

WAYS TO GET AND KEEP EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION

Part 1: Getting Effective Representation

There are as many different structures for student representation as there are schools. Keys to having an effective representation system include: creation and publication of clear job description and guidelines for a representative to follow and creating a sense of commitment to the job on the part of the representatives along with finding appropriate time and frequency for representatives to meet. The following are some effective models:

- 1. Select representatives from English or Social Studies Classes.** What better place to connect abstract learning of public speaking and oral expression and the teaching of democratic principles with real in-school lessons. The representative must be instructed in the use of good public speaking skills can become a role model to the class. Class members can be encouraged through discussion of school issues and initiatives to use appropriate public speaking techniques. The use of an agenda for reporting can be promoted and utilized. Class or school-wide surveys can be created. These can be good instructional moments in an English or Social Studies class. Teachers of English or Social Studies need to be shown the “academic” value to having Student Council representation come from their classes AND the representatives must be trained to make well-planned reports to class and to lead focused discussions to avoid the loss of too much instructional time. It does not matter if classes are homogeneous or academically tracked, it will allow for a well rounded representation on the Student Council. The key is good reporting, student feedback, and a feeling that each representative represents a specific constituency.
- 2. Ten students elected per grade.** This tends to create a smaller Student Council, but hopefully a very dedicated group of students. In many ways this is a plus. You can build a Student Council Team and expect action, positive results and dedication to Student Council projects. The downside is that this system tends to be elitist academically and socially. The student body can view the Student Council group as unrepresentative of THEM. When using this system, it is important to create an excellent system of communication between these representatives and the student body. Examples:
 - Distribute minutes to homerooms
 - Post minutes on a Student Council Bulletin Board
 - Create and maintain a suggestion box and announce the results of answers to ideas or concerns
 - Distribute a Student Council Newsletter to faculty so that others know what Student Council is doing
 - Report to the student body using the school’s intercom or closed-circuit television system
 - Hold Student Forums at lunch or after school so that students know that they have a way to communicate with Student Council members
 - Assign representatives to report and to visit specific homerooms in their grade level
- 3. Representation-At-Large.** This system can be used as the sole method of representation or can be used in a modified form with Representation Ideas #1 and #2. This system eliminates the popularity contest. You can get Student Council members who want to be in Student Council. On the one hand, it gives you a pool of interested students to voice student opinion and to carry out projects. On the other hand, the group can be large and bulky to deal with in a meeting. Some of the group who sign up can fade away because they do not feel wanted, needed or satisfied by the size. Some may sign up just to get their name in the yearbook or to enhance their transcript. When using this system, it is very important to have an excellent accountability system of attendance and a check off list to record participation in Council projects and programs. Any Point System and Attendance Log should be clearly spelled out when students enroll in Student Council and must be used to eliminate those who fade from involvement after a meeting or two or after the first marking period. Students must see that they are accountable for their Student Council involvement. A strong committee system would also help this representative system to work. Officers can interview students to be Committee Chairs. These committee chairs should be dedicated to work with students placed on their committee. This system also needs to use many of the good communication ideas found under Representation #2 so that members interact with the student body to make Student Council a representative organization as

viewed by the student body. Student Council leaders and faculty members should be encouraged to recruit under-represented students of the student body to be in this representative system. An additional major challenge of this system is when and where to meet since many students could be involved. Work with administration to consider meetings before school, during school once a month rotating from one period to another throughout the school day, or during a common lunch period. After school or evening meetings will probably not work with this concept if the goal is to involve a diverse group from the student body.

4. Representative from Advisory Groups. Many schools have eliminated homeroom periods and thus the traditional selection of HR Reps will no longer work. Some schools have created a system in which students meet once or more a week during a set period with an assigned Faculty Advisor. These are known as advisory periods and placed randomly selected students with randomly selected teachers in groups of 15-20. The purpose is to create a feeling of a small group within the school community, and to provide special lessons, graduation project planning time, and personal counseling. These groups could be an excellent source for Student Council representation. The Student Council concept creates opportunities for discussion of ideas and concerns within the advisor group and the small size allows for diverse representation in Student Council. One important key to the success of this system is administrative and faculty support for the use of advisor time for this purpose on a weekly or monthly basis. Training of the entire staff to “buy into” their role as a faculty advisor in this system is critical. Training of the representatives to hone their reporting and meeting skills to make the best use of advisory time is also important. The system must be seen as efficient. Administrative support is also important when planning for monthly or bi-weekly meetings of the Student Council. It could occur one period per month during Advisory Time, before school, or during a rotation of one class period per month. Student Council officers and committee chairs would also need a common planning or meeting time with the Student Council advisor to make sure they are well prepared for Council meetings and to plan projects.

5. Executive Council. This system is designed to create a small core of dedicated student leaders. Many times this group can function as a Principal’s Advisory Council. It can combined the elected Student Council leaders with the officers of the class governments into a group of approximately twenty school leaders. Its strength is the manageable size and the fact that the students have elected all of the members as THEIR leaders. Its challenge is to be seen by all students as THEIR voice. A second challenge is to have enough members to carry out school-wide projects and thus to be a truly active and visible student representative organization. This structure however, can work in conjunction with any of the representative systems discussed above. To be effective as a stand-alone representative system, the members must utilize many of the successful tools listed under Representation System #2 to communicate with the student body. The Council must also develop a good volunteer committee system to implement school-wide activities effectively.

6. InterClub Council. This system of representation could be used alongside any of the other ideas above. It is not a very good stand-alone system. To enhance student representation and to involve some of the most active members of the student body in Student Council projects and programs, consider the creation of an InterClub Council. This group could be composed of athletic team captains, leaders of the band and chorus, presidents or vice presidents of every other school club and each class government. If you have a diverse club program, this would bring a very varied group of students together under the auspices of Student Council. I.C.C could meet once per month and could be chaired by the Student Council Vice President (good VP function). They could meet periodically with the building principal to share ideas and concerns of athletes and club leaders. They could also function as a group to plan a multi-organization charity fund raiser or activity, provide recognition for all coaches and activity advisors, and serve as “ambassadors” of the school to community groups or to the middle school or elementary schools that feed into the high school system. They should not be viewed as the “Voice of the Student Body” but they can certainly provide an effective additional student point of view.

PART II: Keeping Effective Representation will be found in the September 2009 issue of *PASC NEWS*.