, Maryland is an example of such a school. There the principal felt that some sort of unifying activity was needed in the school. After several planning meetings with the faculty, a series of group meetings of the students were held to discuss the idea of a student council. Representatives and student officers were later elected and the first meetings of the councils were held under the direction of the principal. The principal felt that there was more of a feeling of unity and better school spirit at the end of the year than there was at the beginning.¹²

Role Of The Sponsor

Much of the success of the student council depends upon the sponsor. It takes leadership of high quality to help children do their own thinking. The sponsor must give children the opportunity to make practical plans and follow them through to successful completion in such a manner that the responsibility is really theirs. Children need to profit from their own mistakes and experience full satisfaction in their successes. There are advantages to having a teacher of an older group as the sponsor, particularly in the beginning stages of the organization. This

¹² Laura M. Mixner, "Planning for Democratic Living in an Elementary School," Educational Administration and Supervision, 36:292-305, May, 1950.

teacher is likely to know the leaders better and to be more accustomed to working with older children. If the president or chairman is a member of the sponsor's group, it makes the follow up of plans a bit easier.

The sponsor's preparation for council meetings involves careful planning with the principal, the faculty, and the student chairman. The sponsor needs to follow through on plans that are made. The children must take this responsibility themselves, but the faculty provides the situation within which it can be done.¹³

Sponsors should not vote and should not use their positions to control the council except in rare instances. Their function is to assist, teach, and guide councils in conducting their meetings effectively in accordance with accepted parliamentary procedure. Good sponsors are always good teachers, stimulating thought in pupils and helping them arrive at their own conclusions rather than forcing ready-made decisions upon them.¹⁴

The principal should seldom sponsor the council; but the one who does sponsor it should be appointed by the principal, should be closely in accord with his policies, should be able to secure the cooperation of other

¹³ A. H. Blankenship, "A Student Council with Elementary Children," The National Elementary Principal, 27: 40-44, April, 1948.

¹⁴ Maurice M. Smith, L.L. Standley and Cecil L. Hughes, Junior High School Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942), p. 376.

teachers, and should be responsible to the principal for conduct and conclusions of the council. Those in authority should take care that the will of the sponsor is not automatically imposed upon members of the group. Pupils may accept or do what they think the principal desires without using their own judgment to formulate their own conclusions. The student council should be directed with the sponsor in the background. Probably in no school activity is greater tact required for successful direction.¹⁵

In at least one school the sponsorship of the student council is based upon a rotation plan among the teachers. An example of such a plan is found at the Bluemont Elementary School, at Manhattan, Kansas.

Each of the ten teachers who constitute the Bluemont School faculty becomes a sponsor for a period of two weeks, with a new teacher becoming a sponsor each week. Thus, it is possible to have one experienced sponsor at all times. These sponsors are chosen by the principal without regard for the individual's skill or interest in student council work.

Membership

A student council should represent the entire student body. Some organizations purporting to be student councils

¹⁵ C. F. Allen, T. R. Alexander, and H. W. Means, Extra Curricular Activities in the Elementary Schools, (St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1937.) p. 152.

represent only various segments of the student body. One school in the west, for instance, has a club which it calls the student council even though it is made up of junior and senior boys who are elected to it by the club members.¹⁷

The plans of electing students from home rooms instead of from clubs has the advantage of representing all the students. In general, there should be no restriction on council membership. Students should not be restricted from membership because of sex, moderately low marks, disapproval of the principal, sponsor or dean, or because they already have been a member.¹⁸

Some schools exclude the primary grades from representation on the council while many other schools have all grades, including the first, represented at the council meetings. Although the lower grade representatives actually take very little part in the meetings, they are impressed with the importance of the assembly. Their presence in the council is a challenge to the older children who are leaders in the organization. The experiences the smaller children gain in being part of the group, which actually plans for and makes possible a happier democratic life for all the children of the school, not only gives them a spirit of unity with the whole school, but also helps to prepare them for leadership in the student council when

¹⁷ Joe Smith, op. cit., p. 1-5.

¹⁸ Harry Charles McKown, Extra-Curricular Activities (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1951), p. 110-111

they are older.¹⁹

Length of membership in the council varies with circumstances. Opportunity should be provided for as many children as possible to serve without sacrificing continuity of work. A plan for always having experienced children on the council while new ones are learning can be worked out. One practice is to have a nucleus elected in the spring to begin work the following year. Three groups of members during the year can serve very well. One new representative from each classroom every three months, each member serving six months, is suggested as a workable plan.²⁰

The atmosphere and environment of a student council meeting should be highly permissive so that members feel free to give their opinions on the solution of problems. It is doubtful if such a permissive attitude can be realized when the size of the group exceeds thirty members. The size and process of the council should give ample opportunity for students to talk about their jobs, to practice needed skills and to evaluate continuously.²¹

The Lafayette School, (1-8), San Francisco, Calif-

¹⁹ Winnie Yoe, "Elementary Student Councils at Work", School Activities, 21:55-56, October, 1949.

²⁰ Blankenship, loc. cit.

²¹ Ida Stewart Brown, "Group Development in a Junior High School Student Council," Educational Leadership, 9:496-501, May, 1952.

ornia, is unique in the fact that there are three different student councils within the school. The seventh and eighth grade have their student council, the fourth, fifth and sixth grades have a separate council, while the first, second and third grades have still a separate council. Each student body has its own weekly assembly for business and programs, except the lower grades, which have a business meeting every third week. Every pupil in the school is a member of one of three student bodies.²²

Election of Officers

Allen²³ states that the election of officers of the council offers an excellent opportunity for teaching pupils "to do better, those desirable activities they will perform anyway." Here the pupil is called upon to consider the merits that qualify a candidate to become a member of the council. The wise home room teacher will take note of the opportunity this occasion offers for him to conduct a lesson in practical citizenship training.

Officers of the council are selected for a two fold purpose. Primarily, they are selected on the basis of the service they are able to render to the school; and second, for the value the officer will secure from the experience.

²² F. C. Borgeson, All School Activities. (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1931.), p. 55.

²³ Allen, et al., loc. cit.

In the minor offices of the school, as in the homeroom, provision is made for participation largely on the basis of the value to the pupil in performing the service.

However, in selecting the president or other officers, students should be elected because they can perform valuable services to the school.

In some student councils, the candidates for office are selected not from the student body but from the members of the elected council. An example of this type of officer selection is found in School 29, Wilmington, Delaware. Here the members of the council divide into two political parties, each of which makes its ticket and its party platform. Following the primaries, there is the usual campaign during which time the party candidates make their speeches to the students.²⁴

Benbrook²⁵ describes an election similar to a convention. At an assembly of the entire student body, two or three students were nominated for each office to be filled, and they were voted on by a rising vote. This method did not meet with the approval of either teachers or the more enthusiastic pupils. All the evils of a nominating convention were noticeable. The majority of the students followed the person who could make the most noise; if a candidate had a noisy spokesman, his chances for

²⁴ Eldridge J. Waters, "How Our Elementary School Council Grew," School and Society, 31:647-649, May, 1930.

²⁵ Joyce Benbrook, "An Experiment in Socializing School Control," School and Society, 23:97-98, November, 1951.

election were increased very much.

A typical assembly program for the installation of officers is one that was conducted at the Washington School, River Forest, Illinois.²⁶ This assembly program was presented for the entire school:

1. Song, Star Spangled Banner by all pupils.
2. Pledge allegiance to the flag led by the president of the council.
3. Installation of new members and officers conducted by co-sponsor of the council.
4. Selections by the Glee Club.
5. Presentation of the booklet, "School Courtesies and Regulations," by president of the council.
6. Song, America, sung by all pupils.

The Council Constitution

McKown²⁷ maintains that a school should always develop its own constitution rather than copy that of some other school. It can, of course, profit from the study and analysis of other constitutions. The constitution may follow some such outline as this:

Article I	.....	Name and purpose
Article II	.....	Membership
Article III	.....	Officers
Article IV	.....	Duties of officers
Article V	.....	Meetings
Article VI	.....	Powers
Article VII	.....	Amendments

Publishing this constitution in a neat little booklet adds to the importance and the dignity of an organization.

²⁶ Roy O. Schilling, "Pupils Write the Constitution for the Student Council," The Elementary School Journal, 48:427-431, April, 1948.

²⁷ McKown, Extra Curricular Activities, op. cit., p. 52.

It is entirely proper to amend the constitution when necessary, but the business of "amending the constitution" should not be allowed to become the most common and the most important order of business, as it appears to be in many councils.

In many schools, a student committee working with a faculty sponsor has successfully drawn up the council constitution. However, an exception to this practice occurred at Public School 233, Brooklyn, New York. At this school a class of intellectually gifted children in the upper seventh year volunteered to take the job of writing the constitution for the school student council.

In the classroom, discussions concerning the regulation needs of the school were held, and various members of the staff and students were interviewed. A basic outline was designed, and committees were designated to work on each of the major divisions of the outline. A draft of the constitution was eventually submitted to the student body and was accepted after minor changes.²⁸

Activities Of The Council

The new council may attempt to do too much and

²⁸ Sigmund Fogler, "Pupils Write the Constitution for the Student Council," The Elementary School Journal, 48:427-431, April, 1948.

is far more likely to err on this side than on the side of attempting to do too little. Naturally it will attempt to do much because of its feeling that it must prove its worth immediately. The principal and faculty sponsors must see that it assumes responsibilities gradually.²⁹

Student self-government has been responsible for planning assemblies, social affairs, and other events; for behavior in the halls, on the grounds, at dances, games, assemblies, and to and from school; for pupil automobile traffic, pupils leaving the school grounds and safety in general; for keeping the grounds and buildings clean, and protecting shrubbery, flowers and lawn, and finally for the handling of all kinds of drives.³⁰

The council members of the Caroline Bevard School, Tallahassee, Florida, decided that the tables and chairs of the lunchroom needed painting, but no money was available to buy the paint and brushes. Under the sponsor's guidance, and the work of various committees, the lunchroom became neat, clean, attractive and festive.³¹

Student Self-Government

In the past, many student councils were accompanied

²⁹ Harry C. McKown, Extra Curricular Activities, op. cit., p. 55.

³⁰ M. M. Calvert, "Recipe for Student Government," Clearing House, 18:156-159, November, 1943.

³¹ Myrtle C. Burr, "Student Council in an Elementary School," School Activities, 21:119, December, 1949

by student courts whose purpose was to bring the offending student to trial and mete out some form of punishment. These courts were many times of an elaborate structure, with a judge, clerk, marshall, witnesses and a jury. However, many times the results of giving students the authority to punish other students ended in disaster and the trend today is away from giving students responsibility for discipline.³²

Gruhn and Douglas³³ state that at the junior high school level, the advisability of delegating disciplinary responsibilities to the pupil council or some other pupil group is indeed open to question. Although in some schools, pupil organizations have satisfactorily discharged such responsibilities; in others, pupil participation in disciplinary activities has been quite unsatisfactory. If the pupils are given responsibility for disciplinary action, it is important that (1) these responsibilities are clearly defined, (2) that they relate to matters which pupils can be expected to manage successfully, (3) that any action by the pupils be subject to review by the principal or some representative of the faculty, and (4) that there be intelligent supervision by competent faculty sponsors.

³² Iris Cleva Good and Jane M. Crow, Homeroom Activities, (New York: Professional and Technical Press, 1930), p. 39.

³³ William T. Gruhn and Harl R. Douglas, The Modern Junior High School. (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1947), p. 375.

Mr. C. B. Hartshorn,³⁴ in his investigation of Iowa High Schools, found that student officers are unlikely to initiate discipline against students who violate citizenship standards. The students opposed any attempt by the council to deal with misconduct. A principal who had abandoned the program in his high school said: "The writer was, for a long time, sympathetic toward the plan of student government, until it became unmistakably clear that parents do not want the child across the street imposing school government on a member of their family." Yet another administrator indicted the whole pupil participation movement on its failure to assume responsibility for enforcing its own rules.

An outstanding young man in a large high school justified this failure with this logic: "The student, if brought before and punished by the student council, is inclined to believe, because his punishers are of the same age, that his judgment is as good as the council's.

³⁴ C. B. Hartshorn, "A Study of Pupil Participation in Iowa High School Government," School and Society, 38:379-382, September, 1933.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

While considering the possibility of establishing a student council at the Garfield School, the question of what other schools in the state have done naturally arose. How common are student councils in the large elementary schools of Montana and how successful are those already in existence? What kind of activities are the student councils of these schools engaged in? What are the advantages of having a student council? How were the councils already in existence brought into being? These were questions which could only be answered by contacting a representative of the schools. Therefore, a questionnaire was prepared and sent to sixty of the largest elementary schools in the state.

Because the Garfield School at Billings has an enrollment of over one thousand students, only the sixty larger schools were contacted because they might be expected to have a situation similar to that found at Garfield School. Forty six of the sixty principals contacted returned the completed questionnaire forms and of this number, seventeen or approximately thirty seven per-cent indicated that there was a student council operating in their schools. Twenty-nine or the forty-six principals, roughly sixty-three per cent indicated that there was no student council in

operation at their school. These results would indicate that student councils are not uncommon in the larger elementary schools of Montana.

Student Council Activities

A summary of the answers to the question, "What kind of activities are engaged in by your student council?" is found in Table I. Thirteen of the principals checked monitoring behavior in the halls and on the grounds; indicating, perhaps, that their student council sponsored some type of a school patrol organization. Since a survey of the literature indicated that many student councils grow from a safety council organization, monitoring student behavior would logically be one of the primary occupations of an elementary school student council.

"Keeping buildings and grounds clean" was checked by twelve principals. One of the primary objectives of a student council is the development of attitudes of good citizenship. Therefore it is not surprising that one of the common activities in many student councils is keeping buildings and grounds clean.

A well known fact is that as the elementary school enrollment grows, the bicycle problem becomes increasingly important. Therefore, it is probably gratifying to teachers and principals to have the responsibility of this problem assumed by the student council.

TABLE I
ACTIVITIES ENGAGED IN BY SEVENTEEN STUDENT COUNCILS
OF LARGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF MONTANA

ACTIVITIES	FREQUENCY
Monitoring behavior in the halls	13
Monitoring behavior on the grounds	13
Keeping buildings and grounds clean	12
Regulating bicycle traffic	10
Planning and presenting assembly programs	9
Planning school dances and parties	9
Supervising student behavior at athletic games	9
Maintenance of the lost and found department	6
Supervising student behavior at dances	5
Handling of Red Cross and Community Chest drives ...	5
Presenting school awards	3
Regulation of student hall lockers	2
Disbursement of student association funds	1
Making posters	1
Regulation of gymnasium	1
Assisting in the school library	1
Regulation of fire drills	1
Assisting P.T.A. projects	1
Establishing and conducting a student court	1

Planning and presenting assembly programs along with planning school dances and parties were activities of nine councils. This reveals that the student council has a part in building leadership and intelligent followership. In planning school activities, the use of the democratic process would seem to be almost essential.

As indicated by Table I, supervising student behavior at athletic games was an activity of nine councils. This points out again that the school patrol and student council can be linked together as one organization.

Maintenance of the lost and found department, a problem of a school of any size, was conducted by six councils. Since these council members were performing a service for the school, the morale of those students participating was probably benefited by the activity.

Supervising student behavior at dances was conducted by five councils. Since many of the schools contacted in the study included only the first six grades where school dances are uncommon, it is not surprising to find that this was a limited activity.

Handling Red Cross and Community Chest drives were carried on by only five councils. Although this activity is most frequently handled by the principal, it would seem that this sometimes tedious task could very well be performed by a student council. The conducting of these sometimes very numerous campaigns by the school council

might very well build prestige and importance for that organization.

Although presenting school awards is probably not so common in the elementary school as in the junior high and high schools, it is surprising that only three councils conducted this activity as indicated in Table I. This could be the purpose of at least one assembly program each year and be planned and executed by the council.

The regulation of student hall lockers, another monitoring activity, was conducted by only two councils; showing that this may be a problem but that it is not handled by the student council.

The disbursement of student association funds and the following activities of Table I were not listed on the questionnaire but were added as "other activities" by individual principals. Perhaps, if these items had appeared on the questionnaire they would have been checked more frequently. The number of items appearing on the questionnaire were purposely kept at a minimum, so as to make the completion of the form a not too tedious performance.

Advantages And Disadvantages Of Having A Student Council

In comparing Table II, advantages of having a student council, with Table III, imperfections and shortcomings of student councils, it is apparent that the principals contacted in the study felt that the student council idea had

more advantages than disadvantages. Sixteen of the principals checked "aids in developing good citizenship attitudes" and "builds leadership and intelligent followership" while only six checked "sponsor does too much of the planning", the most common fault as indicated by Table III. Evidently, the seventeen principals in whose schools a council is operating, feel that a council does develop increasing self-direction, make for better pupil cooperation, present student opinion and have most of the other advantages listed in Table II.

TABLE II

ADVANTAGES OF HAVING A STUDENT COUNCIL
AS REPORTED BY SEVENTEEN MONTANA
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

ADVANTAGES	FREQUENCY
Aides in developing good citizenship attitudes	16
Builds leadership and intelligent followership	16
Develops increasing self-direction	15
Makes for better pupil cooperation	15
Presents student opinion	14
Helps develop sentiments of law and order	13
Develops intelligent respect for authority	11
Promotes proper student-faculty relationships	10
Builds student body morale	9

The fact that existing councils in the larger elementary schools of Montana do have imperfections is shown by Table III. Of these imperfections, the one most frequently checked is that the sponsor does too much of the planning. The desirability of council meetings during regular school hours is evident, since holding council meetings after or before school was considered a shortcoming in four cases. Also, the importance of educating all teachers concerning the value of student councils can be observed, because in four instances, the council was not favored by all the teachers.

TABLE III
IMPERFECTIONS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF STUDENT
COUNCILS IN SEVENTEEN LARGER ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS OF MONTANA

SHORTCOMINGS	FREQUENCY
Sponsor does too much of the planning	6
Council is not favored by all teachers.....	4
Council meeting held after or before school hours...	4
Student body selects poor leaders.....	4
Lack of interest by student body.....	4
Council does not represent entire student body.....	2
Too much faculty domination.....	1
Meetings are noisy and disorderly.....	0
Pupils run the school.....	0

That some faculty guidance can be employed during election time is indicated by the fact that poor student leaders was considered a fault of at least four student councils.

A multitude of factors may be present that could cause a lack of interest by the student body. Perhaps in the four cases where lack of interest by the student body was a factor, the council did not have enough importance to affect the student of the respective schools.

How Sixteen Student Councils Were Originated

In response to the question, "By what process was the student council in your school brought into being?", ten principals indicated that the council in their school was organized and directed by the school principal. While this may be the common means of originating a council, it may not be the best method to employ. In surveying the literature on student participation in government the fact was revealed that authorities favored originating a council by means of a faculty committee which would later work with a student committee in establishing the council.

In two schools the council evolved from popular demand of the students. In one school, the council was begun by the principal working with a faculty and student committee. In another school the council was

organized by the principal and faculty. In still another case, the principal organized a council on popular demand of the students, whereas in yet another school, a council was initiated at the suggestion of a teacher with the approval of the principal and student body.

The responses to this question of how the council was originated indicated that there were various methods of organizing a council, but the most common practice is for the principal to organize and direct the student council.

Comments By Council Sponsors And Principals

In reply to the questionnaire, one council sponsor volunteered a description of how the elections in his school were handled. In this particular school, one boy and one girl were selected as representatives from each home room. There were no nominations; each student in the room simply voted for the two people he thought best qualified for the office. The sponsor noted that this system seemed to work fairly well as the best students were elected. In this same school the president of the council, vice-president and secretary were elected by the entire student body with the council acting as a nominating committee. This same sponsor also complained that the council's activities were mostly concerned with parties and recreation. This sponsor felt that

more authority and responsibility should be delegated to the council.

A reply from another school stated that their council had been in operation approximately two months and had only recently finished choosing members and electing officers. The teacher who evidently had been nominated as sponsor by the principal was quite doubtful as to the possible success of an elementary student council. She stated in her note that she personally felt that children below the fifth and sixth year levels were too immature and incapable of handling the responsibilities of a council. She felt that in handling a council with this age group that she would have too much of the planning falling upon her shoulders. This particular sponsor felt that cooperative planning should be experienced in smaller groups during the early school years so that the child could grow in knowledge and perception. She also believed that only at the junior high school level would a child be ready for the responsibilities of a student council.

One superintendent, writing in the absence of the elementary principal, assumed a very negative attitude toward student councils. He stated that the students in his schools had never been very enthusiastic about any self-government. He said that he had once tried to persuade high school students to demand more student participation by urging them to write articles in the school paper asking for more authority from the administration.

One of the top student leaders of the school later asked this superintendent whether the district paid the superintendent to run the schools or whether the school board wanted the students to run the school.

This same superintendent stated that at one time an aggressive teacher in the school system who believed in student participation offered to sell the program to the school. The superintendent stated that he gave this teacher his whole-hearted support in establishing a student council complete with constitution and elected officers. The superintendent also said that during the first year, the sponsor's enthusiasm carried the program, the second year there was less interest, and during the third year the council died a natural death with students seldom reporting for meetings.

A description such as this would tend to emphasize the value of proper planning and the supreme importance of the sponsor in connection with the student council.

The importance of proper faculty guidance for an elementary council is brought out by another comment from a principal in whose school a student council had been started at one time. This principal stated that their school had tried the council idea but the enthusiasm among the students for a council soon diminished and the council was done away with when the pupils became quarrelsome over the authority of some particular students.

Another principal who was also the council sponsor

was enthusiastic about the advantages of the council. He wrote that he thought that the grade council in his school was a good bridge between the students and faculty, and especially between the children and the principal. He stated that it was necessary to remind the students of the importance of their job and of the great responsibility with which they had been entrusted by the rest of the pupils. This principal also emphasized the importance of the sponsor by saying that the council would disintegrate unless some faculty members were enthusiastic enough to devote their time to the council.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Over one-third of the larger elementary schools of Montana have student councils. That these councils have experienced a certain degree of success is evidenced by the fact that the reporting principals checked and listed far more advantages than disadvantages of their councils. Evidently, the reporting principals believed that student councils in their schools are realizing the objectives and purposes set forth for such an organization. If objectives such as the development of good citizenship attitudes, leadership and intelligent followership, development of increasing self-directions and better pupil cooperation can be gained by a student council; it certainly should have a place in the school curriculum.

That the council sponsor must possess tact, initiative, good judgment, and industry is shown by the finding that in existing councils the sponsor does too much of the planning. The importance of the sponsor to an elementary council was revealed also in the comments by the principal reporting. Three principals stated that the council would fail without the constant attention of an interested sponsor. Therefore, the council sponsor should probably be relieved of some

other school duties so as to be able to devote adequate time to the problems of the council.

That elementary students are able to assume the responsibilities of a council is shown by the wide variety of activities engaged in by existing student councils. Undoubtedly, these activities are accompanied by the guidance of the sponsor just as are most activities of elementary students.

Most of the student councils in the larger elementary schools of Montana were organized and directed by the principal. In some schools the principal worked with the faculty in establishing the council. However, the common practice appeared to be for the principal to work independently of the faculty in establishing the council. Whether the faculty immediately supported and aided the organization devised by the principal is not known.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE IN ESTABLISHING A STUDENT COUNCIL

Education of the faculty. As soon as the person interested in forming a student council has enlisted the support and interest of other faculty members, a faculty committee should be formed. This faculty committee should consist of all faculty members who believe in the objectives of a student council and desire to have one implemented

in the school. This group should assemble all of the available literature on the subject and discuss the objectives they feel their council should realize. After the faculty has reached some conclusions as to their conception of a student council, their findings should be made available to the remainder of the faculty. A complete overview should be given to the entire faculty with advantages thoroughly discussed so that the support of all members is obtained. Since the reactions of the teachers, favorable or unfavorable, will be reflected in their students, the importance of "selling" the idea to all teachers cannot be overemphasized.

Education of the students. After a large majority of faculty members are supporting the council idea, the education of the student body should be undertaken. This can be accomplished by discussions in the home rooms, poster advertising, and finally by the formation of a student committee to investigate the possibilities of a student council. This student committee should visit other existing councils in neighboring schools to observe meetings in process.

When the student committee is familiar with the functions of a council, it should probably begin building a constitution for the organization. When the constitution is compiled and all home rooms thoroughly familiar with the work of the committee, the student

elections should be held.

Another alternative in building a council is to enlarge and strengthen some organization already in existence. This might possibly be accomplished with a group such as the safety council if it has been traditionally strong in the school. However, if the safety group was weak and had been looked upon with disfavor by teachers or students, it might be well to start from the beginning and build a new organization.

Membership. An important criterion to remember in building a council is that there are fewer barriers of participation in a small group than in a large, unwieldy organization. If the size of the council can be kept under thirty members, the meetings will have a better chance of success.

Council members should be selected from the home rooms with no restrictions in membership, such as low marks or disapproval of the principal or sponsor. The primary grades should be included although sometimes upper grade members might have to go into the lower grade rooms and assist in reporting. It is recognized that the presence of primary children at council meetings is good for the morale of the older leaders and also of the younger children who are included.

The number of members selected from each room will depend on the size of the school and the desired size of the council.

Election of officers. There should be a certain formality accompanying the election of officers and representatives so that all students are impressed with the importance of the event. Probably the best method is to pattern the school elections after city and county elections, with registration a requirement for all before voting. Election booths, ballot boxes, and election judges will help in establishing a serious, business-like atmosphere.

Candidates for office should be allowed and encouraged to conduct a campaign that includes speeches, posters and slogans. Such a program will bring the election to the attention of students and increase interest in the entire student council idea. After candidates are elected, there should be an assembly program held for the purpose of formally installing officers to their positions.

Student council activities. The sponsor of the council should use tact and guidance in leading the group to undertake an initial project that is not too difficult. The council should assume responsibility gradually and its first activity should be one in which there is very good opportunity for successful completion. The activities of an elementary student council are many and varied and no attempt will be made to list them here. The council will naturally assume responsibility for social affairs, assemblies, and student traffic and conduct.

Student self discipline. The student council should not be delegated the responsibility of disciplining members of the student body. Student courts and student self-government are no longer recommended. Such matters as discipline are usually handled much more competently by the school principal than by the student courts established by the council.

Importance of the sponsor. Ordinarily, it is better for some teacher to act as council sponsor rather than the principal. Since the principal is necessarily the final authority in discipline cases that arise in the school, his presence at council meetings might serve as a restraining force on participation and initiative. The sponsor should be chosen by the principal and should be thoroughly familiar with school policy. The council sponsor must be tactful and imaginative in guiding the actions of the group. Ordinarily the sponsor should not vote nor use his position for controlling the council unless absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that there is a definite place for student councils in the elementary schools of Montana. The student council should have its place in the curriculum of the school along with the other more traditional activities. With proper supervision, the student council can be of major assistance in realizing the objectives of the school.

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APPENDIX

114 Cherry Street
Billings, Montana
December 12, 1952

Mr. John Jones
Elementary School
Montana

Dear Mr. Jones,

I have selected student councils as a topic for my professional paper which I plan to present in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a masters degree at Montana State University. Our elementary school is now in the process of organizing a student council. Therefore, this topic presents an interesting problem to me.

I am enclosing a short questionnaire on the subject which I sincerely hope you will complete and return to me. If there is no student council in operation at your school at the present time, would you please check "no" after the first question and return the form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

If you are interested in a student council program, I will be happy to inform you of the results of the investigation.

Sincerely yours,

G. A. Scheltens

STUDENT COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE

Your name _____
Official Position _____
Your Address _____

PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION: To study the existing student councils in operation in the larger elementary schools of Montana for the purpose of devising a good workable plan of organizing an elementary school student council.

I. Is there a student council in operation in your school at the present time?

Yes _____ No _____ (check one)

II. What kind of activities are engaged in by your school student council?

(Place a check before those engaged in by your school and add others below)

- _____ planning and presenting assembly programs
- _____ planning school dances and parties
- _____ behavior in the halls
- _____ regulation of student hall lockers
- _____ behavior on the grounds
- _____ maintenance of lost and found department
- _____ behavior at games
- _____ bicycle traffic
- _____ presenting school awards
- _____ behavior at dances
- _____ keeping buildings and grounds clean
- _____ handling of Red Cross, Community Chest and other drives.

OTHER ACTIVITIES _____

III. What are the advantages of having a student council?

- _____ aids in developing good citizenship attitudes
- _____ helps develop sentiments of law and order
- _____ Develops intelligent respect for authority
- _____ develops increasing self-direction
- _____ builds leadership and intelligent followership
- _____ makes for better pupil cooperation
- _____ builds student body moral
- _____ voice for student opinion
- _____ promotes proper student faculty relationships

OTHERS _____

IV. What are some of the imperfections and shortcomings of the student council in operation in your school?

- _____ sponsor does too much of the planning
- _____ council is not favored by all teachers
- _____ council meeting held after school hours
- _____ too much faculty domination
- _____ student body selects poor leaders
- _____ does not represent the entire student body
- _____ lack of interest by the student body

meetings are noisy and disorderly
 pupils run the school
OTHERS _____

V. By what process was the student council in your school brought into being?
 organization and direction on the part of the principal
 faculty committee
 faculty student committee
 by popular demand of the student body
 by suggestion of parents
OTHERS _____