

PASSION PROJECTS



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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Creating a Culture, Engaging Communities, Closing the Gap

Leadership camp is a staple of summer for many students around the state. AWSP has been sponsoring leadership programs since 1956, and every year, we strive to meet the needs of our schools.

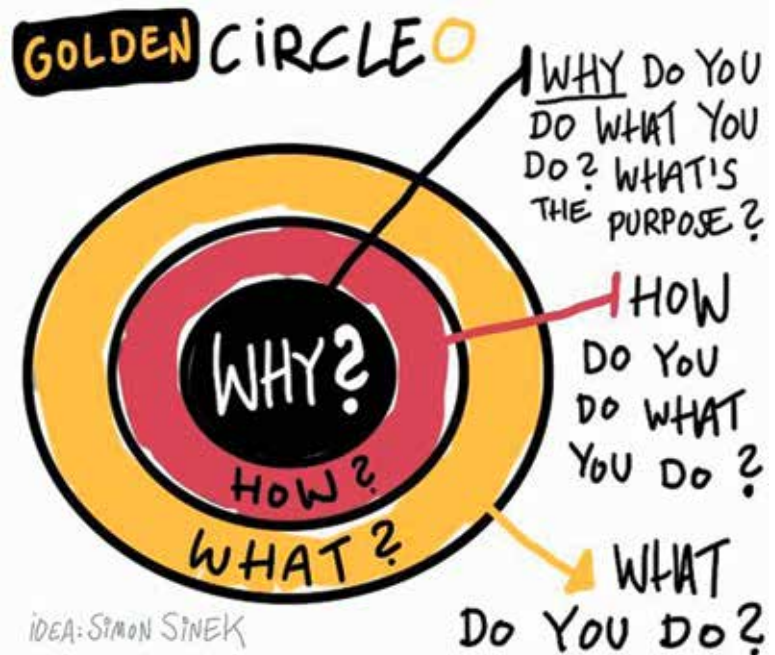
One of AWSP's goals (Goal 5) is directly tied to student leadership, providing programs that support and increase the academic and social success of all students. An element of focus for Goal 5 is:

To develop, identify, and implement strategies to help members support student voice and engagement, to improve school climate and culture.

All the summer leadership camps successfully tackle this area of focus in a variety of ways. Each summer at Mount Triumph (yes, there really is a mountain in Washington named this), we focus on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, paying close attention to safety/well-being and belongingness, as we move through our week at camp. Furthermore, we infuse our focus with Simon Sinek's work on the golden circle ("Start with the why"). The emphasis on these two ideas has led to what we believe is a fantastic

approach to student leadership within schools: passion projects. Mt. Triumph staff felt the need to ramp up student delegates' abilities to take tackling real life issues to the next level. A team of senior counselors dove headlong into this idea and developed a plan of action that allows all our delegates a safe place to ask questions, find the methods to begin to answer those questions, and then practice a strategy.

After spending time introducing and becoming familiar with Maslow and "getting to the why," staff



Motivational speaker Simon Sinek and his Golden Circle.

challenged delegates to delve into a question they had about an aspect of school. By focusing on the "why?" of their question, delegates were challenged to clarify their thinking while beginning to articulate those thoughts in conversations with others. From there, delegates met and discussed their question with dozens of other students, looking for others with similar questions. All of this was completed within the first six

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hours of arrival at camp, with perfect strangers from across the state (30 schools sending over 270 delegates).

Once groups formed around a similar question, they looked at how they might begin to explore possible answers. Thus, passion projects took on life. Each group developed a plan for further investigation into gaining more information for their project and/or practicing methods that they learned that would be applicable back at their home schools. Delegates supported every group by participating in a day of asking questions, activity action, and practice in involving others. Project titles included:

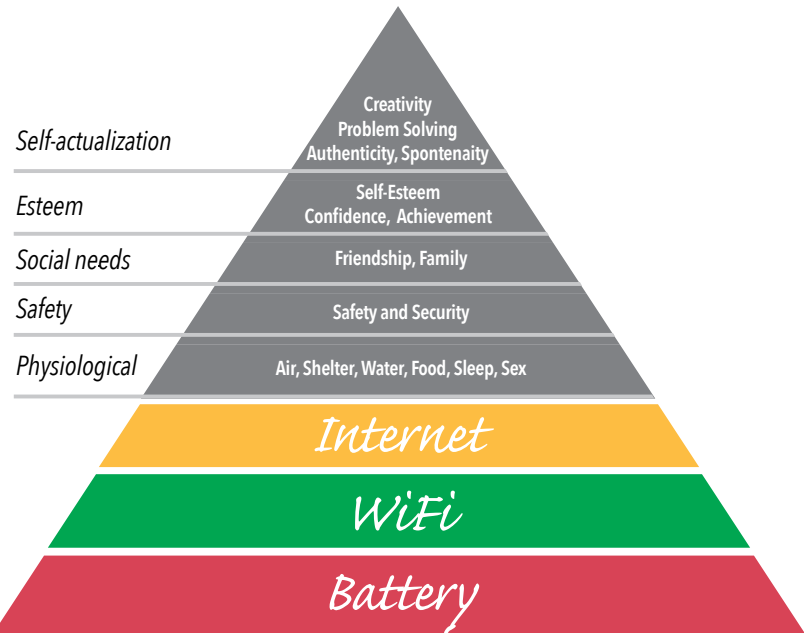
Operation Positivity,
 Student Participation Video,
 Underrepresented Group
 Appreciation, Operation
 Involvement, Back to Basics, ASL
 Lesson, Panel on Traditions/
 Legacy, Connect 4, Back to Basics,
 Don't Diss-Respect, Human Table,
 What Is There to Lose?, Prejudice
 Why, Mental Illness, CommUnity
 Crossline, Not What It Seems,
 It's Not Just Smarts, We Will
 Triumph.

These powerful projects were ready to implement on the fourth day of camp. Delegates were encouraged by what they could take back and the impact their work might have on the culture and climate of their schools.

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Through their reflections, delegates expressed a sense of satisfaction in taking away skills they could use for life (questioning themselves and others, communicating their

MASLOW'S "NEW" HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



An updated version of Maslow's Hierarchy for Millennials.

ideas, challenging others' thinking, embracing vulnerability, and getting to the why). While staff expected great results, we were astonished at the deep, meaningful questions developed by the delegates. Questions were infused with their call to action and to their invitation to be vulnerable toward taking action with a variety of students from across the state.

Several years ago, the National School Councils (NatStuCo—formerly NASC) developed RSVP: *Raising Student Voice and Participation*, a student engagement program working on school reform. Over the last seven years, Washington piloted and trained many students at schools around the state. What students accomplished was fantastic, to say the least. Passion Projects is the next evolution in developing students as agents of change within their schools and communities. It allows individuals and small groups to find their voices and jump into action. What developed when students began with a small question and followed it to a conclusion was a powerful part of our camp this summer. Camp staff

are already working to continue the development of this project idea to new levels.

The final challenge for these delegates was to take their questions and passion projects back to their schools and to work with administration and advisors to make a difference. We're quite confident that we met the area of focus and look forward to celebrating those students' successes throughout the year.

We will work on a future article to check in with delegates and some of the work they began this fall. Some even contacted their administration and began working on the passion projects before summer was done! We look forward to sharing the amazing changes borne with a question, posed by a student leader, at Mt. Triumph Leadership Camp. ■

RESOURCES:

Simon Sinek
startwithwhy.com

Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action | TED Talk | TED.com