

STUDENT COUNCIL PARTICIPATION AND BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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DECODE

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REPORT

Student Council Participation and Broader Civic Engagement:
A Preliminary Study

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REPORT

Student Council Participation and Broader Civic Engagement: A Preliminary Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Project Overview

This study, commissioned by the Library of Parliament, emanated from discussion at the Dialogue Session on Youth Engagement organized by the Library in 2009. The purpose was to explore how the experience of voting for, and serving on, Canadian Student councils can be used to demonstrate the relevance and importance of participating in democratic activities in the wider sphere.

The project consists of primary and secondary research components:

- a) Literature Review
- b) Key Stakeholder Interviews

These research results will help illustrate if student council activities can and are being used to encourage broader democratic engagement and if so, what possible mechanism or vehicles could be used to facilitate broader engagement with students.

B. Literature Review Summary

A literature review was conducted examining Canadian and international sources, including academic publications, white papers, and learning guides relevant to the broad purposes of the project. Resources were selected based on their relevance to the following topics:

- Definitions of Civic and Democratic Engagement;
- Definitions of Citizenship Education;
- Research on Predictors of Adult Civic Engagement;
- Summaries of Current Policy Frameworks related to Youth Engagement and Student Councils; and
- Current Understanding of Student Council Theory and Practice.

Key findings of the literature review have been summarized in the body of the report, while the full review is included as Appendix A of this report. In brief, the literature review included the following key findings:

- Current rationales for citizenship education emphasize the importance of equipping young people with the ability to mediate between political, cultural, economic, and regional interests within national cultures.
- Researchers note that Canada lags behind in all aspects of citizenship education, and has yet to develop its own standards for measuring its impact on Canadian students.
- Increasingly, researchers are finding that curriculum or class-based citizenship education activities cannot be the only vehicle for introducing young people to democratic participation.
- Current knowledge and data on the links between student governance and the goals of citizenship education are lacking in the citizenship education communities.

C. Key Stakeholder Interviews: Methodology

After completion of the literature review, telephone interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from across the country. Interviewees were representative of the following groups: teachers; student council advisors; school principals; parliamentarians and former parliamentarians; professionals working in related fields (experts); lead academics in the field of citizenship education; and a student from junior high.

Customized questionnaires for each distinct stakeholder group were disseminated to participants for review in advance of the interview. In total, 16 interviews were conducted. To review the interview guides for each group, please see Appendix B.

PART 2: KEY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

A. Structures of Student Councils

Executive Model and Election Process

The majority of high school student councils discussed by key stakeholders are hierarchical, presidential/municipally-modeled structures that usually include two democratically elected co-presidents, a vice president, treasurer and secretary. The results of the interviews suggest that the electoral process is varied from teacher appointment to student body elections and that a variance of practice in electoral procedures also exists between junior and senior high schools.

In almost every case, elections or the appointment of the council executives takes place in the spring, in advance of the following year. Student councils range in size from 10 members to 80, with little correlation between the number of councilors and the size or grade range of the school.

Informal Constitutions and Decision-making Practices

Very few schools represented by interview subjects have or use a formal document outlining the governance model of the student's council. That said, a constitution was the most commonly occurring type of formal document with this purpose. If it existed, the constitution often articulated the rules of order, roles and duties of the executive council and terms of office.

Over all, decision-making on the councils seemed to involve a variety of consensus-based approaches that may or may not include a secret vote, or show of hands. In Québec many student councils that participate in the Parlements au secondaire program seek administrative approval on initiatives that impact the quality of student life (school rules, bylaws) through a formalized decision-making process. However, despite this formalized process, many proposed initiatives continue to pertain to recreational or socially focused activities or events at school.

B. Purpose and Roles: Event Planners, Fundraisers and Social Conveners

The most commonly cited purposes for student councils were:

- a) To give students a voice
- b) To create opportunities for leadership training

Teachers, advisors and the student interviewed noted that these purposes of council exist in the limited but "appropriate" context of planning extra-curricular events, fundraisers and dances.

Note: Teachers and student council advisors that were interviewed never referred to student council as student government – suggesting that it is not considered to be a political organization or agency, minimizing its ability to instill an understanding of democratic governance, as suggested in the literature review.

C. The Practice of Representation by Student Councilors

Formal and Informal Representation

Stakeholders communicated that student council is most representative of the voices of those students actively engaged with the school either through academics, sports, clubs and committees or the student council itself. Student councils solicit the opinions of these students in a number of formal and informal ways including:

- suggestion box
- school newspaper
- PA announcements
- class surveys
- website
- social networking pages i.e. Facebook

It is not clear that teachers or administrators believe it is the responsibility of the council to reach the voices of those students who are not otherwise engaged with the school (often referred to as “at risk” or “the fringe”) or that councils are advised to intentionally seek their inclusion. Disengagement with student council was explained by a number of stakeholders as a symptom of perceived under-representation or exclusion from council. A number of teachers noted that other mechanisms and organizations in school exist to reach out to these disengaged students. Student council may or may not be involved in these outreach activities.

Accountability

The discussion around accountability was limited and stakeholders provided fairly standardized responses, which included that council was accountable to:

- the electorate: their peers
- student advisors and administration
- the community
- themselves

With reference to the role, representation and accountability of Student council, a particularly noteworthy case study of work carried out by the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant in Québec has been included in the body of the report to demonstrate the possibility of involving students in a democratic model within the student council function. This case study also demonstrates the impact an individual teacher can have on the operations of a school.

D. Connections Between Student council Activities, Citizenship Education and Wider Civic Engagement

Theory and Practice

Based on the results of the interviews, it is unanimously held that student councils possess the opportunity to connect with citizenship education. These opportunities, however, for most stakeholders are generally viewed as circumstantial and infrequent.

The most notable exception of theory and practice in Canada is the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant in Québec. The Loi sur l'instruction publique stipulates secondary schools in Québec should have a student council. Since 2005, the Foundation's program Parlements au secondaire has enabled 190 schools to "respond to the requirements of the Loi to establish a student council while providing a framework for instruction on the Assemblée nationale du Québec and on the democratic processes that guide civic life." This program is designed to increase the knowledge and participation of high school youth in democratic processes.

All interviewees agreed that the connection of theory to real practice is dependent primarily on the interest, knowledge and willingness of staff and administrators to create a school environment that goes beyond instruction and even experience – one that fosters democratic principles in all aspects of school life.

Experiential Learning – Other examples

Participants noted that there exist other, possibly stronger, more relevant mechanisms of experiential learning for civic education currently at work in most schools. These mechanisms include:

- model parliaments (provincial, national and international models)
- social responsibility clubs and committees including Environment, Students Against Drunk Driving, Debating Club, Leadership Club, etc.
- citizenship award
- school newspaper (letters to the editor)

Mechanism of Support

Participants were quick to acknowledge that without the support of school administrators, student councils could not exist. Additionally, they cited a number of external resources that were deemed best practices in engaging students as citizens and furthering education and awareness around the rights and obligations of citizenry. These programs and services primarily include professional development opportunities for teachers, and student council advisors. A list of best practice resources – with participant descriptions, includes:

- Encounters Canada Program – strong (but dated) introduction for students to Ottawa and federal government systems.
- Voyagers Program – Canada’s 125th Anniversary – pairing youth from different federal constituents to help build a sense of nationhood and citizenship.
- Building Future Voters – classroom resources for Alberta (Grades 6-9) designed by the provincial Legislative Assembly that emphasizes voter engagement and includes election simulation tools.
- Citizen’s Voices Website (Governor General) – current issues forum for sharing thoughts and opinions of “regular Canadians” as well as exceptional citizens including members of the Order of Canada and the Governor General herself.
- Federation de la jeunesse canadiennes-francaise – French Canadian program of resources and youth forums to discuss citizen engagement issues from a municipal and federal perspective.
- Elections Canada – resources for Students, Teachers.
- Library of Parliament - Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy – thought of as the most comprehensive training program for teachers but limited in reach and scope.
- Student Vote – hugely successful election education and simulation program.
- Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA) – national conferences that bring “like minded teachers and kids” together.
- 2005 Congress in the Classroom – American conference for civics teachers (organized by the nationally mandated Department of Education) furthering consistent subject matter knowledge and teaching approaches.

Current Challenges

The connection between student council activities and civic education is challenging to many stakeholders because it is not intentionally or explicitly linked through existing curriculum. A significant number of interviewees believe that in order for it to have significant value as an experiential tool, student councils must take on greater purposes in school, have formal mechanisms/structures to better coordinate their issues to school administrators, have obvious policy implications, and connect current affairs of the student body with the wider community.

The most frequently cited challenge inhibiting the formal connections between student council activities and civics education was inconsistent curriculum content and teaching practices between the provinces. Additional challenges included:

- general lack of interest and perceived value in civics;
- the absence of civics or political science as a 'teachable' in teacher training;
- lack of teacher support infrastructure – time, financial resources, training, professional development;
- rigidity of models, teachers and administrators (rules-based approach) and;
- out-of-field teaching.

E. Participants' Recommendations

Interview participants were open in their discussion about the current limited use of student council activities as experiential tools to further the aims of citizenship education but were unanimous in their agreement about this potential in the future. To this end, key stakeholders identified the following recommendations:

- 1) Professional Development for Student Council Advisors
- 2) Adequate Training of Civics Teachers
- 3) A Dialogue and Forum on Civic Education
- 4) Parliamentarian/Student programs

PART 3: CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A. Concluding Observations

Analysis of the interview findings demonstrates that a large number of key stakeholders recognize the need for a change in the political climate of schools and structures within it, in order for student

councils to be valuable in promoting civic understanding and broader citizenship engagement. These changes are fundamental to the success of future citizenship education and engagement efforts in Canada, and also reflect current thinking as found in the literature review of citizenship education. These changes can be considered as two broad themes:

- A Paradigm Shift: Schools as Democratic Environments
- Student Councils as Agencies of Student Government

B. Options for Future Directions

Based on the findings of the key stakeholder interviews, the following three initiatives are suggested as options for future directions. These suggestions are consistent with international practice highlighted in the literature review, as well as best practice approaches and methodologies required when conducting research projects with and about youth:

1. Conduct a detailed analysis of the successful Parlements au secondaire program offered by the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant to provide information to other provinces and territories that may wish to incorporate elements of this model in their own citizenship education programs.
2. Undertake a large-scale initiative of direction and support to help teacher advisors specifically, and schools generally, realize the potential of student councils to promote citizenship awareness and civic engagement. The overall initiative could be undertaken by an existing body on its own, or as a joint venture with leading Canadian academics associated with Citizen Ed (www.citizened.info) or in partnership with a body such as The Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA).
3. Conduct qualitative research with students from across the country - those currently engaged with student councils and existing third party enrichment opportunities as well as youth not presently engaged with student council, school clubs and leadership programs. This essential phase of the research will offer the opportunity to discuss and “test” some of the proposed recommendations from this initial study with this critical group of stakeholders.

Note: Students are stakeholders in such overall discussion and desired outcomes but their importance warrants an independent research approach and specific analysis, which lay outside of the scope of the initial study.

REPORT
Student Council Participation and Broader Civic Engagement:
A Preliminary Study

PART 1: Introduction

A. Project Overview

The purpose of this project was to explore how the experience of voting for, and serving on, Canadian student councils can be used to demonstrate the relevance and importance of participating in democratic activities in the wider sphere.

To this end, the project consisted of two parts:

- a) Literature Review – secondary research
- b) Key Stakeholder Interviews – primary research

Feedback was collected on the following topics:

1. How young people are introduced to notions of representative governance;
2. How young people understand the opportunities and responsibilities of citizenship;
3. What, if any, role student councils currently play in fostering inclusivity and cultural diversity in the school; and
4. The relationship between student councils and broader active citizenship initiatives in school and in the wider community

This research will help illustrate if student council activities can/are being used to encourage broader democratic engagement and if so, what possible mechanism or vehicles could be used to facilitate broader engagement with students.

The following report provides an overview of the findings of the project, including a summary of the literature review, and key findings of the stakeholder interviews. Attached as appendices to this report are the complete literature review, interview guides for key stakeholders as well as the project bibliography.

B. Literature Review Summary

DECODE, in conjunction with the Library of Parliament and advisor Ian Hundey, first compiled a list of sources, including primary research, white papers, and learning guides relevant to the broad purposes of the project. Resources were selected based on their relevance to the following topics:

- Definitions of Civic and Democratic Engagement;
- Definitions of Citizenship Education;
- Research on Predictors of Adult Civic Engagement;
- Summaries of Current Policy Frameworks related to Youth Engagement and student councils;
- Current Understanding of student council Theory and Practice.

Key findings from the literature review included:

- Researchers and academics have noted the lack of understanding of how young people perceive of the social and political world. This has become especially relevant given the documented decline in civic participation rates among young people in democratic societies. Some researchers believe this is an issue related explicitly to disenfranchisement of young people.
- The rationale for citizenship education has changed along with major social and political changes. Current rationales emphasize the importance of equipping young people with the ability to mediate between political, cultural, economic, and regional interests within national cultures.
- Researchers note that Canada lags behind in all aspects of citizenship education, and has yet to develop its own standards for measuring its impact on Canadian students.
- The role of experiential learning in citizenship education is of particular interest to many researchers. Increasingly, researchers are finding that curriculum or class-based citizenship education activities cannot be the only vehicle for introducing young people to democratic participation.
- Researchers note that experience with student governance (as active representatives, voters, and issue advocates) could have potential in instilling an understanding of democratic

governance. In addition, student councils are seen by some researchers as a potential vehicle for delivering the goals of citizenship education (such goals as: being informed about civic issues; developing skills required for citizenship; exploring diverse beliefs, and values; developing notions of social justice; and, becoming involved in civic life.). Current knowledge and data on these links are lacking in the citizenship education community.

- A best practice Canadian model exemplifying the potential student councils offer in connecting theory and practice in fostering broader civic engagement is the Parlements au secondaire program, offered by the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant de l'assemblée nationale du Québec.

C. Key Stakeholder Interviews: Methodology

Following the literature review, telephone interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from across the country from the following groups: elementary and secondary school teachers; student council advisors; a school principal; a parliamentarian: a former parliamentarian; professionals working in related fields (experts); a lead academic in the field of citizenship education, and a student representative from junior high. Customized questionnaires for each distinct stakeholder group were disseminated to participants for review in advance of the interview. The interviewer transcribed the participants' responses. In total, 16 interviews were conducted. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length. To review the interview guides for each group, please see Appendix B.

Note: Not all key stakeholders that were contacted for interviews responded to the request. Although the key stakeholder list generated for this project included student participants, participation of this group was limited to one interview participant. Students (those engaged and not engaged with student council) are a critical group of stakeholders that warrant independent and specific analysis.

The goal of this phase of the research was to explore how the experience of voting for, and serving on, Canadian junior and high school student councils can be used to demonstrate the relevance and importance of participating in democratic activities in the wider sphere. The interviews were tasked to:

- describe student council structures and roles;
- describe the nature of and support for representation;

- document case studies where teachers have successfully used the experience of electing and serving on student councils as opportunities to demonstrate the concepts of representation, advocacy and civic engagement;
- Identify best practices as well as the feasibility of using student council experiences to foster wider civic engagement and activity; and
- identify challenges and propose possible ways forward to develop a program or initiative which will support teachers and principals should they wish to implement experiential learning opportunities in their schools.

Part 2 of this report highlights key findings of the stakeholder interviews demonstrating consensus across the participants and consistency with current thinking outlined in the literature review.

PART 2: KEY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

A. Structures of Student Councils

Executive Model and Election Process

The majority of high school student councils discussed by key stakeholders are hierarchical, presidential/municipally-modeled structures that usually include two democratically elected co-presidents, a vice president, treasurer and secretary. The exception to the common presidential/municipal structure is the model practiced by 190 high schools in Quebec through the Parlements au secondaire program. Modeled after the provincial National Assembly of Quebec, this model proposes that participating schools designate a Lieutenant-Governor (the principal of the school), Secretary and Supervisor (vice principal or teachers), the premier (a student representing all students), deputy premier (student representative), and members (students elected by their classmates), to form the Assembly of Members, Cabinet and Ministers.

In the majority of student councils discussed by interview participants outside of the province of Quebec, executive candidates are either nominated by their peers (students) or encouraged to participate by teachers and staff. Ad hoc members, class reps or members at large, representing students from particular grades, make up the remaining body of the student council in high schools. Councils are usually organized by sub-committees covering broad event-focused categories including dances, fundraising, and athletics.

Similarly, in junior high, the entire student body often chooses the presidents and/or vice presidents. The executive, however, is commonly selected by class representatives determined through class vote. These class representatives comprise the working members of the council. In larger junior high schools, each grade has one “member at large” that sits with the executive representing the student population of their specific grade. A respondent from one junior high school noted that teachers, rather than students, select the executive candidates. The student vote is reserved only for the president.

A student from the most senior grade in the school can only fill the president’s position. In almost every case, elections or the appointment of the council executives takes place in the spring, in advance of the following year.

Based on interview results, student councils range in size from 10 members to 80 with little correlation between the number of councillors and the size or grade range of the school.

Informal Constitutions and Decision-making Practices

Very few schools represented by interview subjects have or use a formal document outlining the governance model of the student’s council. Those that do identified “the constitution” as the document that addressed the rules of order, (often Robert’s Rules), the roles and duties of each executive council member, and terms of office. The constitution is generally reviewed at the beginning of the year to ensure that students understand what their responsibilities are. One stakeholder drew a parallel between the function of the student council constitution and the athletic contracts that varsity athletes are required to sign prior to playing on the school team – acknowledging, however, that executives are not required to enter into a formal contract in order to serve on council. In one instance, the student council’s constitution also outlines the eligibility requirements for executive candidates including, most notably, past experience working on the student council. This was included in an attempt to eliminate the popularity factor often cited as a barrier to electing of the “best candidate for the job.”

The decision-making process most commonly practiced by student councils is largely informal. A variety of consensus-based approaches that may or may not include a secret vote, or show of hands were described. However, it is common that decision-making is the responsibility of the entire student council body with very few decisions taking place by an executive in isolation from the larger group.

One teacher interviewed suggested that the formality and independence of the decision-making process within a student council relates directly to its purpose: if it is primarily a social or event-planning council, relatively few decisions are made since these events are often repeated from year to year, facilitating an informal and often highly unsupervised decision-making process. However, if the council's purpose is to contribute to policy decisions, including curriculum review and development or school rules, then its decision-making process necessitates a more formalized approach – often with greater coordination, teacher oversight, and administrative support.

A possible example of a more formalized approach to student council decision-making is the “projet de Loi” introduced by the Bonenfant Foundation of Québec in 2007. The activity requires written requests or “a bill” from student council be submitted to school administrators before it can be passed as “a law.” In a number of cases, the bills presented pertain to activities beyond the social/events realm and “directly reflect the quality of student life within the school.” This formalized decision-making process has attempted to encourage a shift in the type and level of student engagement.

B. Purpose and Roles: Event Planners, Fundraisers and Social Conveners

The most common response from teachers and student council advisors to the question “how would you describe the purpose of student council?” was “to give students a voice” followed by “an opportunity for leadership.” However, teachers and advisors were quick to recognize that these purposes often take place in the somewhat limited but “appropriate” context of planning extra-curricular events, fundraisers and dances.

Although some progress has been noted across high schools in Québec towards advancing “proactive initiatives that address/relate to school rules/bylaws that impact student rights”, largely due to the formalized decision-making process of “projets de Loi,” many high school student councils' initiatives remain recreational or socially focused despite working within the context of a model based on the Québec National Assembly.

The student stakeholder interviewed (an elected co-president of a junior high) replied in a consistent manner that his council's job was “to create ideas for fundraisers, and to plan and execute events.” There was little mention of the responsibility of representing the electorate, or operating as issue advocates.

Note: Across all but one interview, the organization of student council was never referred to as student government – suggesting that it is largely not considered to be a political organization or agency, minimizing its ability to instill an understanding of democratic governance, as suggested in the literature review.

C. The Practice of Representation by Student Councilors

Formal and Informal Representation

Stakeholders generally felt that student council is representative of the student body but most specifically representative of the voices of those students actively engaged with the school either through academics, sports, clubs and committees or the student council itself. These engaged individuals offer suggestions for school events, volunteer time for planning, and participate in school activities throughout the year. These students were often referred to as the “keen kids” who utilize the formal and informal means to voice their opinions back to the student council – either directly to student council members or through secondary channels including the suggestion box or teacher advisors.

Student councils solicit the opinions of those students they represent in a number of formal and informal ways including:

- suggestion box
- school newspaper
- PA announcements
- class surveys
- website
- social networking pages i.e. Facebook

In one junior high school, the student council has access to the results of a school-wide survey called “Tell Them From Me.” This survey is designed and administered online by a third party to measure student engagement across the school. The survey gathers student feedback and opinions on a variety of topics including, for example, curriculum, school rules, event dates, and decorations in the hallway. School administrators and teachers use the results of this survey to inform their decision-making process and to “get a beat on what the students are saying.” Particular results of this survey are made available to student council through the student advisors, providing council with student body insight that they would otherwise struggle to collect on their own.

There is a general understanding that specific groups in schools are difficult to reach through current student council practices. These difficult to reach groups are often discussed using terms like “at-risk kids, the

Goths, strugglers, the fringe.” It is not clear that teachers or administrators believe it is the responsibility of the council to reach these voices or that councils are advised to intentionally seek their inclusion. One teacher stated that the voices that are not heard through council are the voices of those kids “who either don’t care or aren’t engaged – similar to a large percentage of adults in the province” suggesting a parallel in the typical and accepted stereotypes of representation and engagement in the student council with those citizens that are disengaged with electoral politics.

Based on the discussion with interviewees, it seems that reaching disengaged or fringe students falls to the responsibility of teachers or other organizations within the school, including welcoming committees for new students, or mentorship programs linking members of the graduating class with students from younger grades. Student councils may or may not be involved with these “outreach” initiatives.

In an effort to explain the disengagement of students with council, one teacher suggested “probably 1/3 of the school doesn’t see enough of their own profile... of their own representation, be it gender, racial, or ethnic in council so they feel disconnected.” It is not clear how this level of disengagement impacts the rate of voter turn-out and, in turn, the ability to use the voting experience to demonstrate the relevance and importance of participating in democratic activities in the wider sphere. It does, however, suggest that student councils play little-if-any role in fostering widespread inclusivity across the student body.

Accountability

It should be noted that the discussion around accountability was limited with all participants. The interview questions related to this key element of democratic governance resulted in fairly standardized responses from the key stakeholders. These responses include council accountability to:

- the electorate: their peers
- student advisors and administration
- the community
- themselves

One particular case study is worth noting in reference to the role, representation and accountability of student councils. The teacher interviewed is now a high school vice principal, but was the former student council advisor at the school for five years. She identified, that during her tenure as advisor, the role of the council was two-fold:

- to give kids an opportunity for leadership; and;
- to give students a voice in the rules of the school and policy decisions.

In this instance, student council had a formal constitution drafted by the students. They attended leadership workshops that educated them about effective leadership styles for various roles within council. Council sought input from their student body on a weekly basis through regularly scheduled classroom visits, administering surveys and through a suggestion box. A representative of the executive was required to attend the teachers' staff meetings providing an update, seeking feedback, suggestions and opinions - but not approval - on issues council was presently working on. Similarly, the principal would schedule monthly "town hall" meetings with the student council and one representative from each class to gather their input and feedback regarding policies open for discussion or renewal, including curriculum developments and school rules that impacted the entire student body. Additionally, the principal would meet weekly with the executive to review their respective projects and positions on policy decisions, ensuring that in this democratic school environment, decision makers were informed parties working together, respectful of the needs and desires of the different groups they represented.

Note: Since her departure from the advisory role, the election process and student council's purpose have changed to be more informal, as has council's level and frequency of interaction with the student body, administrators and teachers. This case study demonstrates the possibilities for involving students in a democratic model within the student council functions, as well as the impact an individual teacher can have on the operations of a school.

D. Connections Between Student Council Activities, Citizenship Education and Wider Civic Engagement

Theory and Practice

It is unanimously held that student councils possess the opportunity to connect with citizenship education. These opportunities, however, are generally viewed as circumstantial and infrequent. Teachers and professionals working in the field provided examples of opportunities connecting citizenship education and student council activities. These examples include:

- administration of election by political science students;
- social studies lesson based on commentary of voting results following student council election, with discussions on voter rates, spoiled ballots, etc.; and,
- sharing of resources between social studies civics teachers and student council advisors specifically with reference to election procedures; rules of order.

Participants noted that it is, in theory, possible to connect student council activities and broader citizenship education. This is not yet naturally or consistently occurring in practice. The connection of theory to real practice is dependent primarily on the interest, knowledge and willingness of staff and administrators to create a school environment that goes beyond instruction and even experience, fostering democratic principles in all aspects of school life. Ultimately, stakeholders noted that the responsibility to identify and create experiential learning opportunities and translate them into actionable and meaningful engagement linked to curriculum lies in the hands of the teachers responsible for instructing civics or social studies.

The most notable exception to the widespread disconnect between theory and practice in Canada is the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant in Québec, mentioned repeatedly throughout this report. The Loi sur l'instruction publique stipulates secondary schools in Québec should have a student council. Since 2005, the Foundation's program Parlements au secondaire "enables schools to respond to the requirements of the Loi to establish a student council while providing a framework for instruction on the Assemblée nationale du Québec and on the democratic processes that guide civic life." Over 190 schools have used the guide and handbook to implement this form of student council government in Québec.

Anecdotal feedback suggests that schools that participate in the Parlements au secondaire program have a greater interest in parliament, are more apt to organize a class visit to the Assemblée nationale du Québec; meet with their local (provincial) Member; and produce students that are more apt to continue their involvement when they enter CEGEP, having developed a 'reflex to be citizens' through their participation in the program.

It should be noted that while this program is a best practice Canadian example of formalized student council activities designed to increase levels of civic education, interest and engagement of participating students, it was not mentioned by stakeholders outside of Québec. This suggests an opportunity to share information, lessons learned and best practice resources about the program in provinces and territories interested in developing similar initiatives.

Many teacher/advisors recognized a more inherent or natural link between the student council, its purpose and activities, and broader themes of citizenship versus direct links to civics education or curriculum; that through voting for, or serving on, council students would be exposed to and have a greater understanding of the rights and obligations of

citizenship, regardless of what is taught in textbooks or in class.

References to this connection include:

- the notion that if you want to see change you have to get involved;
- the duty to vote;
- the value and importance of supporting community organizations and charities;
- creating life-long volunteers through service learning;
- the necessity of remaining connected to current affairs and issues; and;
- “leadership as service” – as a guiding model of student council executives.

One noted professional in the field agreed to the theoretical potential that exists between student councils and broader citizen engagement. He stressed, however, that when assessing the influential nature of many experiential tools currently in practice in schools across the country (i.e. volunteering, student council elections, fundraising activities), the system celebrates its contribution in the creation of “active citizens” when, in reality, its achievements are much more modest. In order for these activities to result in true citizenship engagement, he noted that they must be taken to the “next level – connecting activities in the school to policy debate and development – in an effort to help shape common life together – this is what citizenship is about.”

Experiential Learning – Other examples

Although it is agreed by stakeholders that the act of voting for, and serving on student councils can create opportunities for experiential learning, they also note that there exist other, possibly stronger, more relevant mechanisms of experiential learning for civics education currently at work in most schools. These mechanisms include:

- model parliaments (provincial, national and international models);
- social responsibility clubs and committees including Environment, Students Against Drunk Driving, Debating Club, Leadership Club, etc.;
- citizenship award; and,
- school newspaper (letters to the editor)

Note: the majority of teacher and student council advisor stakeholders referenced model parliaments as the most important and powerful experiential learning opportunity related to citizenship education. This notion is consistent with the successful methodology of the Parlements au secondaire program in Québec, where the student councils themselves are modeled after the provincial National Assembly.

Mechanisms of Support

Teachers and student advisor participants acknowledged that the existence and operation of student councils would not be possible without the support of the school administrators.

Stakeholders cited a number of external support mechanisms or resources that were also deemed best practices in engaging students as citizens and furthering education and awareness around the rights and obligations of citizenry. These resources often include civic and leadership training opportunities for students and professional development programs for teachers and student council advisors.

A list of best practice resources – with participant descriptions, includes:

- Encounters Canada Program – strong (but dated) introduction for students to Ottawa and federal government systems.
- Voyagers Program – Canada’s 125th Anniversary – pairing youth from different federal consistencies to help build a sense of nationhood and citizenship.
- Building Future Voters – Classroom Resources for Alberta (Grade 6-9) designed by the provincial Legislative Assembly that emphasizes voter engagement and includes election simulation tools.
- Citizen’s Voices Website (Governor General) – current issues forum for sharing thoughts and opinions of ‘regular Canadians’ as well as exceptional citizens including members of the Order of Canada and the Governor General herself.
- Federation de la jeunesse canadiennes-francaise – French Canadian program of resources and youth forums to discuss citizen engagement issues from a municipal and federal perspective.
- Elections Canada – Resources for Students, Teachers
- Library of Parliament – Teachers’ Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy – thought of as the most comprehensive training program for teachers but limited in reach and scope.
- Student Vote – highly successful national election education and simulation program.
- Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA) – national conferences that bring “like-minded teachers and kids” together.
- 2005 Congress in the Classroom – American conference for civics teachers (organized by the nationally mandated Department of Education) furthering consistent subject matter knowledge and teaching approaches.

Library of Parliament

Current Challenges

The connection between student council activities and civics education is challenging to many stakeholders because it is not intentionally or explicitly linked through existing curriculum. Any benefit of furthering the objectives of the civics curriculum through the use of student council activities (or vice versa) is often accidental and, arguably, not formally recognized by the students. A significant number of interviewees believe that in order to have significant value as an experiential tool, student councils must take on greater purpose in schools, have obvious policy implications, and connect current affairs of the student body with the wider community.

The challenge most frequently recognized as inhibiting formal connections between student council activities and civics education is inconsistent curriculum content and teaching practices between the provinces. When asked how well Canada is preparing its young people for democratic participation, the overwhelming response was “it’s not, because it can’t” speaking to the provincial jurisdiction of education in this country. However, no interview participants commented on the preparation of students for democratic participation within the provincial or municipal spheres. Additional challenges cited included:

- general lack of interest and perceived value in civics;
- the absence of civics or political science as a ‘teachable’ in teacher training;
- lack of infrastructure for teacher support – time, financial resources, training, professional development;
- rigidity of models, teachers and administrators (rules-based approach) and;
- out-of-field teaching.

It is noted explicitly by some stakeholders that the notion of school as a democratic environment is absent in Canada and that without this, the work of individual teachers, administrators, student councils or even civics curriculum developers will be forever limited. It is challenging for student councils and their related activities to be fully realized as enablers of citizen engagement if the staff, administrators and student leaders of the school do not foster and promote an environment that necessitates the inclusion of students as partners and key decision makers across all areas of student life.

E. Participants' Recommendations

In-service teachers that participated in the interviews generally do not formally recognize or actively use the experiences of electing and serving on students councils as opportunities to demonstrate the concepts of representation, advocacy and civic engagement. However, there was widespread agreement across all key stakeholders of the potential value of utilizing student councils to this end and a willingness of the stakeholders to work toward this objective in the future. In order to do so, participants suggested a number of recommendations:

1) Professional Development for Student Council Advisors

Often, student council advisors are the most engaged teachers in the school. Despite this, they may not be specialists in the field of social studies or civics, making the connection between student council activities and civics education a challenging one. Greater access to learning resources and professional development opportunities, specifically designed for student council advisors (like those offered through the Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors), would be useful.

2) Adequate Training of Civics Teachers

Teachers required to instruct topics including 'government, parliament, and civics' have suggested the need for additional training, referencing the successful Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy program – requesting expansion of this program to reach a greater number of teachers each year. Similar professional development programs could provide suggested learning tools to connect key themes in civics education with student council activities, linking these opportunities more explicitly for participants, and their colleagues.

3) A Dialogue and Forum on Civic Education

Some participants suggested the value of a dialogue on citizen education. This would include the creation of a nationally mandated civics education support mechanism with a centralized portal for learning tools, resources, and best practices. This support mechanism would be useful for all professionals engaged with student council and civics education – and have the means to ensure national awareness of the knowledge and tools listed there.

4) Parliamentarian/Student Programs

Current and former parliamentarians interviewed argued for the enhanced and improved engagement between parliamentarians and students providing meaningful educational opportunities on the subject of careers in politics: expectations, demands, and opportunities connecting curriculum to real life examples and people through the development of targeted programs.

PART 3: CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A. Concluding Observations

Based on the recommendations emerging from the interviews, it is apparent that key stakeholders recognize the value and potential of student councils in promoting civic understanding and engagement, and recommend an improved infrastructure including increased access and variety of training and resources, and coordinated stakeholder engagement (including student council advisors, parliamentarians and students). That said, analysis of the interview findings also demonstrates that some key stakeholders recognize the need for a change in the political climate of schools and structures within it. These changes are fundamental to the success of future citizenship education and engagement efforts in Canada and also reflect current thinking as found in the literature of citizenship education.

A Paradigm Shift: Schools as Democratic Environments

It is generally agreed that the challenge of demonstrating democratic principles through experiential learning in the school environment is challenging because the fundamental nature of these institutions is “undemocratic.” A “practice versus promote” model is required. In order to facilitate this shift, administrators, teachers and parents must surrender some power and areas of decision-making to students, fully integrating them as partners into the policy decisions that affect their daily lives.

Student Councils as Agencies of Student Government

Participants noted the importance of creating opportunities for students to learn and succeed (and fail) by enhancing the purpose, scope and reach of student council activities. For them, it is essential to create challenging and meaningful areas of responsibility connected to policy development and decisions in their school. Only once student councils have genuine authority, with real implications to the operations of the

school, can their ability to demonstrate greater connections to civics education and broader citizen engagement be fully realized.

B. Options for Future Directions

Based on the findings of the key stakeholder interviews, the following three initiatives are suggested as future directions. These suggestions are consistent with international practice highlighted in the literature review, as well as best practice research methodologies for youth engagement.

1. Conduct a detailed analysis of the successful Parlements au secondaire program offered by the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant to provide information to other provinces and territories that may wish to incorporate elements of this model in their own citizenship education programs.
2. Undertake a large-scale initiative of direction and support to help teacher advisors specifically, and schools generally, realize the potential of student councils to promote citizenship awareness and civic engagement. This initiative would also:
 - provide a forum for teachers to exchange professional insights on promoting citizenship and civic engagement especially through student council activities;
 - assist student councils and schools to recognize their responsibility and enhance their ability to engage students with diverse beliefs and values, and involve them in the civic life of the school;
 - assist educators in developing democratic school cultures within which student councils could fulfill their potential.

Note: This multi-layered initiative could be undertaken by an existing body as its own initiative, or as a joint venture with leading Canadian academics associated with Citizen Ed (www.citizened.info) or in partnership with a body such as The Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA).

3. Addressing the need to specifically engage a critical stakeholder (this lay beyond the scope of this initial research phase) - conduct qualitative research with students from across the country - those currently engaged with student councils and existing third party enrichment opportunities as well as youth not presently engaged with student council, school clubs and leadership programs. This research would:

- complement the findings gathered from this preliminary scan, including gaps in theory and practice around issues related to representation and perceived belonging (and related impacts on voting and boarder civic engagement), accountability, and authority
- gather student insight on the recommended paradigm shift to create truly democratic environments in Canadian schools.

This essential phase of the research would offer the opportunity to discuss and “test” some of the proposed recommendations with this critical group of stakeholders.

Appendix A: Literature Review

This top line summary of the literature review is organized using concepts central to the research objective. These concepts include:

1. Civic and Democratic Engagement
2. Citizenship Education
3. Predictors of Adult Civic Engagement
4. Policy Frameworks
5. Student Council Theory and Practice
6. Student Council Case Studies

Canadian and international references have been included where applicable and demonstrate current key findings of this preliminary scan.

Based on this review it is important to note that, although there is ample literature that discusses the importance and complexity of teaching civics education, as well as resources that emphasize the value and benefit of formalized student governments, there is a notable absence of research that discusses the structure or organization of student councils in Canada or demonstrates consideration of them as an experiential tool for the education and development of young citizens.

1. Civic and Democratic Engagement

Canada

- The Institute of Wellbeing defines democratic engagement as “the state of being engaged in advancing democracy through political institutions, organizations and activities.” In this context, democratic engagement is present when there is:
 - Participation in political activities
 - Expression of political views
 - Fostering of political knowledge
- According to Otilia Chareka and Alan Sears, very little is understood about how young people understand the social and political world. Little has been done to map how children and young people understand democratic citizenship.

- In Canada, youth voting rates are commonly held to be in decline. Qualitative work by Chareka and Sears shows that while young people value voting as a “hard-won” right, often seen as a duty or obligation, many do not see their individual vote as having a meaningful impact.

International

- Studies in the U.S. have long shown that rates of voting, joining social groups, and trust in others have declined across generations over the 1900s. Suzanne Soule posits that there is evidence that, while people become more informed and engaged as they mature, Generation X and Y began with the lowest level of interest in politics. Their cohort’s gap in attention to public affairs is greater than it was for previous cohorts.
- Similarly, within the Australian context Saha and Keeves cite the work of Beams which indicates that the under 25 cohort is less likely to vote than older cohorts, despite the compulsory voting legislation across the country. Beams suggests that this is not a generational effect per se rather, it is evidence of a “lifecycle effect” and that the process of this group’s political socialization at this age is “not yet complete.”
- Soule suggests that despite rising levels of education, general public political knowledge is nearly the same in 2001 as it was in 1940. Young people’s understanding of what it means to be a citizen hinges on rights rather than responsibilities.

2. Citizenship Education

Canada

- The framework for citizenship education has changed, and typically does so in line with major social and political changes. In the Canadian context, the rationale for citizenship education has evolved from explicit goals of fostering nationalism (Confederation era), to building a sense of civic obligation and philanthropy (1920s) to education about individual and collective rights. Hundey and Evans emphasize the interconnectedness of political, economic, cultural, and technological in global spheres and the subsequent complexity of mediating the tension between national and regional interests in national cultures.

- In the “Centrality of Critical Thinking in Citizenship Education,” Wright suggests the definition of the elements and values behind citizenship education remains subject to some debate. Citizenship education is now widely held to be a multidimensional concept involving everything from preparing or encouraging social, cultural, and political participation, to equipping students with the abilities to deal with moral disagreements.
- Evans and Hundey position citizenship education within three elements: membership in a community, a set of rights and freedoms, and a corresponding set of obligations.
- Sears and Perry discuss the value of a holistic, multi-faceted approach to civic education stressing that the attitudes taught in civics class must be “reflected in the school’s administration and student government as well.”
- In their article, Evans and Hundey “Education for Citizenship in Canada” identify preferred Learning Goals, expressed by civic teachers from Canada and England in four general areas:
 - Knowledge acquisition and being informed about civic issues;
 - Developing skills required of citizenship;
 - Exploring diverse beliefs, values, and;
 - Notions of social justice and becoming involved in civic life.The authors note that learning goals vary among teachers, possibly suggesting ambiguity around theory and practice in civics education.
- Some studies indicate that voting appears to be a secondary concern of civics educators. Secondary student teachers surveyed between 2001 to 2004 in Ontario and England reported rarely discussing voting in the context of other aspects of citizenship education (such as knowledge of current affairs, exploring diverse beliefs, social justice, and civic participation).
- Sears and Hughes note that there is an emerging international consensus regarding the need to build capacity around citizenship education in four areas:
 - widely accepted goals and outcomes;
 - the development of curriculum material to support teaching and learning in education;
 - the provision of programs for teacher development at both pre- and in-service; and,
 - the funding of research and development in policy and program development around citizenship education.

Sears and Hughes posit that Canada is lagging behind in all these areas and has not had a widespread or in-depth discussion of citizenship education at any level. Civics education varies greatly from province to province (in Canada), with some provinces requiring mandatory civics classes, and others with courses still in development. They state that standards for social studies education are “largely borrowed from the National Council for the Social Studies, an American professional association.”

International

- The Advisory Group on Citizenship Education in England identified three interrelated principles for effective citizenship education:
 - Social and moral responsibility;
 - Community involvement; and;
 - Political literacy – through engagement in decision-making at a local, national and international level. (Deuchar, Ross)
- Ben Kisby and James Sloam state that citizenship education is most effectively taught through interactive approaches, also known as “experiential learning.” They note that traditional approaches to teaching civics resulted in didactic dissemination of “factual knowledge” of the U.K.’s uncodified constitution and systems of law and government. They suggest that without an element of student participation in school life, citizenship education is ultimately undermined. They note that citizenship education should work to build awareness of the complex realities of policy making, the need for compromises that often seem “messy” and the notion that governments need to be realistic about what they can achieve in diverse, pluralistic societies.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress from 1998 contains a Civic Assessment that indicated 35% of American high school seniors scored nearly total civic ignorance. (Glaston, W.A.)

3. Predictors of Adult Civic Engagement

International

- Verba and Schlozman indicate that the two strongest predictors for adult political and “associational engagement” were participation in high school student councils and high school membership in clubs.

- Youniss, McLellan and Yates also propose that participation in organized groups during adolescence is central to instilling a sense of community and citizenship. Two reasons are given: organized group participation helps introduce young people to the basic roles and processes required for adult civic engagement and organized group participation facilitates the incorporation of the identity required to mediate adult engagement.
- Similarly, Hanks and Eckland's study from 1978 of 1867 individuals contacted in high school and then again 15 years later illustrates that participation in extracurricular activities resulted in adult volunteering, as well as trust in the political process and voting.
- In Adam Fletcher's guide for students and educators, he suggests that meaningful student involvement is a process of engaging students as partners "across every aspect of school change in order to strengthen their commitment to education, community and democracy." He claims that creating opportunities for students to work as partners in the school, including as systemic decision makers, will result in the promotion of academic achievement, supportive learning environments and lifelong civic engagement.

4. Policy Frameworks

International

- A number of international constitutional developments have tried to ensure young people's involvement in political decision-making: European Youth Parliament, and National Youth Parliaments in the Caribbean and New Zealand. In 2000, the U.K. government created the Cabinet Committee for Children and Youth People which was combined with the creation of the Scottish Youth Parliament and Scottish Civic Forum to focus on power sharing, accountability, access, participation and equal opportunities (Deuchar).
- European countries with legal frameworks for student participation in schools include Denmark – Act on Democracy, Ireland's Education Act 1998 and Holland's Education Participation Act 1998 (Deuchar).

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes reference to the need for democratic approaches to children’s participation in school (Articles 12-14.) (Deuchar).
- February 2010 saw the creation of a new student council Award, launched by the U.K. Parliament that will recognize “the achievements of student councils, particularly where they have made a difference to a school or local community or to the environment.” Commons representatives have contacted each school in the U.K. to notify them of the award program and encourage school participation.

5. Student Council Theory and Practice

Canada

- In Evans’ study “Education of Citizenship,” one third of Canadian teacher respondents cited encouraging students to express their voices through involvement in student councils as a means to nurture “conditions for student involvement and inclusion in the classroom.” In this instance, the benefits of participating in student council relates to overall participation in the school setting and the involvement of the students in the classroom.

International

- McFarland and Starmanns (US) outline a variety of dependent variables that reflect the quality of student governments. These include:
 - Constitutional charter;
 - Expressed council purpose;
 - Governmental format;
 - Membership exclusivity;
 - Student empowerment; and;
 - Faculty controls.
- Implementation of student councils varies widely even within similar jurisdictions. McFarland and Starmanns find that student councils are variably organized by school charters, income levels, and ethno-cultural identity of student populations. Elite public schools and private religious schools have the most active councils, with more powers and relatively low faculty oversight. Impoverished schools and those with “disadvantaged minorities” are less likely to have councils, or have ones that only organize

social functions. The authors speculate that this variance has implications for the political socialization of young people in the U.S.

- To explain the significant level of voter disengagement between young Americans and those in their 60s, Suzanne Soule suggests referencing student government as an example of a key formative experience. In 2001, Jennings and Stoker stated that there are fewer opportunities for young Americans to practice politics in high school student government – only 27% of adults now aged 18-30 ran for elected office in high school.
- In his article Deuchar frames student councils as a means to extend “participative, consultative environments” central to successful civics education past the individual teacher and classroom to the entire school. However, Deuchar suggests that questions still linger around the educational practices or potential that surround councils.
- Print, Ornstrom and Nielsen position student councils as a critical part of informal curriculum (along with visits to parliament, and political activities in school). The importance of the informal curriculum is elevated due in part to the inconsistent and “problematic” nature of the formal curriculum when viewed holistically across the country. More informal mechanisms and structures might offer the “best hope for a more sustained understanding and engagement, as in the case of Scandinavian countries.”
- In his article “Connecting Youth Political Participation and Civic Education in Schools” Print proposes that the first step for civics education needs to come from more standardized school curriculum, though informal curriculum needs to play an important role. Print isolates two types of informal activities: instrumental (student governance, debating, student elections, fundraising, political clubs), and expressive (sports, clubs, bands, social activities). A growing body of literature links informal participation with later civic participation. The Yes Survey undertaken by Saha, Print, and Edwards in Australia indicates that students who vote in student elections are significantly more likely to vote, while those who run for office are even more significantly likely to vote. Taking a course on government, however, was not shown to significantly increase the likelihood of voting.

6. Student Council Case Studies

Canada

- Parlements au secondaire: Since 2005, the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant in Québec has offered secondary schools a new model of student councils designed to replicate the structure and process of the Québec National Assembly. This model is based on teaching and experiencing the following democratic values: “freedom of speech, respect of others’ opinions, art of compromise, solidarity, justice, tolerance, equality and the right to vote and access to information.” There are no political parties under this model.
- The foundation has prepared a guide for interested schools that is an educational tool and assists with the implementation of this form of government. The Guide highlights four transferable competencies that students can develop through their participation in the program including: intellectual, methodological, personal and social. The Guide also outlines related processes including elections and voting, and the adoption of a bill, among others.
- In cooperation with the Québec National Assembly, registered schools can receive technical and professional support which includes a one-day educational session for school staff advisors and students at the National Assembly.
- To date, the program has not been critically assessed for its impact in affecting students’ perceptions of democratic engagement or exposure to this model and subsequent levels of civic engagement in adulthood. Further analysis is required.

International

- There is some descriptive literature on the extent to which student councils are implemented in the U.K. There, almost all secondary schools (97%) have elected student councils, according to Whitty, Wisby and Diack. Surveys of teachers and principals indicate that they feel students are consulted in the development of school rules, and use student councils as the mechanism for doing this. Over half, however, reported that student councils were restricted from discussing specific topics (members of staff, individual pupils, uniforms, length of school days, curriculum content, and disciplinary matters). Typical agenda items related to issues such as toilets, canteen matters, and uniform. Study authors point to case studies demonstrating the diversity of student council constitution, election, and responsibility, ranging from open volunteer councils with primarily social function organization

duties to elected councils tasked with responsibilities for interviewing prospective teachers. Authors state that implications arising from their study include:

- ensuring a clear objective for student councils prior to implementing them;
- the critical importance of teacher support of growing student voice; and;
- the need to link student council activity to broader civics curriculum.

These implications highlight the critical steps needed to make student council experiences effective pedagogical tools for citizenship education.

Appendix B: Interview Guides

Questions for Teachers /Student Council Advisors

- Description of current student council structure and role (5-7 minutes)
 - How are people selected to serve on student council at your school?
 - How would you describe the purpose of student council? How effective is it at this purpose?
 - How are decisions made within student council? Take us through a key decision made and how it was done.
 - What is the government structure of your student council? Is there a parliamentary tradition / system that is the model for the student council?
 - What are the guiding procedures or rules of order?
 - Describe (if possible) any formal mandate / school constitution / charter that outlines the role of student councils in school affairs.
 - How are jurisdictional issues or conflicts resolved?
 - Do student councilors regularly seek the opinion of those they represent? How do they gather these opinions?
 - How do other students make their opinions or concerns known to student councilors?

- Understanding of representation (3-5 minutes)
 - Who do you feel your council represents? Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are left out?
 - How does the school address the issue of those who are left out?
 - Who is student council accountable to?
 - Are there different levels of involvement in student council? Can students be involved without serving or getting elected?

- Connection to civics education and democratic engagement (5-7 minutes)
 - Do you feel student council's activities are relevant to broader studies in civics? Why or why not?

- Do you see any links between student council activities and civic action in the school and the wider community? Can you provide any examples?
- Do you feel that the student council in your school helps prepare both student council members and the general school population for participation in a democratic society following school? Should it? Why or why not?
- Connection to supervision, external resources (5-7 minutes)
 - What role do you play for student council? What role do most teachers play?
 - Have you received any professional development resources or training on civics education or student council organization in preparation for your interaction with student council? What are these sources or programs? How well do they work? Which work best?
 - What type of resources or professional development would you like to have access to? Why?
- Questions for teachers of civics (7-10 minutes)
 - How is the concept of political representation typically dealt with in the curriculum?
 - What are the key formative experiences in developing an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?
 - How can involvement in student councils help develop an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?
 - What additional opportunities exist to connect student council activities to civics education and broader democratic engagement?
 - What are the practical ways in which this could happen?
 - What are the key challenges in making these connections?
 - Can these challenges be overcome? If so, how?
 - Student council involvement is an example of experiential learning in citizenship education. Can you provide any other examples of experiential learning taking place in your civics classroom or your school?

Questions for Students

- Description of current student council structure and role (5 -7 minutes)
 - How are people selected to serve on council at your school?
 - How would you describe the purpose of student council? How effective is it at this purpose?
 - How are decisions made within student council?
 - How are conflicts resolved?
 - What are the biggest challenges for your council?

- Understanding of representation (5-7 minutes)
 - Who do you feel your council represents?
 - Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are left out?
 - What kind of student typically gets involved?
 - Who is student council accountable to?
 - How do you determine the opinion or concerns of those you represent?
 - How do other students make their opinions or concerns known to student councilors? (Probe for stories about the election, if there are any ongoing “community” consultations, lobbying by students etc.)

- Perception of the connection to civics education and democratic engagement (5-7 minutes)
 - Did you exercise your right to vote in the last student council election? Why or why not?
 - Does student council help prepare you for understanding how parliaments and governments work? If so how?
 - In what way is a student council like a parliament or a municipal council? In what ways is it different?
 - How would you describe the relationship between student council and civics class?
 - Does the student council support other student projects that improve the school community (e.g., peer mentoring, anti-bullying)?
 - Does the student council support community projects outside of the school?

- Connection to supervision, external resources (5-7 minutes)
 - How would you describe the level of teacher support or control over student council? What role do teachers play?
 - How are conflicts resolved?
 - Does council receive any support or guidance outside of the school's teachers? If so, describe.

- Personal motivations – students that are engaged (participate on) (5-7 minutes)
 - Describe your personal connection to student council. What is your role?
 - How and why did you get involved in student council?
 - In your opinion what is the best aspect about being involved in student council?
 - What skills are you learning as a member of council?
 - What would school life be like without student council?
 - What would you like to see council do more of? Less of?
 - Has your involvement affected how you view the work of federal, provincial or municipal governments? If so, can you give me some examples?

- Personal motivations – students that are NOT engaged (5-7 minutes)
 - Describe your personal connection to student council.
 - Why did you not get involved in student council?
 - What changes to student council might cause you to get involved?
 - What skills do you think student council members are learning?
 - What would school life be like without student council?
 - What would you like to see council do more of? Less of?
 - Are you involved in any activities that improve the school community?

Questions for Professional Development / Research Professionals:

- Assessment of Canada's current efforts in citizenship education (15 minutes)
 - How would you assess Canada's current activity around citizenship education?
 - What is working? What is not?
 - How well is Canada preparing its young people for democratic participation? Why or why not?
 - How well are other countries doing in the field of civics education and democratic participation of young people?
 - What are some success stories / case studies we should be aware of?
 - Is the concept of political representation and representative government typically dealt with in curriculum materials? If so, how?

- Theoretical / pedagogical connections between student councils and civics (15 minutes)
 - What are the key formative experiences for students in developing an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?
 - How would you describe the purpose of student councils in developing this understanding?
 - student council involvement is an example of experiential learning in citizenship education. Can you provide any other examples of effective experiential learning taking place in schools?
 - How would you assess the current opportunity to connect student councils to civics education and broader democratic engagement?
 - What are the practical ways in which this could happen?
 - What are the key challenges in making these connections?
 - Can these challenges be overcome? If so, how?

Questions for Current and Former Parliamentarians:

- Connections between past student council participation and political / parliamentary involvement (7-10 minutes)
 - Were you involved in student council during your junior/high school years? Why or why not?
 - What was the government structure or organization of your student council? Were any parliamentary models used?
 - How were people selected to serve on council at your school? If they were elected, how did the elections operate?
 - How would you describe the purpose of student council? How effective was it at this purpose? What challenges were there? How were they resolved?
 - As a student councilor what did you learn about the responsibilities of being a representative of a constituency?
 - Did your involvement or interaction with student council affect your interest in politics or the Canadian parliament? Why or why not?
 - Would you describe student council as a key formative experience in how young people are introduced to representative governance? Why or why not?

- Understanding the current context for youth engagement (7-10 minutes)
 - How would you describe the degree to which younger Canadians are engaged by parliamentary or representative government? Are they apathetic? Disenfranchised? Or are their perceptions / contributions unrecognized? Why is this the case?
 - What are some key messages young people need to understand about the function of political representation and the obligations of citizenship?
 - What role might student councils play in communicating these key messages? How might student councils be modified so as to allow young people better to understand these key messages?
 - In what other ways do you think they could learn / experience these key messages?
 - What tools or resources are needed?
 - What are the key skills young Canadians will need to become truly engaged in political democracy?
 - as voters?
 - as political party members?
 - as political leaders?
 - What are the key formative experiences in developing an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?
 - How can involvement in student councils help develop an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?
 - What additional opportunities exist to connect student council activities to civics education and broader democratic engagement?
 - What are the key formative experiences for students in developing an understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship?

- Interest among former Parliamentarians in student councils (7-10 minutes)
 - To what extent do you think current or former parliamentarians can contribute to the development of student councils as vehicles for promoting citizenship education and democratic engagement?
 - How willing would they be to participate? What would their participation consist of?

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