

SDSCA NEWSLETTER FROM THE HILLS

Gary Linn SDSCA Executive Director

How You Can Help

Our friends in Texas need our help! Terry Hamm is compiling a list of needs for schools in Texas. If you go to <http://www.tasconline.org/help-for-harvey-victims>, you can see their needs. I know that Student Councils throughout Iowa have been asking what they can do. I imagine that your schools/advisors are asking the same questions. Directing them to the TASC website will be a great place to start. Keep TASC students, advisors and their families in your thoughts and prayers as they struggle through this natural disaster.

Terry Hamm is the Executive Director of Student Councils in Texas.

How to Be the Best Adviser You Can Be

Congratulations! You have just been appointed or have volunteered to serve as a student council adviser. Now the work, challenges, and the fun begin.

The adviser provides a wealth of advice and practical knowledge and may well be the single most important factor in the success of a student council. The adviser is the liaison between students and school administration. Advising requires personal time and educational commitment. It often is a source of great frustration but also great satisfaction. As a student council adviser you will be expected to:

- Be enthusiastic, energetic, imaginative, resourceful and have a sense of humor.
- Spend your time planning, organizing, listening, and teaching
- Have a genuine interest and faith in young people and their ability to lead
- Serve as a behind-the-scenes "coach"
- Juggle many activities and projects at once
- Do things right and on time
- Keep the administration and faculty informed of and involved in council activities
- Display calmness under stress and have the ability to work effectively in a crisis setting
- Learn from both success and failure.

Leadership development is a lifetime journey, not a brief trip. You are beginning your own personal journey of leadership as you work to develop the leadership of your students! To help you along on your journey, this guide outlines the skills you will need to be an effective adviser and provides resources where you can find answers to your questions. Congratulations again on your appointment and good luck!

Welcome Back Advisers!

Hope your school year is going great so far!

We have a great bunch of student leaders on our SDSCA board. Our first meeting was very successful and they are planning another awesome state convention on March 25th-27th in Rapid City.

Regional workshops are the first big thing that we are planning this fall. Keep reading your emails for further up date when those dates get closer. Thanks for your commitment to SDSCA!



Student Council Structure

By Karen Crawford

Your student council structure is the foundation in promoting student body representation. Not all positions need to be elected. Many students can be vetted through an interview process and then appointed to important positions. This is a reflection of how our federal government works and it can also work for our student councils.

I often hear that school administrators don't want to hold elections as they say it is "only a popularity contest." Well, that's another article! It is our responsibility as educators to make sure that our students are educated voters – a school election is an exercise in civic responsibility. We are teaching our students to be responsible future citizens. A well-rounded student council should include elected positions – it is a student council, so the student voice is key. There are several ways to construct this and the possibilities for different arrangements are pretty limitless.

First, consider the "traditional" student council – four elected officers, typically president, vice- president, treasurer, and secretary. Why not have a school-wide elected president and a vice president for every grade level, elected only by students from that grade. The grade-level vice -presidents could also be the liaison to a grade level administrator, class officers, adult team leaders, etc. They can take the lead in grade-level issues in the lunchroom or work with grade-level teachers for special events.

In a "traditional" student council, there are often an elected treasurer and secretary. Do these really need to be elected positions? Consider the job responsibilities. The treasurer deals with finances and the position could be an appointed "director of finances." Yes, I said "director" not "committee chairman." What's in a name? Well, in schools, we used to have a principal's secretary – now we have an administrative assistant!

I've seen schools where students had little interest in a "committee chairperson" position but applying for a director or deputy-director position renewed enthusiasm. Students might be doing the same job, but the name adds importance to the position. If titles are important to adults, don't we think that they're important to students as well? And just like adults, we still need to be vigilant in supporting these students and

A classroom is a smaller number of students for which a representative can be accountable. The representative would see these students, usually daily, and has a built-in opportunity to seek and give information. Councils might also consider having a male and female classroom representative instead of a representative and alternate. In many schools, gender equity in student council is an issue. This is one way to encourage others to get involved. Elections/selections could also be held each semester, allowing for additional co-curricular activities that may be heavier one semester or the other. Again, councils need to hold representatives accountable. Grade-level vice -presidents can survey students and teachers to see if representatives are being responsible in their job performance.

So, take a look at the structure of your council. Is it set-up to serve the needs of your school community or is it inherited from the constitution because that's the way it's always been? Don't be afraid of change. Ask the questions, talk to the students, and think outside the box.

Survival Guide for New Advisers

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By Jason Little

Educators are often asked—and sometimes even volunteer—to be the adviser of a cocurricular activity. It's not an easy job and you won't get rich doing it, but it can be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable parts of your job.

When I became a club adviser, I took over a successful club that was run by an organized person, so I figured it would be an easy transition. It wasn't. All the hard work the previous adviser had put into it was gone and I was left to start from scratch, wondering if there wasn't an easier way.

Having been a club adviser for three years now, I have learned many things to help make my club successful and keep my own stress level down. In the interest of making it easier for someone else just starting out, here are a few tips to being a successful adviser:

- **The students should be doing the bulk of the work.** One of the main purposes of cocurricular activities is to allow students to take on leadership roles and gain leadership experience. It is your duty as an adviser to help this along whenever possible. Club officers should be organizing the group's activities, keeping records, writing letters, making phone calls, and doing the work of the club. The adviser is there to guide the students and ensure that all decisions are appropriate and for the good of the school. There are a few jobs the adviser should have more of a hand in—accounting paperwork and discipline of nonparticipating members, for example—but the majority of the work can be done by students, depending on their level of experience.
- **Communicate your expectations.** Be specific when communicating expectations to your group's officers and members and give precise directions on how you want things to be done. Give students feedback on how well they are doing and give praise for jobs well done.
- **Be consistent from day one.** Start from the first meeting enforcing the rules and making members follow procedures. If the club bylaws say a member can not miss a meeting or they will be removed from the club, then when the first member misses a meeting you must remove them. An inch now will be a mile later.
- **Plan officer meetings.** Meet with the officers prior to the meetings to discuss an agenda. The officers should be well informed so they can lead the club. The officer meeting is where the adviser needs to do more talking to help prepare the officers to lead the general meeting.
- **Create lists for the officers.** Write up the tasks to be completed and when they need to be completed. The president can delegate jobs to the various officers and members.
- **Create a plan for projects.** If you have been the adviser of the same club for several years or if you have been an adviser in the past, you already know of some of the jobs that will need to be completed for an upcoming project. Go ahead and create a plan for the project. Create a list of questions to be answered and jobs that will need to be completed and give these to your officers. Do not plan everything out for them though. If the upcoming project is a dance, you would not want to choose the theme or the decorations, for example. You would, however, give them a deadline for when the decision has to be made. The students usually do not think about making tickets, hiring security, buying refreshments, making signs, and creating a ticket sales schedule for lunch periods. They would eventually get to them, but giving them a list at the outset will speed up the process.
- **Students should speak for the club.** From assemblies to discussing fundraiser ideas with the principal, have the students do the talking, but go over details with them beforehand so they are well prepared.
- **Use forms to keep yourself and the members organized.** I have a form for almost every task that is to be completed, from meeting notes and financial reports to subcommittees and discipline of members. If you teach your officers to do the paperwork from day one the way you want it and check them as they go, they do most of the work and it gets done correctly. You might also give each officer a binder in which to keep their club information.

Club advising can be stressful, especially that first year, as you are picking up where someone else left off and trying to put your own personal spin on the club. Keep these tips in mind and you'll not only survive, you'll thrive as a club adviser.

Jason Little (little_j@cneschools.org) is student senate adviser at Clermont Northeastern HS in Batavia, OH.