



Student Leadership: A High Performance Teams Approach

The Other School Leadership Team...

Having just returned from the school assembly the principal sat down for their executive coaching session. After reviewing their leadership update tool and the key successes and challenges, the conversation turned towards the student leadership committee (SLC).

"I really want our student leaders to move beyond gold-coin donation dress up days. I want our school to tap into the latent potential and significant influence that these student leaders could bring instead of seeing them as custodians of simplistic reward and recognition programs....."

Student Voice: Deeper Levels of Authentic Collaboration

.... What I really want is to engage my student leaders in some of our big school improvement priorities – especially our student wellbeing agenda. I want to give them genuine ownership and influence in how we move forwards as a school. I want my executive leadership team and middle leaders to recognise the legitimacy of the student leadership committee and consultant with them and use them as key advisors in driving cultural change in our school...."

".... I want our student leaders to work as a [High Performance Leadership Team](#) – just like we do. I want them to have high energy solution focused meetings – tackling all the issues that really matter to them. I want them to be able to develop an action plan

and be able to implement this across the calendar year. I want them to have access to relevant data about our school culture and be able to adapt and adjust strategy as they go. I want them to have insights into the complexities of communication and how to meet the needs of the mix of personalities on their committee, in their classrooms and even be able to manage up their teachers and leaders....”

Student Leaders & Wellbeing: Playing A Critical Role in School Improvement

Ensuring every student can flourish sits at the heart of becoming a ‘High Performance School’ (defined as a place where all staff and students can flourish). When we think about the core purpose of schools, two of the fundamental priorities schools must address are (1) providing quality teaching & learning and (2) supporting the wellbeing for students and staff.

When we think about Student Wellbeing in a school setting, it is [best understood through the lens of student self-efficacy \(SSE - students’ self-belief in their ability to get work done, improve over time, ask for help when needed, and stay motivated\)](#). Indeed, it could be argued that boosting student self-efficacy should be THE number one priority for modern school leaders. Sadly, there is one cohort of school leaders that are often absent from the student self-efficacy conversation (even though they, more than any other leadership group could provide the greatest level of insight) – student leaders.

The Challenge of School Leadership: Student Leadership Committees

I really appreciate the honesty and directness that students can bring to their conversations. It was nearly time to begin the workshop, as I was setting up for the day, the newly minted student leaders who had assembled early began to chat amongst themselves...

“I know I’m supposed to be a leader but I’m not really sure how I can best contribute... the Student Leaders from past years have done a lot of fundraising but I want to have a different kind of impact and legacy”...

“I was really excited to be given a leadership role at the end of last year, but now my assignments are piling up, I’m not sure how I’m going to juggle this?”...

“We’re all so different, how will we possibly get along?”...

This brief exchange between the Student Leaders encapsulated the many challenges that members of Student Leadership Committees (SLC’s) face in enacting their role:

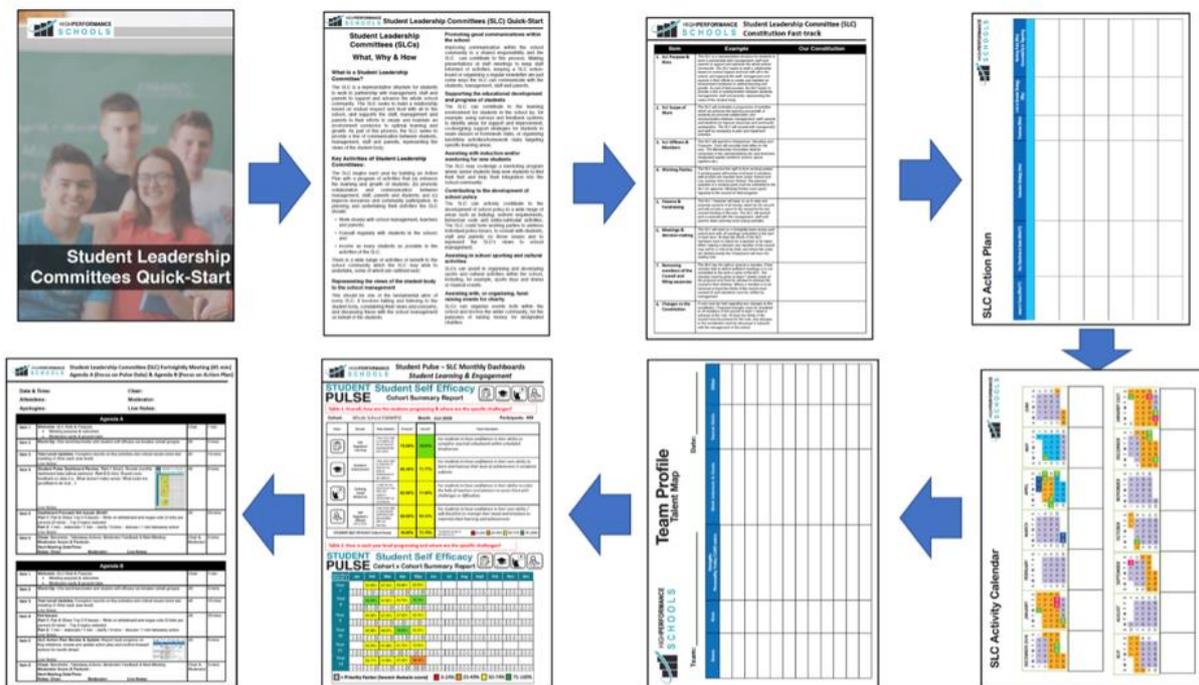
- **Tokenism vs Integrated Part of School Governance Systems** – Many SLC’s are run as leadership teams in title only. They exist because ‘every’ school has one, and rather than being consulted with, they are often directed by a senior member of staff as to what activities they should focus on (usually fundraising),

or simply given the template of what the previous year's cohort did and asked to rinse and repeat.

- **Lack of Role and Scope Clarity** – Where SLC's are given freedom they often suffer from ill-defined role and scope, resulting in the group either biting off too much and becoming overwhelmed, or too little and becoming unfulfilled. Further, a lack of individual accountability usually results in group based non-discussion making, with planning of critical group actions only happening at the 11th hour resulting in unnecessary stress.
- **Personality Clashes** – While Student Leaders are usually amongst the most conscientious and respectful of the whole student population, they are not immune from personality clashes (which can become even more pronounced when a group of highly passionate people with lots of ideas to share come together).

These common issues impact not only the effectiveness of SLC's but also the enjoyment of the students involved (not a great experience for first time leaders).

Feeling their uneasiness, I spoke up... *“Hi everyone, I couldn't help but overhear your concerns just now... Actually, the reason I'm here is that your principal shares many of the same concerns. Is it ok if I show you how we plan to address these, and turn your SLC into a High Performance Team ready for a great year?... Let's do a quick walk through the Student Leadership Committee Quick-Start ”...*



Student Leadership Committees (SLC) Quick-Start Overview



Student Leadership Committees (SLCs)

What, Why & How

What is a Student Leadership Committee?

The SLC is a representative structure for students to work in partnership with management, staff and parents to support and advance the whole school community. The SLC seeks to build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust with all in the school, and supports the staff, management and parents in their efforts to create and maintain an environment conducive to optimal learning and growth. As part of this process, the SLC seeks to provide a line of communication between students, management, staff and parents, representing the views of the student body.

Key Activities of Student Leadership Committees:

The SLC begins each year by building an Action Plan with a program of activities that (a) enhance the learning and growth of students; (b) promote collaboration and communication between management, staff, parents and students; and (c) improve resources and community participation. In planning and undertaking their activities the SLC should:

- Work closely with school management, teachers and parents;
- Consult regularly with students in the school; and
- Involve as many students as possible in the activities of the SLC.

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

Representing the views of the student body to the school management

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

Promoting good communications within the school

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

Supporting the educational development and progress of students

The SLC can contribute to the learning environment for students in the school by, for example, using surveys and feedback systems to identify areas for support and improvement, co-designing support strategies for students in exam classes or homework clubs, or organising lunchtime activities/homework clubs targeting specific learning areas.

Assisting with induction and/or mentoring for new students

The SLC may co-design a mentoring program where senior students help new students to find their feet and help their integration into the school community.

Contributing to the development of school policy

The SLC can actively contribute to the development of school policy in a wide range of areas such as bullying, uniform requirements, behaviour code and extra-curricular activities. The SLC could form working parties to address individual policy issues, to consult with students, staff and parents on those issues and to represent the SLC's views to school management.

Assisting in school sporting and cultural activities

SLCs can assist in organising and developing sports and cultural activities within the school, including, for example, sports days and drama or musical events.

Assisting with, or organising, fund-raising events for charity

SLCs can organise events both within the school and involve the wider community, for the purposes of raising money for designated charities.

As you can see, we think that a well-run SLC is an important representative structure for students to work in partnership with management, staff and parents to support and advance the whole school community. While every school and therefore SLC may be a little different, a well-rounded SLC directs their focus between:

1. Representing the views of the student body to the school management
2. Promoting good communications within the school
3. Supporting the educational development and progress of students
4. Assisting with induction and/or mentoring for new students
5. Contributing to the development of school policy
6. Assisting in school sporting and cultural activities
7. Assisting with, or organising, fund-raising events for charity

Student Leadership Committee (SLC) Constitution Fast-track

In leadership it's never too early to learn about good governance. In order to hit the ground running, and to have a clear path forward for the group should any issues arise, it is vital that SLCs form a set of ground rules by establishing a constitution. Typically, this would include specific elements related to:

1. SLC Purpose & Aims
2. SLC Scope of Work
3. SLC Officers & Members
4. Working Parties: Responsibilities & Membership Requirements
5. Finance & Fundraising
6. Meetings & decision-making
7. Removing members of the Council and filling vacancies
8. Changes to the Constitution

Student Leadership Committee Meeting Agendas

Given the limited amount of time available for most SLCs to meet, using meeting time well is a must. This is where structured agendas involving clear ground rules and roles (e.g., chair and moderator), meeting icebreakers that reconnect the group, updates from working parties, the chance to address emerging 'hot issues', a regular focus on the committee's action plan, Dashboard Reviews, and a meeting close that drives towards next steps can be a life saver. Many SLC's find great value in using alternating agendas (as below) to ensure equal focus on the group's core priorities across the term.



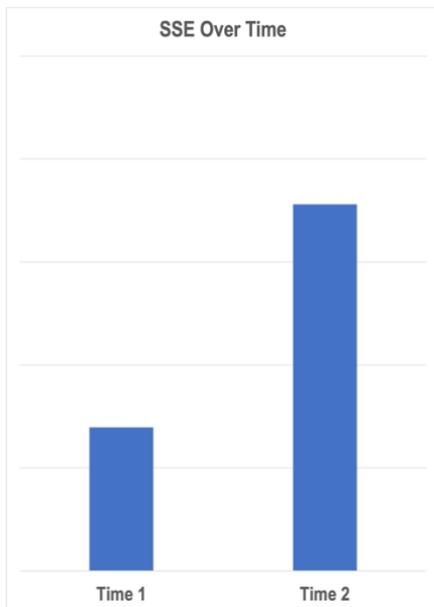
Student Leadership Committee (SLC) Fortnightly Meeting (45 min) Agenda A (Focus on Pulse Data) & Agenda B (Focus on Action Plan)

Date & Time: _____ **Chair:** _____
Attendees: _____ **Moderator:** _____
Apologies: _____ **Live Notes:** _____

Agenda A			
Item 1	Welcome: SLC Role & Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting purpose & outcomes Moderator cards & ground rules 	Chair	1 min
Item 2	Warm-Up: One word barometer and student self-efficacy ice-breaker (small groups)	All	3 mins
Item 3	Year Level Updates: Exception reports on key activities and critical issues since last meeting (1-2min each year level) <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	10 mins
Item 4	Student Pulse Dashboard Review: Part 1 (3min): Review monthly dashboard data (elbow partners). Part 2 (5 min): Round room feedback on data (i.e., What doesn't make sense; What looks too good/bad to be true...)  <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	8 mins
Item 5	Dashboard Focused Hot Issues (Brief): Part 1: Pair & Share Top 2-3 Issues – Write on whiteboard and vegas vote (5 ticks per person) (2 mins) – Top 3 topics selected: Part 2: 1 min – elaborate / 1 min – clarify / 3 mins – discuss / 1 min takeaway action <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	20 mins
Item 6	Close: Barometer, Takeaway Actions, Moderator Feedback & Next Meeting Moderator Score (5 Factors): Next Meeting Date/Time: Roles: Chair: _____ Moderator: _____ Live Notes: _____	Chair & Moderator	3 mins

Agenda B			
Item 1	Welcome: SLC Role & Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting purpose & outcomes Moderator cards & ground rules 	Chair	1 min
Item 2	Warm-Up: One word barometer and student self-efficacy ice-breaker (small groups)	All	3 mins
Item 3	Year Level Updates: Exception reports on key activities and critical issues since last meeting (1-2min each year level) <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	10 mins
Item 4	Hot Issues: Part 1: Pair & Share Top 2-3 Issues – Write on whiteboard and vegas vote (5 ticks per person) (2 mins) – Top 3 topics selected: Part 2: 1 min – elaborate / 1 min – clarify / 3 mins – discuss / 1 min takeaway action <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	20 mins
Item 5	SLC Action Plan Review & Update: Report back progress on Key initiatives, review and update action plan and confirm forward actions for month ahead  <i>Live Notes:</i>	All	8 mins
Item 6	Close: Barometer, Takeaway Actions, Moderator Feedback & Next Meeting Moderator Score (5 Factors): Next Meeting Date/Time: Roles: Chair: _____ Moderator: _____ Live Notes: _____	Chair & Moderator	3 mins

Empowering SLC: The Impact of Tools and Training



While it logically makes sense that providing SLCs with Tools and Training around increasing clarity and structure would assist in improving their performance, what is the real impact of such initiatives?

To answer this question, in a school setting it makes most sense to return to the concept of student-self efficacy (SSE - students' self-belief in their ability to get things done, improve over time, ask for help when needed, and stay motivated). When we do so, it's clear that SLCs experience a notable uplift in SSE when following up post High Performance Leadership Team training and implementation. This makes sense given the SLCs enhanced skills, tools and strategies boost their ability to have a higher impact in their role to ensure that every student flourishes!

Bringing it Together...

Without question Student Wellbeing is a fundamental priority within schools. As we've seen in the brief case study above, student leaders (an often under-utilised leadership cohort), if empowered with the right tools, strategies and communication channels can lead significant improvement efforts in this domain. What role do student leaders play in your school? Is having a student leaders group a 'tick box' exercise with some patronising long established low impact responsibilities OR are student leaders treated as 'real leaders' - engaged in important school improvement activities with high impact responsibilities.

If you'd like your student leaders to take a High Performance Teams approach towards everything they do [you can download the Student Leadership Committees Quick-Start Guide here](#) or get in touch to find out more.