Student councils in Massachusetts.

William E. Clark

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses

Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/2722

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
STUDENT COUNCILS IN MASSACHUSETTS

CLARK - 1948
STUDENT COUNCILS IN MASSACHUSETTS

By

William E. Clark

A problem submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree University of Massachusetts 1948
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................. 111
LIST OF TABLES .......................................................... v
LIST OF CHARTS .......................................................... vii

CHAPTER I -- THE INTRODUCTION ........................................ 2
Importance of Student Councils ........................................ 2
Background of Student Councils ....................................... 3
Statement of the Problem ............................................. 5

CHAPTER II -- CONSTRUCTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE .................. 7
Constructing the Questionnaire ...................................... 7

CHAPTER III -- AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS ...... 10
Objectives of Student Councils ....................................... 10
Basis for Choosing Representatives to the Councils .............. 12
Place Where Elections Are Conducted ............................... 14
Type of Ballot Used in Elections .................................... 16
Time of Year that Elections Are Held .............................. 17
Number of Members in the Councils .................................. 19
Faculty Position of the Sponsor ..................................... 21
How the Sponsor Is Chosen ........................................... 23
Frequency of Meetings ............................................... 25
Time of Meetings ..................................................... 27
Length of Meetings ................................................... 30
Activities of the Councils ........................................... 32
Constitutions of the Councils ....................................... 35
Number of Years the Councils Have Been Functioning .......... 39
Council Emblems ...................................................... 41

CHAPTER IV -- SUMMARY -- A COMPOSITE STUDENT COUNCIL ........ 43
Establishment ......................................................... 43
Representation ........................................................ 43
Elections ............................................................... 43
Sponsor ................................................................. 44
Meetings ............................................................... 44
Activities .............................................................. 44
Constitution ........................................................... 44
Emblems ............................................................... 44

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................... 47
APPENDIX ............................................................... 49
LIST OF TABLES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
<th>Objectives of Student Councils Listed According to Importance</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table II</td>
<td>Bases of Choosing Representatives to the Student Councils</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table III</td>
<td>Polling Places Used in Student Council Elections</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table IV</td>
<td>Types of Ballots Used in Elections</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table V</td>
<td>Time of Year Used for Elections</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table VI</td>
<td>Position on the Faculty of the Sponsor</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table VII</td>
<td>Method of Choosing Sponsors of the Student Councils</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table VIII</td>
<td>Frequency of Meetings</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table IX</td>
<td>Time of Meetings</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table X</td>
<td>Activities of Student Councils</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF CHARTS
LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1  Number of Members in Student Councils ..... 20
Chart 2  Length of Meetings of Student Councils ..... 31
Chart 3  Number of Years the Councils Have Been Functioning ..... 39
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Importance of Student Councils

In a study made by J. R. Shannon of the relative later success of high school "scholars", it was found that, "Whatever is required to excel in the extra-curriculum life of the high school seems to be the same thing that contributes most to success later."¹ This finding illustrates the great importance of the extra-curricular activities, and the importance of the student council is easily demonstrated by its close connection with all the extra-curricular activities. Paul B. Jacobson and William C. Reavis believe that, "The student council is highly important in many schools, since it is the hub from which radiates all the other activities of the school."²

"Today it is widely recognized and accepted that the primary function of the school is to turn out good citizens."³ Progressives in education maintain that the best way to "turn out good citizens", is to give the students the opportunity to practice good citizenship in their school life. Actual participation in democratic procedure will form habits of good citizenship which the students will take with them when they

². Jacobson, Paul B. and Reavis, William C. Duties of School Principals. p. 294
³. McKown, Harry G. The Student Council. p. 25
leave the school. The student council offers one of the best means for student participation in government, and therefore its importance cannot be over estimated.

Background of Student Councils.

The student council, or the idea of student participation in the affairs of his school life, is not a new idea. As early as 386 B.C., Plato had a system in his "Academy" in which the students, and teachers together owned and operated the school's property. The student leaders were elected every ten days on secret ballots by the students themselves.

Aristotle, who studied at the academy, organized a similar institution, the "Lyceum", in which the idea of student participation was continued, although he added an overseer of good order, and a master of sacrifices to the offices. The main purpose of student participation in both these institutions was educational, unlike some of the later schools who used it to lighten the administration load.

After this enlightening beginning, student participation suffered serious setback with the decline of the Grecian state. The philosophy of the student was practically non-existent through a long period of various educational theories until 1428 when Vittorino da Feltra established his "Pleasant House" at the request of the Prince of Mantua. In his court school, da Feltra developed a curriculum which included a program of physical activities and competitive sports. This program required student organizers, leaders,
and officials, and was the start of an idea of student participation which spread into other activities, and finally grew into a form of self government.

Vallentino Trotzendorf organized a plan of participation at Goldberg, Germany in 1531, which included a senate composed of elected representatives, a larger council, and administrative and recording officers. Court trials were also held for students who violated the rules of the school.

Joseph Lancaster in using the Reverend Andrew Bell's monatorial system introduced a participation plan of a sort. His plan, although it was used purely for economical reasons, did contribute to the participation idea in America when he set up monatorial schools here.

In the United States, the William Penn Charter School had an assembly chosen by the students. This assembly made laws it thought necessary for the good of the school, and judges, elected by the students, tried and meted out judgement to offenders.

"Student participation was introduced in the New York High School in 1825; into the Temple School, Boston in 1834; into Catherine Beecher's school for girls in Hartford, Conn. in 1830; into the Hartford public school in 1852; and into the Mattakeesett School, Duxbury, Mass., about 1840."  

The participation plan has continued to grow from this
start in the United States, until it has spread throughout the country, and "recent studies indicate that from two-thirds to three-fourths of all the schools have some form of student participation in school government."  

**Statement of the Problem.**

While studying about student councils in a course on extra-curricular activities at the University of Massachusetts, I became greatly impressed with their importance, and as the high school which I attended had no council at that time, I was all the more interested in the councils in Massachusetts.

---

1. McKown, Harry G. *op. cit.* p. 15.
CHAPTER II
CONSTRUCTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE
Constructing the Questionnaire.

Setting up a questionnaire is a problem that requires much thought and consideration. It cannot be too long so that it will not discourage the person filling it out, and yet it must have all the questions needed to cover the subject completely. It must be constructed so that the person answering the questions does not have too much writing to do, and above all, the meaning of each question must be clear. These are the things I had to keep in mind as I started to make up my questionnaire.

My first step was to get as much reading matter on the subject as I could find. These books and periodicals gave a general picture of student councils throughout the United States, including statistical material compiled in other studies. From this general picture, I was able to compile a list of questions which I thought would illustrate what I wanted to know about the councils in Massachusetts.

My next step was to take the rough draft of the questionnaire to my advisor. We went over each question carefully to see if I had worded each one correctly, and if I was asking for the information correctly. This rough draft was revised five times before it was finally decided that I had the material I wanted in its best form. In order to obtain additional information, with no hardship or additional work for the person answering the questionnaire, I asked each
school to send me a copy of their council's constitution.

As a trial for the questionnaire, I had three copies made, and had one checked by the head of the Education department at the University of Massachusetts; one I took to the sponsor of the Amherst High School student council; and the third I sent to the principal of a nearby high school. Only one addition to the questionnaire was suggested, and when this was added, I sent out the questionnaire to one hundred and fifty schools in Massachusetts asking questions which should reveal the pertinent facts concerning the objectives, activities, number of members, organization, etc. of the councils in this State. I also asked the schools to send me copies of their council's constitutions, and with the questionnaire and this material I intend to compute and compile the information which should give a clear picture of the councils in Massachusetts.
CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS
CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Objectives of Student Councils

In an analysis of student council objectives, Elbert K. Fretwell found that almost half the claims were for citizenship values, and Earl Rugg in his study found that of the sixty-two objectives set down, thirty-three were for training in worthy citizenship.¹ This is readily understood, as the teaching of good citizenship is one of the cardinal principles in the curriculum of secondary schools. Therefore, student councils which have good citizenship as their main objective are an excellent means for supplementing the academic teaching of good citizenship, by giving the students some practical experience in this field of study. The virtues of good citizenship studied in the classroom can be exercised and tested in the workings of the student council. "These pupils can be learning in the voluntary associations with their fellows how to cooperate for the common good, how to lead or select a leader wisely and to follow him, how to assume responsibility and to make good."²

The councils analyzed in this study were similar to those observed in other studies as they chose good citizenship as their main objective from a list that also included increasing self direction, developing leadership, respect

¹ Fretwell, Elbert K. *Extra-Curricular Activities in Secondary Schools* p. 110
² *Ibid*, p. 112
for authority, building up school morale and promoting social cooperation.

The second most important objective listed was building up school morale which is also important to the students, the council and the school. Students with good school morale have a feeling of being a vital part of the school. Their conduct, use of school equipment, courtesy to visitors, and aid to new students, in fact, all their school experiences take on a new importance when their school morale is high. The feeling that "our school is better than any other, and I'm a vital part of it," is the outcome of good school morale, and a very important objective for student councils.

Developing leadership was listed as the third in importance, and is an objective that cannot be overlooked. Leaders are developed, they do not just suddenly blossom into being. There has always been the criticism that we do not develop leaders for government positions as the schools of England do, and whether this is true or not, the effort should be made to encourage leadership abilities in our students whenever we can.

Increasing self-direction, marked fourth in importance, is a quality which should be closely watched and developed in all high school pupils. The high school age is the transitional period in which the student finds himself changing from a child to an adult, and during this change an increased independence is thrust upon him. His duties and social
obligations do not come naturally as his physical maturity does, they must be developed slowly and cautiously, so that he will have a solid foundation upon which to build when he leaves the school.

Promoting social cooperation and respect for authority were next in importance in this order. Combined efforts for the benefit of the group, and an intelligent knowledge of the reasons and respect for authority are essential for the success of a democracy.

**TABLE I**

Objectives of Student Councils Listed According to Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Weighted Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good citizenship</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Building up school morale</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Developing leadership</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Increasing self-direction</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Promoting social cooperation</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Respect for authority</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basis for Choosing Representatives to the Councils

The basis for choosing representatives to the councils is similar to the different government units in that there are a great many ways in which they are chosen; the main idea behind both being to get the best representation pos-
sible. However, election by each class is the most popular. This is quite natural since the main classification in schools is by classes. It is the basis for promotion, for social functions such as the Junior prom, the Sophomore-Senior hop, the Senior play and the like. Class loyalty, and the fact that the students of the same class are likely to be studying the same subjects and therefore know each other better, makes the class basis a popular one for choosing representatives to the council.

Election by homerooms, the second choice of the schools gives good representation, and the best means of keeping in touch with the representatives. The homeroom usually meets every day and members can question their representative and find out just what took place at the meetings. They can plan what they would like to have the council do and instruct their delegate to the council to act accordingly. This close contact between the homeroom and the council adds interest in the council, and offers an opportunity for more active participation by the school body.

The larger schools seem to favor the home rooms as a basis for representation, while the smaller schools used the class plan. The average enrollment for the schools using the homeroom system was 789, and 581 for those using the class basis.

Election by each class with the class president automatically appointed was the next most popular plan used,
followed by a combination of the first and second choice, and last was election by the school at large. This last plan is the least desirable of the bases mentioned, because, unless the school is very small, the students will not know all the candidates running for office, and therefore cannot be expected to make a wise selection. In Table II the tabulated results of schools using the various bases of representation is shown.

TABLE II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis of choosing Representatives to the Student Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election by each class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election by homerooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election by each class, class president appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election by each class and by homerooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections by the school at large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Election by classes with club and activity officers appointed and election by classes with representatives appointed by the principal were other plans used.

Place Where Elections Are Conducted

The homeroom is by far the place most commonly used to conduct the elections. This is quite natural since it is the most convenient and expedient set up for the schools to use.
It takes the least time from school work, and is the easiest to arrange. It has no drawbacks from the viewpoint of the democratic system of voting, because the voters can use the ballot box, a clerk to check off the voters names, a ballot box guard, and all the ritual that accompanies a public election. It does, however, lack the setting that the second most popular place, the central polling spot, has. In addition to all the good qualities that the homeroom has, the central polling place is more like an adult election. Some schools even go so far as to use the town hall voting booths for their elections.

As shown in Table III, class meetings was the third choice of polling places, followed by combinations of a central polling place and class meetings, and a central polling place and homerooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Place Used</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Homerooms</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Central polling place</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Class meetings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Combination of 2 and 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Combination of 1 and 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combinations of polling places, such as a class meeting for the elections of representatives and a central polling place for the election of officers, and homerooms for the election of representatives and the class meetings or central polling place for elections of officers, were also mentioned.

**Type of Ballot Used in Elections**

We have already observed the effort of the schools to make the voting as much like an adult public election as possible, and the type of ballot used is a further step in this direction. The secret printed ballot, which is the type most like the ones used in elections in the United States, is the first choice among the schools of Massachusetts. The methods of making these ballots may differ with each school, some may require writing in the candidate's name, others may use a checkmark beside the name of the candidate, but this is also the case with ballots used in public elections. The schools do agree, however, that the secret printed ballot is the type best suited to simulate the public election ballots, and gives the students the best practical training for future use of them.

The second choice of the schools is an effort on their part to get the closest substitute possible for the secret printed type. This is the secret written ballot, used when printing or mimeographing facilities are not available. It lacks the similarity to the adult ballot, but it does not
lose any of the democratic balloting atmosphere since it can
be used with the same amount of secrecy and ritual as the first
choice. In Table IV, the types of ballots and the number
of schools using each type are shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secret printed</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret written</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret printed and written</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand vote</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice vote</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one school uses the hand vote, and no schools use
the voice vote which speaks very well for the democratic
balloting used by the schools.

Time of Year that Elections Are Held

The time of the year in which the elections are held
is an instance in which the councils should not try to copy
the government's election dates. The different government
units, the town, city, county, state, and federal elections
are held at a time decided to be the best for each unit, and
this should be the determining factor in selecting a date for
student council elections.
All the schools do not agree on the time of year which is best, but they do agree that the council should start functioning each year as soon as possible.

Most schools elect their representatives at the beginning of the school year, which is an excellent system if the elections take place within the first three weeks of school. With the confusion of starting a new school year, this is sometimes a difficult job, but it must be done if this plan is to work.

Election of representatives at the end of the year is the system chosen by the next largest number of schools. This is apparently the best plan to use, because the council can start with its elected representatives as soon as school begins, and can even be doing some planning during the summer months.

Some schools elect their new officers at the end of the year and their representatives at the beginning. This provides a skeleton crew which can begin at the start of the school year to get the council functioning. The officers are usually members with past experience in council activities and can help greatly with the election of representatives and similar preparatory work.

Elections at the beginning and middle of the year is still another system used. This is like the plan used in electing our senators to congress, as it provides for the election of only a part of the delegates at each time, and
thus insures experienced members in the organization at all
times. In Table V, the time of election and the number of
schools using each time is shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Year Used for Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time of Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning and End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning and Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Members in the Councils

There is no definite number of members that a student
council must have, and therefore, there is a wide variety in
the size of councils. The size of the school, and the basis
upon which representatives are chosen usually determines how
large a council will be.

Each school wants a fair representation of the student
body, but it does not want a council that is too large, be-
cause they are unwieldy and do not function smoothly. Small
high schools do not have this problem, but some of the larger
ones have to devise plans to keep their councils to a work-
able size. This does not mean that each student does not have
the opportunity to participate in council activities; there are many ways to keep the councils from getting too large, and still provide for adequate pupil participation. Sub-councils can be organized which are under the jurisdiction of the main council, and do not infringe on any of its rights or duties while they are aiding the council. Numerous committees are needed to help carry out the council's work, which also provides an opportunity for active participation for the student body.

The councils in Massachusetts vary widely in numbers. The smallest council, according to the returns of the questionnaire, has seven representatives, while the largest council has fifty delegates. However, the mean number of members for all the councils is 11.2, and the mode is 20.5, which shows that the average council is not too large. The number of members in the councils is shown in Chart 1.

**Chart 1**

Number of Members in Student Councils
Faculty Position of the Sponsor

From the results of the questionnaire it is evident that the position of the sponsor on the faculty is not the major criterion for choosing him. This is as it should be because the teacher's position does not effect his interest in, or his ability, to guide the students in student council work. These are two of the prerequisites that a good sponsor must have. Previous experience in this type of work is also an important factor in considering the qualifications of a sponsor.

Some teachers because of their training for the positions they hold have a knowledge or preparation which makes them better fitted for the job. Social studies teachers with their knowledge of history and government usually are strong advocates of the student council idea, and can offer excellent, advice in drawing up a constitution, holding elections and the like. Guidance directors with their special training sometimes are chosen because they understand and can direct students so well. The training of a teacher cannot be relied upon entirely, however, as a qualification for good sponsorship. Many science teachers, who supposedly are satisfied with nothing less than tested and proven facts, have had excellent results serving in the capacity of student council sponsors.

The position of the sponsor on the faculty and the number of schools choosing him is shown in Table VI.
TABLE VI

Position on the faculty of the sponsors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Held</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Director</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Social Studies Department</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Girls</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparently the schools in Massachusetts agree that the position of the teacher on the faculty does not matter when he or she is being considered for the sponsorship of the council, as the largest number of returns showed that they chose a teacher regardless of the classes he or she taught.

The second largest number of schools have the principal as the sponsor. This is to be expected because, as we shall see later, the principal does the choosing of the sponsor in the majority of cases, and usually appoints himself to the job when he does not have any outstanding teachers in this line on his staff. A good council carries on many important school functions and is such a vital part of the school that most principals want to keep in close touch with it, and do so as sponsors.

The next most popular choice is the assistant principal, which is a wise selection. In this way the principal can keep
in close touch with the council, and spend only a minimum of his time at the task. The only drawback here is that only the larger schools have an assistant principal, so the smaller schools have no opportunity to employ this system.

The guidance director was chosen by the next largest number of schools, followed by the head of the social studies department, and the dean of girls in that order.

How the Sponsor Is Chosen

The results of the questionnaire show that the majority of the sponsors are chosen by the principal. This is not surprising as, "About one-half of all sponsors are appointed by some administrative officer." This might seem like a rather undemocratic procedure but, like the absolute veto power that most principals have over all decisions of the councils, it is not as bad as it sounds. The student council supervises many important activities of the school, and as the principal is primarily responsible for all the functions of the school, he is justified in choosing its sponsor.

Election of a sponsor by the students and faculty seems to have a more democratic flavor, but the students do not know the abilities of the teachers, and their choice is usually of the popularity contest variety. New teachers or teachers who are not as strict as the rest are the ones the students favor. The faculty should be able to make a better selection than the students, but most teachers do

1. McKown, Harry C. The Student Council p. 301
not relish the idea of sponsoring extra-curricular activities, which would effect their choice somewhat, and probably result in the election of the new teacher regardless of his or her ability and interest in council work.

**TABLE VII**

Method of Choosing Sponsors of the Student Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chosen By</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote of the Council</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal with Council's Approval</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote of the Student Body</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choosing a sponsor by custom is not too good an idea. Just because the social studies teacher has always been the sponsor does not mean that she should continue in this job, and her successor automatically gets the job merely because of tradition. Some other member of the faculty may have ability and interest and past experience with councils that is being wasted just because of this method of selection.

Selection by the principal with approval of the council is a good system, because the principal has a hand in the choosing, and the council also has some say in the matter.
The council would have to show good cause why a certain teacher should not be given the job, and if they had good reasons, the principal would undoubtedly appoint someone else.

**Frequency of Meetings**

The amount of work to be accomplished, and the amount of time given to each meeting, which will be discussed later, are two factors which are instrumental in determining how often the student councils hold their meetings. Most schools, however, make provisions for definite meetings at regular intervals, with the reservation that the president of the council or the principal can call special meetings when deemed necessary. The councils should meet at regular intervals as the students will get more out of the activity, and will also be able to keep up with the other extra-curricular functions which have a predetermined time for their meetings.

The most popular interval between meetings, according to the results of the questionnaire, is two weeks. This procedure is adequate only if the length of each meeting is sufficient to allow for planning the work of the council for the coming two weeks. Councils using this meeting interval should dispense with as much ceremony during the meeting as possible in order to give all the time possible to the actual work of the committees and representatives. Special meetings are likely to be called quite often if the meetings are not long enough, and councils should try to avoid this.
because it is difficult to get good attendance at the special meetings. Representatives not planning on the special meetings have often made other engagements, some of which cannot be broken, and in this way the smooth functioning of the council is interrupted.

Holding a meeting of the council once a week is the next best plan considering all the factors necessary for the most efficient functioning of the council. When meetings are held once a week they do not have to be extra long in order to cover all the business on the agenda, and planning the work for the coming week is much easier than for a longer period. There is also less chance that special meetings will have to be called, because the time in between meetings is not very long. Scheduling the meetings is very simple when this procedure is used, as the regular activities period is excellent for this purpose.

Monthly and bi-monthly meetings seem to be too far apart. Surely something the council hadn't planned on will arise in between meetings, and if allowed to wait until the next meeting many of these things might not be properly handled. Members who wish to have their representatives carry out a particular project may lose interest in the idea because of the delay made in waiting for the meeting. Special sessions may be called to cope with this situation, but it would be much easier, and less confusing to schedule the meetings at shorter intervals.
Holding meetings when necessary brings up the question of who is to decide when they should be held. The principal and the president are usually the ones to decide on this, but there is no guarantee that they will agree that a meeting should be held. Such a situation could cause hard feelings and seriously endanger the harmony of a smoothly operating organization. In Table VIII is shown the frequency of meetings and the number of schools using each plan.

### Table VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When necessary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Time of Meeting**

The schools, by an overwhelming majority, choose the activities period as the time to hold the meetings of their councils. This is undoubtedly the best choice of time that should be held on school time. All the extra-curricular projects are in session during this time, so the representatives do not lose any regular class work. There is no problem of
scheduling the meeting, and the length of one period is sufficient to carry on the business of the council.

The next most popular time is after school, but this is not advisable for many schools. Some of the students live a good distance from the school, and must leave for home as soon as school closes so they can get a ride in the school bus. The students are also tired after a full school day, and probably do not have the enthusiasm and interest that they would have earlier in the day. It is a generally accepted practice to hold school activities during school time, so that meetings held after school should be avoided unless they are absolutely necessary.

Holding meetings during the lunch period was the third most used time. This seems to be about the next best choice if the activities period is not available, but it does have its drawbacks. The students should have their lunch hour for eating and a little exercise, but maybe the meetings would not interfere with this too much as they are held once a week at the most. The length of the meeting cannot be depended upon, however, and are usually shorter than a regular school period.

Three different times received the next largest number of votes, school periods while classes are in session, a combination of the first and third choices, and no special time. These were followed by meetings held at the beginning of the day and meetings held in the evenings in that order.
The tabulated results of the time of the meetings is shown in Table IX.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Activities Period</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>After School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lunch Hour</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Class Period</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Combination of 1 and 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No Special Time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Beginning of School Day</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meetings held while classes are in session is a poor choice, because not all the students elected to the council can afford to miss classroom work. This might antagonize the teachers, and turn them against the council, which is something that no council can afford to let happen.

Using a combination of the activities period and the lunch hour for meetings takes advantage of the two best times, but it would be a better plan to use the first choice as much as possible, and the lunch hour only when this is not available.
The beginning of the school day is not a wise choice, if the activity period is not held at this time, because the students will miss class work, which has already been discussed.

Meetings held during the evening should not be held unless there is no other time available during the day. The students have their home studying to do, and also the trouble of transportation to the schools. So few schools use this time for meetings that it is apparent that it is not an approved procedure.

Length of Meetings

No set rule can be made on the length of the meetings of the student councils because of the varying conditions at each school, and many different amounts of time are set aside for the meetings. The frequency and the time of the meetings along with the amount of work to be accomplished have much to do with determining how long the meetings should be. The results of the questionnaire concerning the length of the meetings followed this reasoning to the letter, with meetings varying from twenty to ninety minutes in length. However, forty-three minutes was the mean time devoted to council meetings, and is about the desired length. It allows ample time for enough ritual to give the meeting dignity; there is sufficient time for the business at hand, and there is no danger of the meeting dragging on and boring the students.

Twenty minute meetings seem to be too short for a well-
organized council. If these short meetings are held by newly-formed councils there is probably an excuse for them, as most new councils start off with very few duties and gradually take on more as they mature. A well-established council, however, would find it extremely difficult to conduct all its business in such a short time.

On the other hand, the ninety minute meetings are probably too long. Unless a meeting of this length is carefully planned it can be very boring to the representatives, and can cause disinterest in the work of the council. This type of opening and closing ceremonies, reading of minutes, and other conventional meeting procedures. Meetings of this length usually have to be scheduled after school or during the evening, as there is not enough time available during the day to devote to them, and this practice should be avoided whenever possible. The length of the meetings and the number of schools using these times is shown in Chart 2.

---

Chart 2

Length of Meetings of Student Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Number of Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other meetings varying from thirty minutes to sixty minutes are used to suit the conditions of the different schools. The shorter meetings are acceptable when the councils meet frequently, and the longer meetings are advisable for those whose meetings are further apart. The schools can experiment with the length of their meetings and decide which is the best suited for them, but it is generally accepted that thirty minutes should be the minimum for any council meeting.

Activities of the Councils

A committee of Elbert K. Fretwell’s graduate students, analyzing the activities of sixty-eight student councils as shown by high school handbooks chosen at random from several hundred handbooks from nearly every state in the union, found one hundred and thirteen different activities carried on by the councils.¹ This illustrates the wide variety of activities carried on by the student councils throughout the country. The same activities, however, are not suited to all schools, and it is necessary, therefore, to select them with this thought in mind. In choosing the activities, the council should decide whether they will promote worthy citizenship, interest the students, serve a practical use, develop responsibility, lead to further interests, develop cooperation between students and faculty, and help students to assume adult responsibilities.

Fifteen of the most popular activities of student councils were chosen for this study. In Table X is shown the relative importance they held in each school in terms of a weighted score.

### TABLE X
Activities of Student Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Weighted Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Promote school spirit</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social affairs</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Manage elections</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Organize assembly programs</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Welfare work</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interscholastic relations</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Proctor duty in halls</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>School orientation</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Welcome new students</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Holding pep meetings</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Maintain bulletin board</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Charting clubs</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Select and train ushers and guides</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Trial of acts of dishonor</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Care of school trophies</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparently promoting school spirit received such a high
score because it is an activity that is common to all schools. It also has a broad meaning, and undoubtedly all the schools do not use the same means to obtain this end. It is, however, an activity which most councils set up as the first one on their list.

Supervising social affairs is another activity which can be expected to rate high in the list of activities, since most student councils are the hub of the extra-curricular programs. The clubs or activities usually run the social affairs, but it is the student council that approves the affair, and sets the time for it and the conditions under which it will be held.

It is not surprising that one of the first three activities of the councils is managing elections. With good citizenship as the prime objective of the councils it is easy to see that they should be a prime factor in handling all general school elections. They supervise registration, designate polling place, supply ballots and ballot boxes, and all things necessary for a good democratic election. Some councils even promote a program for the education of all voters.

Organizing assembly programs is another activity which rates high on the list of the councils. The trend, lately, has been for more student participation in the assembly programs with each homeroom, club or activity presenting one or more programs a year, and the student council arranges the
schedule for the whole year. It provides the necessary equipment and material whenever possible, assists in staging and presenting programs, and supervises seating and ushering.

Welfare work, the fifth highest on this list, is an important activity, and one of which the council can be proud. This activity includes supporting the various drives made by local organizations and provides necessary assistance to students. Some schools even have an "adopted friend" overseas to whom they send food and clothing.

The order in which these activities are listed will not be duplicated in all schools because the conditions will vary in each community, but an overall picture of what councils are doing is provided.

Constitutions of the Councils

It is generally agreed that all student councils should have a written constitution upon which their organizations are based. This is quite natural since we give so much importance to our national and state constitutions, and regard them as the foundations of our democratic system. "Possibly one way to learn how to live by the constitution of one's country is to live by the constitution of one's student council."¹

Harry C. McKown has set down certain desired features for constitutions in his book on student councils,² and it is

interesting to see how closely the constitutions of the councils that answered the questionnaire fulfill his requirements.

First, he believes that every council should be based on a written constitution. The results of the questionnaire show that seventy per cent of the councils have written constitutions. This is not the exact picture of the situation because there was not a one hundred per cent return on the questionnaire, but twenty-five per cent of the returns definitely stated that their councils did not have a written constitution, and five per cent left the question unanswered. There are numerous reasons why some student councils do not have constitutions, such as small size, fear of killing interest, faculty jealousies, and the like, but such councils must have some understanding of their duties and limitations, and it seems as though there would be less reason for any misunderstandings if the duties and limitations were written out. The councils do not completely satisfy the first desire, but they approach it by a large percentage, probably even larger than the one indicated by the returns of this questionnaire.

The second requirement of constitutions, according to McTown, is that they should fit the local situation. This is true of the constitutions of the councils in Massachusetts. The general form of the constitutions are the same, but the details of the plan are adapted to fit the conditions of the
community. Methods of representation, length of meetings, qualifications of representatives, etc., differ slightly in order to satisfy varying conditions.

The third prerequisite of a good constitution is that it should be as simple as possible. The type and size of the constitution depends on the type and size of the organization established, the larger schools having longer constitutions, as all the necessary details must be completely covered. However, some schools try to imitate municipal, state, and federal constitutions with their legal wording, and in this way they compose constitutions which are too long and confusing. The constitutions of the councils in Massachusetts do differ in size, but the average size is three typed pages, which is also the size of the constitution of the Association of Students of Western Massachusetts. All the wording is clear and simple enough for any high school student to understand, and therefore this third prerequisite is fulfilled.

Another requirement of a good constitution is that the source of authority should be indicated. Of the constitutions studied, eighty per cent indicate the source of their authority in some way. The greatest number accomplish this by stating the veto power of the principal. His absolute veto power shows that he is the one who gives the council its authority, and takes it away when necessary. Some constitutions actually acknowledge his authority by stating that the principal has delegated the powers to the council. Still others
state that the faculty advisor reports the work of the council to the principal, thus showing that the activities of the council must meet with his approval. Whatever the wording may be, direct or indirect, the origin of authority is made clear in the constitutions.

As a final qualification, it has been observed that the constitutions should be published. It is difficult to state just how many of the councils do this, because only forty-two percent of the councils that have written constitutions sent me a copy. Whether the others did not send me a copy because they do not have more than a few published, or whether it was too much bother is hard to tell, but at least forty-two percent do publish enough copies of their constitutions to enable them to send a copy to someone outside their school system.

McKown advocates the publishing of the constitutions in printed booklet form, or included in the school handbook, if the school has one. This is a good idea, if it is possible, but mimeographed copies, in sufficient numbers so that all the students may have a copy, will serve this purpose.

As we already have noted, the general form of the constitutions is much the same. With very slight differences this form usually includes the name of the organization, the purpose or objective of the council, memberships, officers and their election and duties, powers of the council, provision for amendments, meeting dates, and the veto power of
the principal. More elaborate constitutions include a preamble, by-laws, standing committees, provision for filling vacancies of representatives to the council and, in some, provisions for recall and impeachment of representatives.

Number of Years the Councils Have Been Functioning

"H. C. Lent's 1938 investigation of 160 councils disclosed that the median age was 9 years, that the oldest had been in existence for 25 years, and that nine had been operative for at least 15 years."¹ The same year H. E. Patrick reported the median age of 74 councils to be 10 years."² This study, analyzing 74 councils, finds that the median age is 12.9 years; and ten councils have been functioning for 10 years. The overall picture is shown in Chart 3 below.

![Chart 3]

Number of Years the Councils have been Functioning

---

1. McKown, Harry C., Student Councils. p. 14
From the chart it can be seen that fifteen schools, or twenty per cent of the number answering the questionnaire, have councils from one to three years in age. This recent interest in student councils is probably due to the war years, when a great emphasis is put on patriotism, good citizenship, and the importance of the part played by each individual in war effort. All these desired qualities can be fostered through student councils, and probably the faculty and students realizing this started these new councils.

Ninety-one per cent of the councils have been established within the last twenty-five years. This last quarter of a century has seen the rapid rise of student councils and other student participation plans all over the country, and Massachusetts is no exception to this trend.

The number of years a council has been functioning does not necessarily reflect its success, although it should have some bearing upon it. Councils learn by experience, and careful observation by its members and the faculty can aid the council greatly. However, if the interest is lacking, the council may continue for years without improving itself in any way.

Newly formed councils can benefit from the experience of older councils that have proven to be highly successful. An exchange of ideas between the old and new councils can be beneficial to both, as there is always room for improvement.
Council Emblems

It is debatable whether the wearing of a council emblem is a good practice or not. Some people feel that a reward such as this is an excellent incentive for the students, while others maintain that the emblems have no practical value and should be omitted.

Forty-three of the councils answering the questionnaire do not have any emblem; thirty-one councils have them, and in five councils the emblems are optional. These figures clearly illustrate how evenly distributed the councils are on this issue.

The councils that do have emblems are not in agreement as to the ones they should have. Twenty-two prefer a pin; five use an armband; and sweater insignias and identification cards are each used by two councils.

This question is not such a vital one that it requires any further comment. Each council can decide for itself what course it wants to follow concerning emblems, and there is not much danger of any serious threat to the council coming from its decision.
CHAPTER IV

A COMPOSITE STUDENT COUNCIL
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

A COMPOSITE STUDENT COUNCIL

In order to emphasize the principal features of a student council in Massachusetts a composite council may be constructed on the basis of the results of the questionnaire. Such a council is not typical of all councils in the state, and no one council may have all the features of the composite council because of limiting conditions in each community. However, by presenting this hypothetical council, a goal may be set toward which all councils may strive.

Establishment

The composite council is established when a desire is expressed by the student body and the faculty to develop the objective of good citizenship. Along with this primary objective, secondary objectives such as building up school morale and developing leadership are also sought.

Representation

In order to obtain the best representation possible, representatives are chosen by each class or by each homeroom, depending upon the size of the student body. The council contains eleven members, a practical and efficient number.

Elections

The student body elects its representatives to the council by voting with a secret printed ballot, and when these are not available, a secret written ballot is used. These ballots are filled out and deposited in a ballot box in the homeroom. The elections are held at the beginning of the
school year in order to get the council functioning as soon as possible.

**Sponsor**

The principal of the school chooses a sponsor for the council who is usually a regular classroom teacher. The position of the teacher on the faculty does not have any bearing on the choice by the principal, as he is concerned with the interest in, and experience with student councils of the sponsor.

**Meetings**

The council meets once every two weeks during the activities period for approximately forty-five minutes, and plans its work for the period between meetings.

**Activities**

The program of work that the council carries on includes the promotion of school spirit, social affairs, managing elections, organizing assembly programs, welfare work, and interscholastic relations.

**Constitution**

The council has a written constitution upon which it is based. This constitution is as simple as possible, containing about three pages. The sources of authority is indicated in some manner within these pages, and the constitution in this form is mimeographed so that every student may have a copy.

**Emblems**
The council has been functioning approximately twelve years, and decides for itself whether or not its members will wear any distinguishing emblem.

It should be stressed again that this composite council does not really exist, but is a hypothetical one having the main features of the councils in Massachusetts. Some councils probably would not fare as well as they do now if they included all these features, because of the conditions under which they function. However, the composite council gives a concentrated picture of what the councils as a whole believe to be the best features of a successful council.
Bibliography


APPENDIX
1. Name of School

2. Grades in school 12 11 10 9 8 7. Total Enrollment

3. The following is a list of student council objectives. Number, according to importance, the objectives of your school's council.

( ) Good citizenship
( ) Increasing self-direction
( ) Developing leadership
( ) Respect for authority
( ) Building up school morale
( ) Promoting social cooperation
( ) Please list any others

4. How are the representatives to the council chosen? (Check your system).

( ) Election by each class
( ) Elections by clubs or activities
( ) Elections by homerooms
( ) Officers of clubs or activities automatically appointed
( ) Students with the highest academic work or citizenship automatically appointed
( ) Appointment by the principal or faculty
( ) Appointment by the student club officers
( ) Election by the school at large
( ) Any others

5. Where is the election conducted? (Check your system).

( ) Central polling place
( ) Homerooms
( ) Class meetings
( ) Activities groups
( ) Any others

6. What type ballot is used? (Check your system).

( ) Secret printed ballot
( ) Secret written ballot
( ) Hand vote
( ) Voice vote

7. At what time of the school year are the elections to the council held?

( ) Beginning
( ) Middle
( ) End

8. How many members are there in the council? How is this number distributed?

9. What position does the sponsor of your council hold on the faculty? How is he chosen?
10. How often does the council meet? ( ) Weekly ( ) Biweekly
( ) Monthly Other times (State when)

11. Time of meeting ( ) Activities period ( ) Lunch hour
( ) After school Any other time (State when)

Length of meeting

12. The following is a list of activities carried on by the student councils. Number, according to importance, the activities of your council.

( ) Social affairs
( ) Chartering clubs
( ) Proctor duty in halls
( ) Interscholastic relations
( ) Holding "pep" meetings
( ) Trial of acts of dishonor
( ) Assume care of school trophies
( ) Select and train ushers and guides
( ) Welcome new students
( ) Manage elections
( ) Organize assembly progra
( ) Promote school spirit
( ) Welfare work
( ) Maintain bulletin board
( ) School orientation
( ))

13. Does your council have a written constitution?__________________________
If so, would you send me a copy?

14. How long has your council been functioning?__________________________

16. Do council members wear any distinguishing emblem?__________________
If so, check your emblem.

( ) Pin
( ) Arm band
( ) Sweater insignia
( ) Ribbon
( ) Any others__________________________
Approved by:

Chris J. Oliver
Problem Committee

Date May 23, 1948.