Partnering with Student Leaders

AWSP has pioneered many student leadership initiatives throughout the years, and has one of the most impactful student leadership training programs in the country. With the evolution of new principal evaluation regulations, and the development of the AWSP Leadership Framework, Susan Fortin and the AWSP Student Leadership team looked to see what role student leaders can play as they partner with principals to strengthen schools. The following is a brief description of to-day's student leadership initiatives written by Joe Fenbert, Washington Student Leadership Student Program Director.

The message from principals on the leadership camp brochure in the 1950s reads: "Washington high school summer workshops are made possible through the combined efforts of all the secondary school principals throughout the state. They believe in and foster student participation through the student council." Students were placed in a system where they participated in student council to plan their activities while the school was managed by the principal. By the 1970s, a new paradigm beyond student participation was born out of the

Vietnam War and youth movement: student voice. When 18-20 year-olds around the country rallied to pass the 26th amendment, their main argument was that if they were old enough to fight in a war, then they were old enough to vote on the repre-sentatives that were sending them to war. Student leaders in schools continued to participate, but they could now provide input into the school system. Their opinions on school issues were solicited, and what they said mattered.

What is the role of student leaders now? Pushing forward on the continuum of student engagement utilizing the AWSP Leadership Framework, the new role is that of partner in educational outcomes. A simple rephrasing of the Principal Evaluation Criteria graphic (shown above) brings this point to light.

This adjustment to the graphic is being presented to both high school and middle-level students that participate in one of the Washington Student Leadership programs or trainings. It is now a main staple of the curriculum. The Washington Student Leadership staff explains that all leaders in schools need to be focused on these concepts. And, just like a principal, they too are leaders in a school. The words principals use to explain the criteria might be different than what student leaders use, and what principals decide to do to meet the criteria might be different than what student leaders decide to

do. However, the question around the criteria is the same: How can schools help all students achieve academic and social success by creating a culture, ensuring school safety, planning with data, aligning curriculum, improving instruction, managing resources, engaging communities and closing the gap?

In many of the action plans students create through the Student Leadership program, their first step states: "Meet with our principal." In this meeting, their goal is to explain how the ideas they have for the school fall into one of the eight principal evaluation criteria. Student Leadership has created a project planning template called *Contributing to the Leadership Framework* (see page 65) that students are encouraged to use when planning activities and events. Students are asked to think beyond the "fun" of an activity and dig down into a meaningful purpose that aligns with the Framework.

Criteria through the Lens of a Student Leader

A closer look at each of the criteria through the lens of a student leader, as illustrated on the following pages, shows how students can truly be partners with principals in attaining educational goals.

1: Creating a Culture

Creating a culture is what student leaders are all about. They want to help create a place where kids *want* to come to school instead of *have* to come to school. The goal of a student leadership program is for all students to feel welcomed and connected. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once a person's need to belong is fulfilled, that person can more easily slide into self-confidence and peak experiences. Students need to feel safe and connected at school before they can excel in academics.

A good place to start is for the principal to share with student leaders his or her goals, the mission of the school district and the school improvement plan. The student leaders in turn can then share their goals, mission and year-long action plan. Together, the principal and student leaders can establish a school culture where kids feel supported, included and motivated to develop to their full potential. "ASB" can be looked at as meaning, "*All Students Belong.*"

Ideas:

- Develop recognition programs that are inclusive of all students (e.g., Star Walls with every student's name, birthday acknowledgements for all).

- Secure affordable T-shirts with a unifying schoolwide theme.

- Build an association with the school mascot that all students (not just athletes) can relate to. For example, all students and staff can be "Eagle Strong" as learners, citizens and members of the school community.

- Name events in an inclusive way. A traditional fall "Student Leadership Retreat" renamed "Make A Difference Camp" increases attendance, as students who may not see themselves as "leaders" might see themselves as someone who wants to "make a difference."

- Ensure fun, fair, inclusive spirit activities during assemblies and events.

2: Ensuring School Safety

Student leaders won't be the principal's go-to source for evacuation and fire drill plans. However, they can be counted on to work at the level of emotional safety. To stop bullying and intimidation, the principal needs students to step up. Students are always two steps ahead of the adults in a school in terms of knowing who is being picked on, which kids are experiencing trauma and who is teetering on the edge. Principals can cultivate a relationship with the student leaders and reinforce the adage, "Tattling is when you try to get someone in trouble, telling is when you are trying to get someone out of trouble." Incidents of bullying and harassment decrease when kids take the lead in solving the problems.

Ideas:

- Student leaders gather data from other students using a map of the school as their survey tool. Students code the map with green to designate areas where they always feel safe. Yellow marks areas where they generally feel safe. Red shading shows areas where they don't feel safe. An analysis of results may point to areas of concern, differences in classroom climate, or focus areas for improved safety.

- Enlist student membership on committees related to ensuring school safety.

- Encourage student-led campaigns on issues related to the emotional health of the school. When organized by peers, these programs can have a deep and lasting impact on daily actions and attitudes of the entire school.

- Involve students in the creation and implementation of anti-bullying policies.

3: Planning with Data

Let student leaders be data gatherers. "What's working at our school? What would you change to make our school better?" These are the first questions asked of the entire student body when participating in Student Leadership's R.S.V.P. (Raising Student Voice and Participation) process. Principals can support student engagement in a process such as R.S.V.P. Student leaders can become the source of solutions that work at their school, and become the eyes and ears and heart and soul of their school; when a principal wants to know the pulse of the school, he or she can ask the student leaders. Student leaders can also be instrumental in collecting data on how kids are doing at school. Do they feel smart? Do they think the adults care about them? Do they have hope for the future? Do they understand the graduation requirements?

Ideas:

- Support the student-led R.S.V.P. process to help students gather data and take action for school improvement. (For more information, visit www.awsp.org/studentleadership.)

- Share data with student leaders from various clubs, activities or populations. They can use this information to establish goals and develop campaigns related to their organization. For example:

  – Attendance data by grade level to class officers. What factors lead to differences by grade level? What can they do to help improve attendance for their class?

  – Healthy Youth Survey data to clubs focused on peer influence and social behaviors. What are key issues in our school? What project(s) might your club implement to help change these behaviors?

  – School report card data with Latino Club members. What observations can they make? How is the school supporting success for all students? What can be done to help all students achieve?

4-5: Aligning Curriculum & Improving Instruction

At first glance, these categories might appear beyond the scope of student leaders. But, a student leadership group can help build a school's academic identity just like it helps build a social/cultural identity through student activities and athletics.

Student leaders can make the job of being a teacher easier. Student-driven teacher recognition programs can help teachers feel appreciated. Student leaders intentionally acting as classroom role models can set a tone for a classroom, just like younger kids learn by watching others in a library to be quiet and purposeful. Guest teachers can actually start requesting work at a school due to the interventions student leaders initiate when a "sink the sub" attitude emerges. The more student leaders learn about the big picture of educational reform, the more they will be able to incorporate concepts into their student activities.

Student leaders can help other students develop good study habits and increase their understanding about the importance of being college and career ready. They can even, as customers of learning, help a school understand which teaching methods and strategies are working and which ones are not.

Ideas:

- Have student leaders facilitate an activity to define a "super teacher"—what does he or she look like? Sound like? And how do students feel in his or her classroom? Students share the qualities of the super teacher (engaging, fair, challenging, etc.) with staff. Staff can do the same activity creating a "super student." What would he or she look like? Sound like? And how do teachers feel with "super students" in their classroom? Rubrics for "super student" and "super teacher" can be created and discussed.

- Survey students to identify how they learn best, what learning strategies are successful for them and how they feel about school.

- Recognize students who act as a motivator/role model in class or assist teachers to get everyone engaged in learning.

- Just as sport teams ask their captains to set the standards in regards to character, work ethic and team, so too can student leaders be asked to set the standards in the classroom in regards to character, work ethic and team.

6: Managing Resources

When it comes to ASB budgets, student leaders, advisers, bookkeepers and principals are trained in ASB finance. They know how to manage legal fundraisers, award programs and activities. When it comes to managing the physical plant, student leaders are the principal's direct link to the student body. If litter or graffiti are issues, students can find the solution and carry out an action plan for change. When student leaders understand that schools attempt to do a lot with scarce human and fiscal resources, they will be better able to help schools maximize what they do have. Student leaders can spread the attitude that being at school is like hanging out at your best friend's house; one intrinsically wants to take care of the place because he or she cares about who lives in the house.

Ideas:

- By Washington statute, raising and spending of ASB funds require a partnership between students and administration. Annually support the training of student leaders, bookkeepers, advisers and administrators in ASB Finance.

- Use the AWSP Leadership Framework to guide a goal-setting session with newly elected officers prior to their ASB budgeting process.

- Support the creation of a Green Team using the Washington Green Schools (www.wagreenschools.org) initiative. Through engagement in resource conservation at school, students on the Green Team learn valuable leadership skills while managing resources and educating their peers.

- Share data on a school facility concern with your student leaders (e.g., the number of hours and financial cost of custodial time spent cleaning gum from under lunch tables). Leaders can brainstorm solutions, create awareness campaigns, present data to other students and establish a school-wide goal to eliminate problems with the reward of a new school improvement with the money saved.

7: Engaging Communities

Positive student-planned events bring in the community. Students are already planning and carrying out talent shows and blood drives. The principal can help them see the value in reaching out to the larger community in events such as these. The principal might ask student leaders to help maintain an up-to-date reader board and timely publicity for events. Student leaders will see that each student activity is an opportunity for positive interactions between the school and members of the community. Students can be allowed to take the lead. They can organize events for the local elementary schools, reach out to senior centers and assisted living facilities, or plan an event to beautify the neighborhood. Student leaders make great community ambassadors, opening the door for the community to become a greater partner with the school.

Ideas:

- Student leaders take an active role in a school awareness night. Community members are invited to have dinner and learn about the school. Skits, performances, demonstrations of learning and displays can feature the academics and activities available to students.

- Use reader boards, digital displays or social media to advertise events, but also celebrate "fun facts" (e.g., pounds of food eaten, amount of money or pints of blood collected, perfect attendance day, school-wide percentage gain in GPA).

- Clubs and classes work together to sponsor an International Fest. Community members are invited to a showcase with students sharing talents unique to their cultural heritage. Train student leaders in positive customer relations. Help them understand that any community member in a school is a customer of public education. Through simple positive interactions with students, community members can feel proud of their schools and the future citizens.

8: Closing the Gap

For students, closing the gap can translate to, "I want my class to graduate together." The principal can challenge student leaders to think about their work through this lens. If student leaders focus on creating a safe and caring school, their work should be measurable through greater student engagement, less school discipline issues and better attendance rates.

Student leaders can also be servant leaders who help struggling students and they can be mentors to younger students. Student leaders can intentionally plan activities that do not exclude students based on income, and they can become involved in charitable fundraising to help students in need. Research is starting to prove that family income level is more of the driving force behind those students who are graduating and those students who are not.

Ideas:

- Adjust sports program practice times to a later start so athletes and cheerleaders can attend after-school homework help sessions. Students attend to receive help or to serve as role models and tutors.

- Have students advise and mentor a targeted group who are not on track to graduate or who have not met grade level standards.

- Throw an end-of-term celebration to recognize all levels of improvement.

Conclusion

In the end, strong student leaders create strong schools. The first step in this process is to realize that students should be an integral part of the process. For a school to flourish, all the leaders, both student and adult, need to be working toward and thinking about the same goals. Sometimes the students might be directly aware of the connections between their work and the work of schools, and other times they might just be thinking about planning a fun activity.

The principal can help student leaders see their impact based on the AWSP Leadership Framework. Together, the principal and student leaders can add new depth and purpose to the school's student leadership program, while making school better for all students.

Contributing to the Leadership Framework

Project/Event Name: _____

Dates, Time: _____

Location: _____

Organizing Body: _____

Student Contact: _____

Adviser Contact: _____

Description:

_____

_____

_____

_____

This project/event contributes to the following criteria of the Leadership Framework:

Criteria	Contribution
Creating a Culture Ensuring School Safety Planning with Data Aligning Curriculum Improving Instruction Managing Resources Engaging Communities Closing the Gap	

Evaluation Criteria: How Student Leaders Can Help

Criterion	What Principals are Asked to Do	What Student Leaders Can Do
1: Creating a Culture	Influence, establish and sustain a school culture conducive to continuous improvement for students and staff.	Create a place where kids *want* to come to school instead of *have* to come to school.
2: Ensuring School Safety	Lead the development and annual update of a comprehensive safe schools plan that includes prevention, intervention, crisis response and recovery.	Stop bullying in its tracks. Principals take care of physical safety; student leaders take care of emotional safety.
3: Planning with Data	Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of the data-driven plan for improvement of student achievement.	Become the eyes, ears, heart and soul of the school; listen, watch, observe and talk to the principal.
4-5: Aligning Curriculum and Improving Instruction	Monitor, assist and evaluate staff implementation of the school improvement plan, effective instruction and assessment practices. Assist instructional staff in aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with state and local learning goals.	Make the job of being a teacher easier by being a role model for others in class. Organize meaningful teacher appreciation events. Learn what is taught. Be kind to guest teachers.
6: Managing Resources	Manage human and fiscal resources to accomplish student achievement goals.	Be responsible with Associated Student Body funds. Take care of the school and all of its resources.
7: Engaging the Community	Communicate and partner with school community members to promote student learning.	Don't frighten the adults! Make the community feel proud that they are the future.
8: Closing the Gap	Demonstrate a commitment to closing the achievement gap.	Leave no one behind. Graduate with all of their peers. Be a mentor to younger students.