

Develop a strong leadership culture in your school

Schools with the most effective student leadership programs have managed to establish a culture of student leadership. That is, the whole staff know and understand what student leadership is about and leadership becomes not just integrated into the curriculum but ingrained in the 'way we do things' as a school.

A school that has developed a culture of student leadership has the following features:

Teachers are facilitators of leadership experiences

For leadership to be effective teachers need to step back and allow students in. It can be a little scary stepping back to allow students to not only have a voice but to take some real responsibilities.

There is succession in the air

Ideas and learning are passed on from one group of students to another and from one leadership group to another. Somehow things are organised so that succession occurs between the group leaving the group who is arriving.

Mentoring is a feature

Mentoring is one the most efficient ways to accelerate student leadership development in a school or class. There are four domains of mentoring to be practised including being a mentee, being a mentor, passing on learnings and leaving a legacy.

There is a language of leadership in the school

Leadership has its proprietary language, which is evident in schools and classrooms that focus on leadership. Students use terms and phrase such as: "Is this a job I should delegate or can I do it myself?" "I've got to get my team moving in the right direction." "That's a problem I can't solve by myself." Students think 'we' not 'me' when there is culture and a language of leadership in a school.

Major student-initiated events happen

In schools that promote leadership, teachers encourage their students to think in a service-oriented or problem-solving way. It's usually evidenced by some ongoing projects that benefit others either inside or outside the school.

Student leaders are visible

Whether they wear badges or hold formal positions there are some students that take leadership roles who are highly visible as well as highly influential. Leadership doesn't occur in a vacuum. Student leaders need to not only do something that impacts, but need to be seen by many to be leading.

Some adult-oriented events are handed over

Do you have any iconic events in your school that are organised by students? Student-run assemblies are one way to give student opportunities to do some real leading in a public way. There are many other activities that student leaders can ably do from meeting and greeting visitors to a school to organising lunch-time quiz or games events for younger years.

Roles are rotated

How long does a student fulfil a particular role? Some positions such as sport captaincy have a limited lifespan while others, such as house captaincy and SRC representation may last a year or more. By shortening the life of a leadership role schools open up leadership opportunities for others.

Some schools have a rapid rotation of student roles – no role lasts more than half a school year. Even the prestigious position of school captain is rotated so that the maximum number of students have opportunities to participate. Rotation of leadership activities can happen on a short-term or even weekly basis. Sports leaders who deliver a report at assembly or write up a report for the school or class newsletter can change each week. So too can student monitors or those who have school yard responsibilities.

These are just some features shared by schools that focus on developing a culture of student leadership. How does your school measure up?