

What is a Student Council?

A Student Council is a representative structure through which students in a post-primary school can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management and staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.

The role of the Student Council

The main role of a Student Council as set out in the Education Act is "to promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board, parents and teachers".

A Student Council will identify activities that it would like to be involved in organizing, although the final decision on the activities of a Student Council should be agreed with school management.

The Education Act provides that a Student Council shall act in co-operation with the Board of

Management, parents and teachers. A Student Council should not through its activities interfere with, or detract from, the authority of school management or the teaching staff of the school. It is therefore not a function of a Student Council to discuss or comment on matters relating to the employment or professional affairs of the Principal, teachers and other staff of the school, or to become involved in any issues that fall within their professional competence.

A Student Council will set its own objectives. Some general objectives could include:

- To enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development
- To promote friendship and respect among students
- To support the management and staff in the development of the school
- To represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them

THE WORK OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

The Student Council as a whole has responsibility for:

- Working with the staff, Board of Management and Parents' Association in the school
- Communicating and consulting with all of the students in the school
- Involving as many students as possible in the activities of the Council
- Planning and managing the Council's programme of activities for the year
- Managing and accounting for any funds raised by the Council

The Student Council and the Parents' Association

A Student Council may find it useful to meet with members of the Parents' Association from time to time or to invite a parents' representative to attend Council meetings or to assist it in particular activities. This will help to ensure good communication between the Student Council and the Parents' Association.

There is a wide range of activities of benefit to the school community which a Student Council may wish to undertake, some of which are outlined below:

Representing the views of the student body to the school management

This should be one of the fundamental aims of every Council. It involves talking and listening to the student body, considering their views and concerns, and discussing these with the school management on behalf of the students.

Promoting good communications within the school

Improving communication within the school community is a shared responsibility and a Student Council can contribute to this process. Making presentations at staff meetings to keep staff informed of activities, keeping a Student Council notice-board or organizing a regular newsletter are just some ways the Council can communicate with the students, school management and staff, and parents.

Supporting the educational development and progress of students

A Student Council can contribute to the learning environment for students in the school by, for example, setting up study groups for students in exam classes or homework clubs, or organizing lunchtime activities such as language clubs.

Assisting with induction and/or mentoring for new first year students

Starting elementary school is a challenging new experience for 1st Year students. A mentoring program where senior students help new students to find their feet can help their integration into the school community.

Contributing to the development of school policy

The Student Council can actively contribute to the development of school policy in a wide range of areas such as bullying, behavior code and extra-curricular activities. The Council could form sub-committees to consider individual policy issues, to consult with students, staff and parents on those issues and to represent the Council's views on those issues to school management.

Assisting in school sporting and cultural activities

Student Councils can assist in organizing and developing sports and cultural activities within the school, for example, sports days and drama or musical events.

Communication between the Council and the School Community

Regular communication between the Student Council and school management, staff and parents provides the basis for building a good and lasting relationship, based on trust and respect, between students and the rest of the school community. Much can be achieved where all members of the school community work together towards common goals, and good communication is vital if a common understanding is to be reached on what those goals are, and how best to achieve them.

Good communication doesn't simply mean keeping the school management, teaching staff or Parents'

Association informed of planned activities; it also involves seeking their views and suggestions. It means consulting with, and sharing ideas with the school management, staff and Parents' Association, listening to their suggestions and making sure that all sections of the school community understand the purpose and goals of the Student Council.

Having a parent attend meetings of the Council on a regular basis also helps to improve communications and this may be provided for in the Board of Management rules. Also, the

Principal may wish to address the Council from time to time on key issues affecting the school community.

Removing members of the council and filling vacancies

The Student Council has the right to remove a member, if that member fails to attend meetings or is not committed to the work or aims of the council. The member must be given at least 1 week notice of the proposal and must be allowed to address the council in their defense. Where a member is to be removed, a vote must be held and at least two thirds of the council must be present

Filling a vacancy on the Council

Where a member is removed or resigns from office, the resulting vacancy should be filled in accordance with the procedures governing elections. For example if the representative of class 5B is removed, then class 5B should elect a new representative in the same way as they elected their first representative.

Sample calendar of activities

Here are some examples of the activities a Student Council might be involved in planning and organizing in conjunction with the school staff and/or management and/or Parents' Association:

- Mentoring programme for 1st graders
- Second hand school books
- School newsletter
- Fundraising activities
- The School Play
- School sports day
- Homework clubs
- A foreign language club
- School Open Day
- Competitions within the school (for example, in sports, chess, singing)
- Graduation ceremony for 4th graders, or other ceremonies within the school
- Presentations to school staff on their retirement
- A 'thank the teachers' event at the end of the school year

Tips for the student council president

1. Be prepared for each meeting and try to ensure that the other members of the group have a written agenda beforehand, if possible, so that they can also be prepared for the meeting. It may be useful to meet with the Secretary to agree an agenda in advance of a meeting, and an agenda should always include a provision for 'Any other business'.
2. Start and close each meeting punctually.
3. At the beginning of any meeting allow some opportunity for group members to put matters on the agenda under 'Any Other Business'. Then, keep to the agenda/items for discussion.
4. It may be necessary to review and approve the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of a meeting and to sign the approved minutes.
5. Present each item for discussion, ensuring that everyone who wishes to do so gets an opportunity to speak, and that each person is listened to.
6. Give direction to meetings making sure that there is adequate time to deal with each item on the agenda.
7. Try to keep the meeting focused on the agenda.
8. Call the meeting to order, if necessary (for example, if more than one person speaks at the same time or if an argument breaks out).
9. Help the process of decision making by asking people to clarify what they are saying if it is not easily understood, by summing up what someone has said and by stating clearly the decision that is being taken before it is noted in the minutes.
10. In some instances, it may be necessary to hold a vote (for example, by a show of hands) on a particular issue.
11. At the end of each meeting, make sure to arrange a date/time/venue/possible agenda items for the next meeting.

When planning fundraising activities:

- Be clear about why the money is needed and what will be done with it
- Get as many ideas as possible for activities
- Make sure your planned activity will suit your school and is practical
- Make sure all students in the school are told about the event well in advance, and know what the Student Council plans to use the money for

Finance and fundraising

The Student Council Treasurer will keep up to date and accurate account of all money raised by the council, and will provide a report to the council at the last council meeting of the year. The Student Council will consult and co-operate with the management, staff and parents when planning fund raising activities.

Some examples of fundraising activities include:

- Art exhibition
- Cake sale
- Fashion show
- Holding a collection
- Non-uniform day
- Table Quiz
- Yard sale

