

Friends of Wingra

Fall 2011

Student Council: By the Students, For the Students

Twelve students of all ages sit on the floor in a circle with poster paper and markers, their half-eaten lunches beside them.

An eight-year-old boy describes how the daily kickball game at recess is turning ugly. There's fighting about the rules, not everyone gets to play, and kids' feelings are getting hurt.

The facilitator, Molly Murphy, then reads a letter from Room 103 (Pond) Teacher Tiffany Rampey asking the students to help come up with a solution to these recurring problems.

Listening to the group discussion it was clear that each student had something to contribute and valued the chance to share his or her ideas.

"They have a voice, and they know how to use it. Every kid has something to contribute," says Molly.

Molly brings it to a vote: "Do you believe Wingra School should have school-wide rules for kickball?"

She reminds the students that "being a part of student council means making decisions based on more than what's good for you."

Ten yes votes, one no, and one maybe.

The specific rules will be decided at the next meeting, and one council member suggested including more regular kickball players in that discussion.

At the end of the half-hour meeting, Molly shakes each student's hand and thanks each one for serving on student council.

Background

Even though Molly facilitated the

meetings, student council wasn't her idea. It was her daughter's. Earlier in the spring, eleven-year-old Miranda wanted some ideas for dealing with conflicts at school.

Miranda and her mother talked about how students can help each other solve problems and come up with ideas about how to make school a better place.

The idea of a Wingra School Student Council was born.

Miranda presented the idea of a student council to other students in the Lake (Rooms 105 and 107), and fellow Lake student Dash Cooper volunteered to help get the group going.

What is the fairest way for representatives to be chosen? They eventually decided to ask interested students to sign up. All the names were put in a hat, and two student names were drawn from each classroom.

Term limits are still being decided.

The student council met three times in the spring during Friday lunchtime.

Practicing Democracy

Miranda wasn't really thinking about democracy when she wanted to start a student council. She just wanted students to have a voice. But that's the root of democracy, isn't it?

One insightful 8th grader noticed the similarities between discussing who gets to decide kickball rules and the debate about who gets to decide about taxes leading up to the American Revolution.

Having a voice—power—in the way your world is structured is no small thing.

"I just love what happens when you give them the floor," says Molly. "It's so lovely. You can tell they've been in a place where

they're asked to share what they think."

That's one of the beautiful things about a Wingra education. Students are encouraged to speak up for themselves and others, to pursue their interests, and to tap into their power.

What do the council members think?

"I like student council," one girl says.

Her friend responds. "I do, too. This is cool."

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