

James Hubert Blake High School
Student Government Association

**Report on Strengthening Relations between the Student Body and the Student
Government Association**

Authored by
Ian Nyanin
SGA Executive Board Member

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Since the dawn of man there has been an inherent need for governance which has manifested itself in various political institutions in the centuries that have followed. The successes and failures of each system are clearly splayed across the pages of history, but the most popular and effective means of government of the past century has been democracy.

The cornerstone of democracy is direct connection between the people and their leaders. It is the duty of every elected legislative body to reflect the needs and desires of its people in its actions. Student Government Associations are no different in bearing this onus; in fact, they face a greater accountability because they experience direct contact with their constituents on a daily basis.

Every Student Government must be a tool for the students first and foremost. In the expansive and intricate web that is the public education system every Student Government must act as a voice for students who otherwise have none. Every Student Government must truly be a representative legislative body, with all members playing an integral role in its successes and decision making.

For the sake of pragmatism however, one must ask themselves when philosophy must be pushed aside, and when the end justifies the means. The truth is that James Hubert Blake High School has an SGA that has achieved a great deal in the past 10 years and a General Assembly that is often unruly and ineffective. More and more it has become the role of the Officer Team to make important plans behind closed doors, as a result. While this may lead to a less contemptuous and more decisive decision making process, it in turn alienates members of Assembly and widens the gap between the SGA and the students.

As a part of the school's greater legislative body, members of the GA have the rightful expectation to be included in the SGA's greater workings. For members who have experienced just one meeting, the fact that this assumption is wrong is greatly evident.

This is the cause of the discontent and animosity commonly expressed by the General Assembly. The fact that no organization can operate properly with such friction goes beyond saying, which is why there must be a thorough examination of the interaction between all members of the SGA.

The distinction that must be made but hasn't is the fundamental difference between opinion and input. The latter implies consideration of what is shared and the possibility of a subsequent course of action. The first entails of a simple head nod or shake; a yes or a no, there is no great thought process required.

Naturally, after being excluded from the decision making process and being presented with a plan for the first time, members of the GA respond with their input. Questioning the need for the proposed event, asking for more in depth details, pointing out possible flaws, adding new ideas or proposing alternatives are all healthy and integral parts of the brainstorming process. The only issue is that the Officer Team is that at that point far past the brainstorming process.

Feelingly deservedly that their input is not valued the General Assembly becomes hostile, and as a response to this hostility and having their work challenged the Officer Team becomes defensive. Tensions mount, members of the General Assembly find it harder to articulate their feelings over their louder counterparts and everything goes to utter chaos.

And from this continues the cycle, as the OT excludes the GA more and more from the decision making process, causing them to become more and more resentful.

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The General Assembly cannot be faulted for a lack of passion; that is in fact the exact opposite the reality we face. There lies a sea of untapped enthusiasm, imagination and fresh ideas within the greater SGA. Time after time, members of the GA address each issue they are presented with, with the same fervor, still trying to make a meaningful difference within the greater organization. What the SGA can be faulted for is a misdirection of this passion.

While it may seem as though leaving the majority of SGA responsibilities to the OT makes things easier in the end, all it does is place a larger burden on the shoulders of a select few. There are far more ideas to be heard and fleshed out beyond those of only 6 people. There are far more hands and minds ready to work beyond those of the same 6 people. In the end, no matter how much good the SGA aims to do its efforts will remain limited without the support of the entire organization.

The successful turnout for Staff Member interviews this past year indicates the need to do good felt by much of the greater SGA. But to gain the support of all General Assembly members we will need to show a change in our policies regarding them. We must actively involve them in decision making and pursue their support in planning and carrying out various SGA activities. We must also open up ourselves fully to the concerns of the GA, allowing them to speak freely on more than just the topics on the agenda. We must gain back their support because old memories of being undervalued will not die easily.

For more than just the philosophical purposes of representative democracy, the integrity of the General Assembly must be maintained. In a school of nearly 2,000 greatly diverse students, the General Assembly is the most substantial tool the SGA has in trying to address the concerns of them all. The differences between members of the SGA, while they may lead to conflict, must be fully embraced as they mirror the differences that lie within the entire student body.

The discontent of the GA is representative of what is felt by most students. The SGA has not only created a rift between itself and the rest of its rank and file members, but the entire student body as a whole.

The SGA over the past few years has involved itself far too heavily in the bureaucracy of legislative government. Far too many constitutional amendments which are of no consequence to the vast majority of students have been passed. While this may make the organization run more smoothly, it has no direct benefit to the students.

Like all constituents, unless their desires can be reflected directly in the actions and efforts of their government, the student body is left to feel as though the SGA is a totally separate entity from their lives which does nothing for them. The SGA simply needs to place as much focus on connecting with students as it does on what positions will be elected or appointed in the future.

This disconnect is reflected in student support and turnout for various SGA events, the time when we need students the most. In examining student participation we must look at more than just the numbers, but at the students themselves. Are we reaching all segments and demographics of our diverse student body? How many of these students are not directly affiliated with the SGA and are there simply due to school spirit? How many SGA events are these students aware of and participate in? And most importantly, what keeps all of those other students from participating at all?

It's quite easy to trace this rift over the years: the election of Homeroom/7th Period Delegates has become more sporadic, the reporting of news by these Delegates

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has become nonexistent, voting by students has greatly decreased and power has become more focused within the Officer Team.

The way to repair the relationship between students and their SGA is to put the power back into their hands. General Assembly meetings should be open to more than just the elected delegates, allowing students with real concerns to participate. The possibility of hosting open forums for students to voice their concerns whether in person like at lunchtime or virtually through mediums like Facebook, seems to be a very viable one. Allowing students to volunteer their time to more SGA efforts and publicizing these opportunities allows them to feel a sense of responsibility and pride concerning their student government.

Affording students more voting opportunities when it comes to things like Spirit Days as we've done in the past goes a long way in making them feel more connected. While events that benefit charity like Pennies for Patients and the Blood Drive are very admirable, they take up most of the SGA calendar. Besides Homecoming and its associated activities there is nothing that the SGA does to actively affect the lives of the greater student body. Ideas like carnivals and winter dances have often been brought up and represent the need for such student central events.

What the current SGA represents is a disjointed unit capable of doing great things. One can only imagine the possibilities, were it to act cohesively with all of its members and the student body. It is our duty, not an option, to become a properly functioning legislative body.