

Impact of Leadership Position In High School on Student Outcomes- An Evaluation.

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine how leadership role of a student impacts student outcome. Head Prefects or Head Boys/ Head Girls are student leaders appointed and assigned administrative duties in schools. Besides their school responsibilities, these school leaders like other students are expected to perform their academic work well and attain good grades in class tests and national and international examinations. This article seeks to evaluate the influence of school responsibilities on Head Prefect's academic work performance. This article reveals that there is no significant adverse fall in Head Prefect's performance of academic work before appointment and after appointment as a School Prefect. On the contrary it helps them to improve their all round performance. Responsibility of a Head prefect and personal academic performance is complementary to each other. By being a role model for others and balancing duties as a Head prefect with academic responsibilities helps a person grow fast and excel in his/her academic and extracurricular activities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In various High Schools, the term "prefect" applies to a student having leadership qualities selected by the school authority or by students and given certain powers to control and guide other students. Prefects represent the student body and embody the best in student qualities that a school has to offer. They are assigned supervisory roles over other students in and outside the classroom. In classes, they control noise during private study and maintain the general hygiene. Outside the classroom, prefects control activities such as games, clubs and societies, supervise communal work within the compound, oversee the organization and life of students in dormitories, and ensure that those concerned serve meals well and on time.ⁱ

Historically and strategically, the involvement of Prefects in educational leadership has been mainly due to their closeness to their colleagues in the classroom, boarding area and dining halls. It can also be said that the reason why students are given leadership roles is to impart participatory leadership skills that they would need in both their working and social environment after leaving school.

Trying to pin down what makes an effective school leader can be little like eating soup with a fork. Simply put, School Prefects are role models to the rest of school. They are expected to uphold the highest standards at all times- adherence to school rules, attendance, punctuality, attitude, manners, motivation to work and help others etc. In nutshell, being Head prefect or Head Boy or Head Girl in High School involves all the dynamics that makes for a good leader and sticking to the format of the school expectation. It is an experience that provides constant learning and teaches how to handle power and get fellow students to listen and obey without use of force. One learns how to be authoritarian at the appropriate time. Is there a downside to it? Does it adversely affect student outcomes in terms of academic performance or promotes learning and enhances student's performance? This examination requires a deeper analysis of what qualities are essential to become and function as a High School leader and what are the costs involved in terms of time and energy spent on leadership role.

Let us briefly look at the roles School Head prefects are expected to perform,

Roles of School Prefects:

In broad terms, rolls fall into five categories:

- Maintaining discipline
- Helping Staff
- Supporting Younger Pupils
- Organizing Events
- Representing School in the community

In essence, each school is unique and has its own rules and regulations, which the prefects uphold as they influence the other students to adhere to them.

Carleton College in US, describes the Prefect Qualifications, Primary activities, secondary activities and maintenance activities in these words.ⁱⁱ

Prefect qualifications

- Junior or senior standing is preferred; sophomore standing is the minimum.
- A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above is preferred.
- A grade of A in the selected course is preferred; prior enrolment with the instructor who teaches the selected course is also preferred. Put another way, the prefect must be competent in course content, as determined by the instructor of the selected course.
- The ability to establish and nurture collaborative work relationships with department faculty.
- Good interpersonal and communication skills:
- Self confident
- Articulate
- Patient and empathetic
- Able to establish positive, productive rapport with students.
- Flexibility in responding to course professor's and students' needs.
- An understanding of the value of collaborative learning and different teaching styles.
- The ability to contract to work ten hours weekly, attending mandatory training, and attend *all* class meetings of the selected course (class attendance is paid).

Primary activities

- Attend all class meetings of the selected course, take notes, follow homework and review all assigned material, including text(s) and supplemental readings.
- Conduct an average of *at least* two fifty-minute study sessions, or occasionally a combination of study session and office hour, per week throughout the term, using strategies learned during the prefect training workshop.
- Facilitate interactive, discussion-based learning in sessions. Avoid lecturing.
- Communicate with course professor about course content that students are finding particularly difficult.
- Keep all students in the selected course, as well as the Prefect Program supervisors and the professor teaching the course, *informed by email of all study sessions*, including place, time, and topics to be covered.
- Meet three times per term with the prefect supervisors and other prefects to discuss:
- Study sessions
- Planning prefect sessions and using a wide variety of the identified active learning strategies.
- Notify supervisor about problems or potential problems.
- *Be available to meet with students individually to the limit of the hours contracted.*

Secondary activities

- Provide extra study sessions as necessary (e.g., prior to major examinations).
- Provide handouts relevant to the course, when there is a need.
- Ascertain course requirements and maintain contact with the course instructor.
- Assist prefect supervisors in training new prefects.

Maintenance activities

- Complete necessary personnel paperwork (time sheets, work transfer forms—if necessary, etc.).
- Attend mandatory prefect training workshop prior to the beginning of first term.
- Schedule study sessions based on student feedback, using start-of-term surveys.
- Make periodic announcements to the students about the availability of study sessions (including meeting time, place, and topics to be covered).
- Ensure that initial survey and end-of-course surveys are distributed.
- *Collect attendance data for every help session (sign-in sheets)*, including student names (first and last) and class year, course title, date, and time of sessions. Submit the attendance data in Excel format, including all students in the class, at the midterm and at the end of the term.
- Maintain a professional attitude about such matters as class standards, grades, and student complaints.
- Model appropriate professional attitudes and behaviors to students, staff, and faculty.
- Provide supervisor(s) with current schedules of study sessions.

- Notify supervisors, all students, and the professor in advance if you cannot conduct a study sessions as scheduled.

Few necessary attributes for School leadership.

- One should be aware of one's personal strengths and passion.
- Have great inter-personal skills
- Establish trust
- Belief in team work
- Maintain focus and positive attitude especially in trying circumstances
- Willingness to 'walk the talk'
- Effective communication skill
- Open minded and flexible
- Thirst to be a learner
- Assertiveness without being aggressive

As an American President John F Kennedy said, "Leadership and Learning are indispensable to each other." It takes real sense of personal commitment after you have arrived at a position of power and responsibility.ⁱⁱⁱ

Let me enumerate the advantages and disadvantages of being a head prefect of a High school.

II. ADVANTAGES

The advantages of being a Head Prefect in a High School are many. From *my own experience of working as a Head Prefect of the High school* I can highlight the few major ones experience by me and also others below.

- I. It helps develop leadership skills and provides the confidence one needs at every stage. From my personal experience I can say that being the Head prefect has taught me to think not only about myself but about others as well.
- II. It helps in acquiring social orientation.
- III. It provides stress tolerance. The job requires accepting criticism and dealing calmly and effectively with high stress situations.
- IV. The job makes one attentive to detail and analyzing information and using logic to address work related issues and problems.
- V. It adds to persuasive skills. Persuading others to change their mind or behaviour requires skills that are acquired on the job.
- VI. It teaches art of negotiation as one has to attempt reconciling differences and bring opposing parties together.
- VII. It promotes critical thinking as one is all the time makes use of logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
- VIII. Time management is an important trait one acquires by managing not only one's own time but also the time of others.
- IX. One acquires knowledge of elementary psychology to assess human behaviour and performance, and appreciate individual differences in personality, ability and interests.
- X. The job requires being sensitive to others needs and feelings and being understanding and helpful.

Further it helps younger students transition into school life, improves mentoring skills and improves public speaking skills. The prefects meet a greater number of students and teachers and are generally respected by students and teachers. Students learn about being in a position of power and responsibility. It improves time management skills.

How students who have worked as prefects say five things about the role and responsibility summarizes the general impressions about being a Prefect.^{iv}

- “The badge: The badge was one of the coolest things about being a school prefect. Extra points to your school if your name was customised on the badge. Do you know what it felt like? Going to school with the badge and everyone’s looking at you like “that’s the man”.
- Friends: With being a school prefect, you have friends and fans. Being a school prefect is almost like being a music star really. You go to different places and you see people you don’t know, but they know you and you have to put a smile and try to make them feel like you’ll remember them another day, even though deep down you know you won’t.
- Frequent visits: As a school prefect, you were an automatic candidate for frequent visits outside the school and they were always fun because food and just the fact you’re skipping classes.
- Dressing Changes: Depending on your school, prefects got the opportunity to dress a little differently than the students. For some schools, the prefects wore blazers while others got to wear trainers instead of the sandals. This was grossly dependent on your school.
- Waivers: As a prefect, you got a million waivers really. Of course, no morning duties for you. You had to supervise the morning duty students, so what time would you have to perform one yourself. Apart from that, there were a lot of free passes you got for being a Prefect.”

III. DISADVANTAGES

Few students have a theoretical objection to the school prefect system opposing it for no other reason than it being perceived as a ‘school imposed system of hierarchy’. It is also argued that the key to concept of Prefect system is ‘authority’ and it promotes elitism and since it does not resonate well with the American egalitarian culture the American schools, different from schools in UK and other commonwealth countries, don’t have prefects because the concept of hierarchy opposes American values of social equality and democracy. The answer to this is that American schools do have elected positions like class president, vice president. The prefects are seniors who have are elected by the student body, subject to the approval of the faculty. In Australia and New Zealand schools have Prefects. In France the concept is not known. Despite different systems in place in countries the fact remains that there are leadership positions in school across the world.

My own experience suggests that except for little demands on one’s time, the job of Head Prefect has very little disadvantages and the advantages far outweigh any disadvantage. However, some disadvantages perceived by few previous Head Prefects are listed below.

- I. The leadership role of Head Prefect requires sharing out of one’s free time outside classes.
- II. The job requires assertiveness and maintenance of discipline and that does not add to the popularity of the person.
- III. One has to lead by example and that means living a life of not one’s own.
- IV. If one is unable to balance his/her time, one may fall back in studies.
- V. Prefect system can lead to conflicts between students and prefects.

A British headmaster of a school speaking about the importance of Prefect system and student councils has said^v:

1. “I have always felt the best way to approach appointing prefects is to canvas the opinion of staff, teaching and ancillary, and also to take into account the views of the current year’s prefects. I applied the criteria that a) prefects should be likely to set an excellent example in all things and b) they should have a charisma that made it likely others would follow that example. Long gone are the days when prefects had a punitive role. Today’s prefects should be learning and showing that leadership is all about service to others.”

2“Schools are not democracies – they are benevolent oligarchies, with philosopher-kings (and queens) lurking in the Head’s study – and the principle, of course, is that the staff run the school in the interests of the children. But it does seem enlightened, and sensible, for schools to listen formally to what children are saying and to let them feel they can have some input into what happens to them at school.

Most schools do have such a school council, with representatives (perhaps elected) from each class, or at least year group, who meet staff to raise issues of concern and interest. It is important that this is not just a paper exercise to fob off the children or impress inspectors (who like to see such committees, not least as they provide children with a working model of the political process).

Pupils should be encouraged to make constructive suggestions about how to improve their school and also be prompted to acknowledge any improvements. An agenda should be drawn up and minutes taken, which are then brought to the Head, who should discuss them with the senior management team and then report back to the children. Done properly, this is a healthy and positive system.”

Let us see what the alumni wisdom suggests.

In US an alumni research project at Carleton College was conducted about the benefits of working as a Prefect. What are the words of wisdom from the Alumni?^{vi}

The Benefits of Working as a Prefect: Words of Wisdom from Alumni

Results from the Prefect Program Alumni Research Project

Conducted Winter Term 2011

Data analyst: Rachel Zucker ('11, Psychology)

Background: During winter term 2011, we surveyed Carleton alumni who had worked as prefects since fall 2004. We contacted 112 alumni and were thrilled with the response rates:

Total Respondents:	86
Email Response Rate:	76.11%
Total Complete:	75
Percent Complete:	87.21%

Rachel Zucker ('11, Psychology), herself a former prefect, conducted data analysis on the open-ended responses. Her findings are below.

What are the most significant abilities, values, or skills that you developed in your work as a prefect? (76 open-ended responses)

Communication:	28
Teaching/tutoring skills:	27
Appreciating/presenting multiple perspectives:	23
Public speaking:	19
Leadership:	10
Better personal understanding of subject matter:	9
Self-confidence:	8
Patience:	8
Organizational skills:	8
Developing group work skills:	7
Value of students working through problems:	7
Creating sample problems:	5
Ability to admit ignorance:	5
Time management:	5
Planning lessons:	3
Improved professor relations:	3
Responsibility:	1

In your occupation(s), have you used the qualities you developed as a prefect?

(65 open-ended responses)

Theme:	No. of responses involving theme:
Teaching experience was valuable	31
Use communication skills	21
Employed as TA	18
Use group work skills	9
Use skills in organizing/presenting material	9
Use subject area skills	5
Use skills to improve written materials	3
Patience and understanding	2

How would you rate the importance of your prefect training and experience as you developed as college student?

(58 open-ended responses)

Theme:	No. of responses involving theme:
General positive experience in college	13
Made me more confident	13
Little/no effect	13
Helped my academic work	12
Gave me teaching and mentoring skills	7
Made me a leader	5
Helped me build relationships	4

<i>Defined my career interests</i>	4
<i>Improved communication skills</i>	4
<i>Gave me broader perspective</i>	3
<i>Taught me professionalism</i>	2
<i>Improved my writing</i>	1

What have you learned from facilitating the learning of others? Please elaborate.
(61 open-ended responses)

<i>Theme:</i>	<i>No. of responses involving theme:</i>
<i>How to teach to different learning styles</i>	29
<i>That I love teaching</i>	13
<i>How people learn</i>	12
<i>How to communicate</i>	10
<i>How to be a role model</i>	2
<i>How to work with a group</i>	2
<i>Better study habits</i>	2
<i>How to admit "I don't know"</i>	1
<i>How to motivate</i>	1
<i>That I shouldn't be a teacher</i>	1
<i>That I like working one-on-one</i>	1
<i>That Carleton students are relatively easy to teach</i>	1

The above given project survey shows that the responses of the Ex Prefects are absolute pointers to only one direction of positive outcomes for everyone of them.

Another study, using descriptive survey research design^{vii}, published in The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies has tried to find an answer to how prefects have performed their academic work before and after appointment as prefects.^{viii}

“Prefects’ questionnaire was used to generate data on prefects’ performance of their academic work before and after appointment as a Prefect. Prefects’ performance of academic work included:

- Setting academic goals with realistic chances of success,
- Developing interest in learning,
- Attending lessons regularly,
- Active participation during lessons,
- Performing laboratory assignments
- Visiting the library whenever the need arises.
- Developing good study skills and habits,
- Preparing personal study time and following the prepared study time,
- Doing all the class assignments on time,
- Sitting for all the tests/exams.

The study revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in prefects’ performance of academic work before appointment and after appointment as a prefect.” The study came to the conclusion that the appointment as a prefect did not affect their academic progress.

IV. CONCLUSION

The two survey results mentioned above have given a clear indication that the Prefect system in High Schools has not adversely affected the student academic outcomes after their becoming prefects or school leaders. On the contrary, the advantages of working on a leadership position in the School have enabled the students to acquire certain positive traits which would help them in their future. It may be argued that prefects to begin with are ‘high achievers’ leading them to a leadership position, but there is no data to support the contention that their academic performance goes down after becoming a Prefect. In my own case I have not experienced any handicap or faced any struggle to manage time between academics and leadership duties. Rather, the job helps in performance in and out of classroom and structures student daily life better.

I would suggest that opinion surveys of all stakeholder groups in every School be asked, which would include,

- All current learners in the school;
- All parents of learners in the school;

- All teachers;
- All administrative personnel;
- Younger old boys who graduated five years before;

This opinion survey should seek to find out the impact of school prefect system upon,

- School discipline
- Class room orderliness
- Communication between students
- Sports
- Club and societies
- Bullying if any
- Are prefects even handed with all students

The opinion survey would throw light whether Prefect system contributes positively to standards and discipline and acts independently and with authority. It would also inform the readers whether the past school prefects lost out on studies and sports due to their preoccupation with prefect duties.

During the interviews conducted by me, I asked the ex-prefects whether their academic output suffered due to involvement in duties associated with school prefect system. I was informed by five ex-prefects of my school that their extra responsibility had no impact whatsoever upon their academic output. In fact one ex-prefect told me that his performance in sport improved as his confidence level soared after becoming school prefect. I sent emails to at least a dozen ex-prefects and sports team captains whether their leadership position made it difficult for them to manage their time. Again, the answer was a categorical NO. I asked the school administration to provide me an insight into the grades of these ex-prefects before they became school prefects and a year after they worked as prefects. It was quite an interesting data. The grades of all the ex-prefects had improved after they started working as prefects in the school.

I tried to find out whether the grades of other students who did not work as prefects improved or went down as much as the prefects. I could not be provided the grades of other students but I was told that the performance increase of prefects was clearly ahead of their fellow students. I wanted to find out if any correlation existed between sports performance and the leadership position of students. The basketball coach was categorical in saying that the best basketball players in the school were those who occupied leadership positions in school.

The conclusion that I have reached after interviewing ex prefects, administrative staff and sports coaches is that despite prefect system having an advantage by itself, the performance in academics and sports does increase after a student is chosen to work as a leader in school, whether a school prefect, team captain or a boarding house captain. In fact not only the performance in the school but also in later life it helps as shown in the analysis given above.

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