

"Election time can be a stressful time for both students and advisors. It's a risky thing for a student to put him or herself forward and risk losing. Sometimes when a student loses, it's easier to blame the process than to accept that voters preferred another candidate. Advisors who don't carefully control the election process to assure fairness for all candidates and promotion of the democratic process open themselves and their school to possible criticism from students, faculty, and parents."

The above statement is quoted from Sue Dowty, "Election Methods," *Leadership for Student Activities*, NASSP, November 1996.

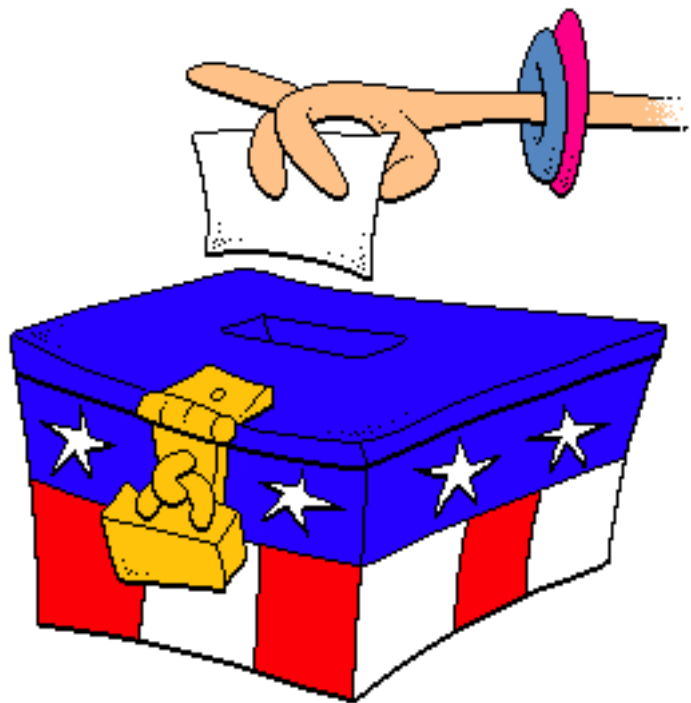
This sample packet has been assembled as a guide for advisors conducting elections. Schools should carefully evaluate their election procedures, examine their constitution, and meet with the administration before adapting election procedures.

Student Government provides an "opportunity for young people to become active and informed citizens of the communities in which they live. It is essential that students be given meaningful opportunities to participate in the governance of the school community." (NCSS Guidelines and Principles for Student Government)

Contact Karen Crawford for election packet samples from schools

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Elections

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Position for which you are applying: _____

Elections packet Due Date: _____

Dear Student Government Association Candidate:

Thank you for expressing your intention of running for a Student Government Association (SGA) office. As the faculty advisor to the SGA, I feel that it is important that you be aware of the commitment you will be accepting if you win. First, academically, the Montgomery County Board of Education requires that students involved in extracurricular activities maintain a 2.0 grade point average (with no more than one failing grade). An SGA officer often must miss classes to attend countywide meetings, general assembly meeting, meetings with the principal and other special training sessions. Although I prefer meetings to be scheduled before and after school, there is a certain amount of class work that SGA officers miss and are expected to make up. When meetings are before and after school, class work is not affected, but you will need to have arrangements for transportation (if there is no activity bus). In addition, an SGA officer is a representative leader in the school, therefore expected to exhibit model citizenship. You will be held to a higher standard of behavior by both staff and students.

Secondly, one of the hardest lessons to learn is the ability to recognize when you are overextended. Some students who become actively involved in SGA are also involved in other activities. I would ask that you seriously consider the time, commitment, and responsibility that you are willing and able to accept!

Please call (_____) or email (_____) me if you have any questions or concerns about a specific office or item that I have mentioned. In this packet, there are a lot of other items that you will need to read carefully. I highly suggest that you discuss your candidacy with your parents. Please remember that being an SGA officer is really and invaluable "hands on " educational learning experience.

Sincerely,

SGA Advisor

I have discussed the responsibilities and commitment of being a student government leader with
my son/daughter.

_____ *parent signature*

_____ *date*

Note: Positions that are not filled by election (i.e. qualified candidates have not applied) will be re-opened after the election as an applied position. Candidates running for other offices will be given the first opportunity to apply for the position. The principal, with the input of the SGA advisor, will select the officer.

All pages in this packet should remain together and be returned as an entire application.

Candidate's Name _____ Current Grade Level _____

Running for Executive Board (circle one): President 8th grade VP 7th grade VP 6th grade VP

Recommended appointed positions: Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Historian, Committee Directors (Advocacy Director, Financial, Citizenship Director (character education type liaison), public relations director, publicity director, service director, social director, spirit director....then you can also have deputy directors – these would be listed in the Constitution Bylaws)

Elections will take place on May (Sept) XX, 200X throughout the day. Election results will be announced to candidates on May (Sept) XX, 200X at a special conference with the principal in the principal's conference room at X:XX am. The actual vote count will not be release - just the results. Candidates must win their position by majority vote. In the event that there are more than two candidates for any given office, preferential ballots (rank ordering preferences) will be used. A team of adults appointed by the principal will count ballots.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT APPLICATIONS SGA EXECUTIVE BOARD

1. APPLICATIONS.

- Completed applications (this entire packet) must be **handed** to the SGA advisor at or before 3:30 pm on May (Sept) XX, 200X

2. CAMPAIGNING

- Candidates will be allowed five posters:
 - One (no larger than 3 feet by 3 feet) in the lobby. Posters on the lobby windows must be hung with painter's tape. Please ask the SGA if you need painter's tape.
 - One (no larger than 4 feet by 3 feet) on the balcony over-hanging the student commons area. This poster must be tied to the railing. (Candidates may get bulletin board paper from the SGA advisor)
 - The remaining three posters (not to exceed standard poster board size) may be hung in the cafeteria, physical education wing, and media center lobby.
 - Posters may be put up beginning May (Sept) XX and must be removed by the end of the day on May (Sept) XX.
- No stickers or magnets are permitted.
- All flyers must be approved by the SGA advisor prior to distribution.
- Candidates must turn in a final statement of all campaign materials that were posted/distributed.
- *Optional - spending limit (if allowing candy, pencils, tee-shirts, mailings, etc.)*

3. SPEECHES: *(specify audio or video - schools may choose to play an audio tape over the PA)*

- Will be taped May (Sept) XX through XX by appointment - sign up for a time slot in the media center
- Must be approved prior to taping (submit a typed transcript attached to the back of this application)
- Speech Length: President, 3 minutes; Vice Presidents, 2 minutes

4. ELIGIBILITY

- Candidates must be academically eligible on the report card issued after the X marking period (*3rd marking period for May elections – 4th quarter the previous year for fall elections*)
- Candidates must demonstrate a high level of behavioral ethics (model citizenship)
- If elected, candidates must remain academically and behaviorally eligible for their entire term or will forfeit their office.

5. TERMS OF OFFICE

- Elected officers will shadow the current officers and will assume responsibilities of position at the "passing of the gavel" and induction ceremony at the beginning of June. They will serve until the following June ceremony. *(For fall elections - elected officers will assume responsibilities of position following the announcement of the election results)*

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS:

- Promote a positive attitude towards our school community
- Act as a role model (model citizen) at all times
- Encourage student involvement in school activities
- Act as a link between the student body and staff members
- Keep open communications with other executive board members and the SGA advisor
- Complete project planning forms concerning events for which they are responsible
- Submit all appropriate forms (publicity, officer report, auditor's forms, etc.) in a timely manner
- Generate agendas for general assembly, committee meetings, etc. as appropriate
- Attend all executive board and general assemblies
- Participate in the organization and attendance at SGA sponsored activities
- OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES AS OUTLINED IN THE SGA CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

I, _____, am applying to run for the SGA executive office of _____. I agree to mount a serious campaign and serve out my term if elected. I also agree to all of the rules posted in this packet.

I intend to serve my office in the Student Government Association's Executive Board with the utmost respect for the office I serve. I understand that as an SGA officer I will be expected to serve a minimum of (post a reasonable list here: sample - two lunch periods per week, a few Saturdays for leadership conferences, and attend a minimum of one after-school meeting per week). In addition, I understand that I will be required to participate in related events during the school day both in and out of school.

I understand that I must remain academically eligible and demonstrate a high level of behavior ethics (model citizenship) for my entire term or I will forfeit my office.

_____ *student signature*

_____ *date*

_____ *printed name*

_____ *student ID#*

The following signatures are required. With each signature, aspects of your office will be discussed.

COUNSELOR –

This candidate has met the BOE required 2.0 to participate in extra curricular activities. We have discussed the priorities of school work, academic honesty, and education as a priority.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

GRADE LEVEL ADMINISTRATOR –

This candidate has demonstrated a high level of behavioral ethics this year. This student understands that he/she will be representing our school as a model citizen at all times.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Note: Teacher recommendations are NOT recommended. If a teacher has an issue with a candidate, he/she should talk to the grade level administrator. If there is an issue, then the administrator, counselor, SGA advisor should meet with the candidate/parent to address the concern. Criminals are given three strikes before they are out – we know that students base many decisions on emotions....let's use poor decisions as a teaching opportunity, not a black-ball to drum the student out before they even have a chance!)

Notification of Your Right to Participate:

Presidential Debates, Thursday and Friday May (Sept) XX-XX, 200X

Candidates for the office of Executive Board President are invited to participate in two debates scheduled for Thursday, May (Sept) XX, 200X during A and B lunches, then again on Friday, May (Sept) XX, 200X for C and D lunches. The debates will be held in room XX on Thursday and XX on Friday. They will be open to a limited number of students who sign up at lunch. Candidates are expected to dress appropriately. Interested candidates should talk to the SGA advisor for more details.

Forum, Friday May (Sept) XX, 200X

All candidates for Executive office are invited to participate in an open forum/debate, which is scheduled for Friday, May (Sept) XX, 200X during seventh period. Participating candidates will have an opportunity to give short speeches (one minute or less) and answer screened questions from the audience. Candidates should dress appropriately. See the SGA advisor for specific details and logistics.

Notes for Advisors:

- Obtain the principal's signature on election packets distributed to candidates
- List all election dates (campaign period, due dates, election day, etc.) on the master calendar. Be sure to allow ample time to ensure all qualified students have an opportunity to run.
- Evaluate your election procedures immediately after the election - while feedback is fresh, update all guidelines as a draft for the next year.
- Read the election issues listed below (from previous workshops)

Constitution: Many election issues will not arise if your student government constitution is well written and covers the issues involving student government officers and staff. Your constitution should define:

1. Qualifications and terms of office - grade stipulations, behavioral ethics, past experience (if general), ability to meet after school, the service year (when you take office and how long you serve), etc.
2. Roles and Responsibilities - specific duties that the office performs plus the responsibilities (be as specific as possible). Instead of listing general responsibilities under duties of each officer, it is easier to have a section in the constitution that covers all officers/appointed staff. Items such as attending all executive board meetings and general assemblies, conducting yourself as a representative of the student government and your school at all times, etc. would be listed in that section. (Do take these example items for granted - list them as a responsibility!)
3. Elected and/or Appointed Positions - not all officers need to be elected...does your constitution specify any appointed positions? Sometimes the most qualified student will not enter an election because he/she

views it as a "popularity" thing. Consider that some positions--the recording or corresponding secretary, county liaison, Webmaster, etc.--might be better filled through an application/appointment procedure (this is especially true at the middle school level).

4. Election Timeline - when will elections take place? The constitution should specify a basic timeline. For example--elections will take place the month before the end of school or in the fall by the third week of school. Don't be too specific in the constitution, but be sure that there is a reference in the elections article.
5. Powers and Accountability (impeachment and succession) - before students are elected, they need to know and understand the powers and accountability of the office/organization. For example, if a qualification of an officer is to "demonstrate ethical behavior," then the section in the article covering impeachment should explain who can bring charges against an officer, the range of charges allowed, and how the charges are handled (committee comprised of the election board, adult staff, and administrative representation...right to a hearing...general assembly vote, etc.). Some violations of qualifications, such as failure to maintain an academic grade point average, can lead to immediate impeachment requiring no committee or general assembly action.
6. Election Procedures - It is very important that the constitution cover basic election procedures (majority - vote vs. popular vote, preferential balloting, eligible voters, when election rules are approved, etc.). The constitution should not list specific rules (campaigning, pledges, speech requirements, petitions, etc.), but should be general (i.e. "The Executive Board shall determine all campaign and election procedures during the month of February."). See election rules and procedures below for more information.

Election Rules & Procedures:

Many student governments do not have their election rules in writing. This could create a major loophole if a student or parent were to file an appeal or grievance. Timing is also important. If election rules are determined too close to the election, it may appear that requirements are added to favor specific students or to keep out specific students. Mid-year is a good time to review election rules and procedures. Specific rules should not be spelled out in the constitution since new election/campaigning issues arise each year and anything in the constitution would require a constitutional amendment to change. Rules do, however, need to be in writing, covering all aspects of an election (deadlines, campaigning, speeches, finances, ballot integrity, if or how specific election results are shared, etc.), and they have to have the written approval of a part of the student government (executive board, special elections committee, etc.), the advisor, and the administration. Rules also need to be given to all candidates when they file for office. In addition, rules should also cover the appeals process and possible consequences for a breach of rules.

Voter Education:

Voter education includes not only the students, but also the staff in a school. The student government must first educate the staff to the hands-on civic educational opportunity that the student government elections offer. When the staff takes the elections seriously, they will be able to model the attitude to the students. Be sure that the students have ample opportunity to read voter profiles (think about having a published voter guide or "meet the candidates" TV show) and question candidates (a public debate or town meeting) in order to make an informed decision. Consider collaboration with your local Board of Elections either by having a voter registration drive during the election process or even using official election equipment. What a great opportunity for public education and voter outreach!

Ballots:

Design your ballots with specific, easy to follow directions. Have a specific procedure to distribute ballots to ensure that only qualified students vote, all students have the opportunity to vote, and ~ that no student votes more than once. It is best not to have ANY students involved in counting ballots. Be sure that the teller's committee (at least two adults to double-count each other or run Scantron or verify electronic ballots) has one neutral adult observers. All members of the tellers committee should sign statements of ethics in the counting

procedures and these, along with the ballots should be kept on file for a year. Many schools are incorporating technology programs for elections (scan-type ballots, computer/web-based programs, and official election equipment). Regardless of the method, be diligent in insuring the quality of the ballot, the voter's rights of a secret vote, and the integrity of the ballot tabulation.

And the Winner Is:

Always hold a private meeting of candidates to announce election results before making a general announcement to the student body. This is an excellent opportunity to thank all candidates for their willingness to take a risk and to recruit these interested, qualified students into other positions in the student government. Consider having an administrator or other community leader make a few remarks about leadership to the group before announcing the election results. Never announce the actual vote count – it doesn't change the outcome of the election. It is hurtful to barely lose or to lose by a landslide. The principal should handle any issues parents have with asking for ballot recounts, etc.

And a New Year Begins:

Plan a celebration time for the outgoing and incoming officers/staff. What a great opportunity to have a time of lessons learned, role-alike time, and goal setting. Present certificates and gifts to the outgoing officers/staff and officially "pass the gavel" to the new president to start his/her term. This event not only brings closure to the year, but also decrees the start of a new student government. (*NASC has good resources on their web site*).

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