



Participation by Teens in School Based Clubs

WHAT TEENS WANT US TO KNOW

unite for children





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First Floor, UN House, Marine Gardens,
Christ Church, Barbados.

Tel |246| 467-6000
Fax |246| 426-3812
email bridgetown@unicef.org
website www.unicef.org/barbados

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Acknowledgements

This report is primarily for educators working on developing strategies to encourage more participation by students in student governance. It summaries the findings of a study conducted in four eastern Caribbean countries.

UNICEF hopes that this report will be useful for educators not only in the Eastern Caribbean but in the wider Caribbean region.

UNICEF acknowledges the technical assistance of Dr. Corin Bailey (PhD), the Consultant who conducted the study for UNICEF.

UNICEF would be happy to receive any feedback on this report. Please send any comments to:

Elaine King
Adolescent and HIV Specialist,
UNICEF Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean
email bridgetown@unicef.org

UNICEF Coordinator of the study:

Lisa McClean-Trotman, PhD
Programme Communications Specialist

Author:

Corin Bailey (PhD),
Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies
The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, St. Michael, Barbados.

Concept, Design and Layout:

Cullen J. Kong, Whirlwind Designs - Barbados.



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I n t r o d u c t i o n

One of the areas of focus in the 2008-2011 Multi-Country Programme of the UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Office is youth participation. This study sought to understand the extent of participation by adolescents in in-school clubs, with a particular focus on participation in Students' Councils. It also examined some of the barriers to in-school participation faced by adolescents. This report is a summary of a longer report that has been prepared as part of UNICEF for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Office's emphasis on evidenced-based communication for social and behaviour change. It was done during the period of August - September 2009.

M e t h o d o l o g y

The study began with a review of existing literature on youth participation. In the absence of available data on youth participation in the Caribbean the literature review used extensive findings from similar studies conducted in Western industrialized nations (E.g. US, UK, Canada, and Australia).

The study looked at the actual participation practices of students in schools in four countries of the Eastern Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada and St. Lucia.

Nineteen schools were selected across the four countries, reflecting geographical distribution (at least one rural and one urban school in each country), educational achievement (covering a range of achievement, including if possible both the highest achieving and lowest achieving school in each country) and single sex school (both boys and girls) as well as at least one mixed school in each country.

The following schools were involved in the study:

- **Barbados:** Harrison College, The Alleyne School, Lester Vaughan Secondary School, St. Leonards' Boys School, and St. George Secondary School.
- **Antigua and Barbuda:** Antigua Grammar School, Jennings Secondary School, McChesney, Antigua Girls High School
- **Grenada:** St. Mark's Secondary School, St Rose Modern, Westerhall Secondary School, Anglican Girls School, Grenada Boys Secondary School
- **St Lucia:** St. Mary's, St. Joseph's Convent, Ciceron, Choiseul, Anse Ger

A questionnaire survey was administered to 950 students, between ages 11 and 17 years, who were randomly selected from forms 2 to 5. With the help of the school, an attempt was made to ensure that the gender composition of the students reflected that of the school.

Questionnaires solicited information on the level of participation as well as the manner of participation of boys and girls in each school. Students were also asked questions relating to their reasons for participation or non-participation, their own notions on effective participation, as well as their recreational activities.



Interviews were held with high ranking members of the Students' Council in each school that had one. Where schools did not have a Council, the Head Boy or Girl was interviewed in order to get their perspective on the general participation among the student body, and their thoughts on whether or not a Students' Council would be effective in their school.

F i n d i n g s

General Participation in School Clubs

Student participation in school based clubs were generally low —————

Participation in student-based organizations in schools in Barbados was low, at 35 per cent, although 79 per cent of students surveyed were aware of the various opportunities for participation in clubs and organizations at their schools.

The same situation was found in St. Lucia, where 98 per cent of students were aware of opportunities to participate but only 48 per cent actually got involved. Student participation rates were somewhat higher in Grenada, at 54 per cent. In Antigua and Barbuda, 88 per cent of students said that they knew about the participation opportunities available to them, but only 34 per cent actually participated in at least one club or organization.

Participation was lower for boys in every country

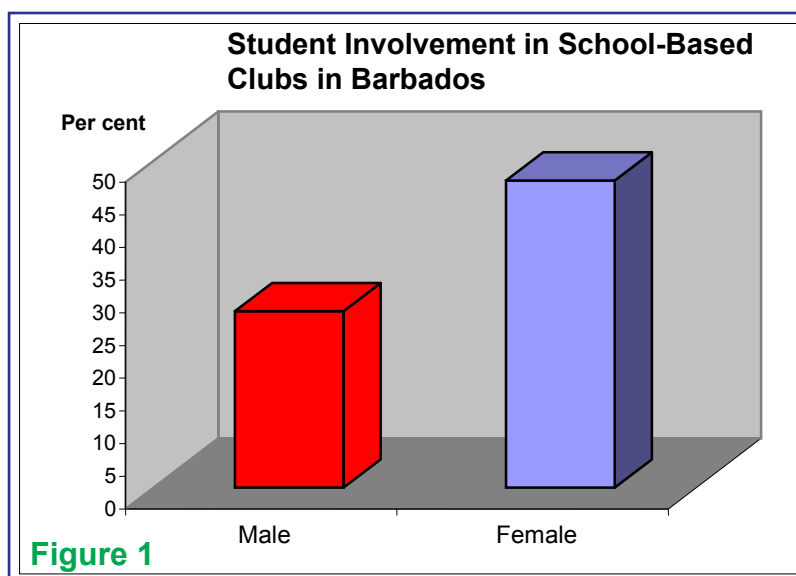
Participation of Girls versus Boys

Participation was lower for boys students in every country. The situation in Barbados was typical, with only 27 per cent of boys active in even one club or organization, while 47 per cent of girls participated in at least one club. Comparable rates for Grenada were 36 per cent for boys and 66 per cent for girls, while in St. Lucia only 24 per cent of boys participated compared to 65 per cent of girls.

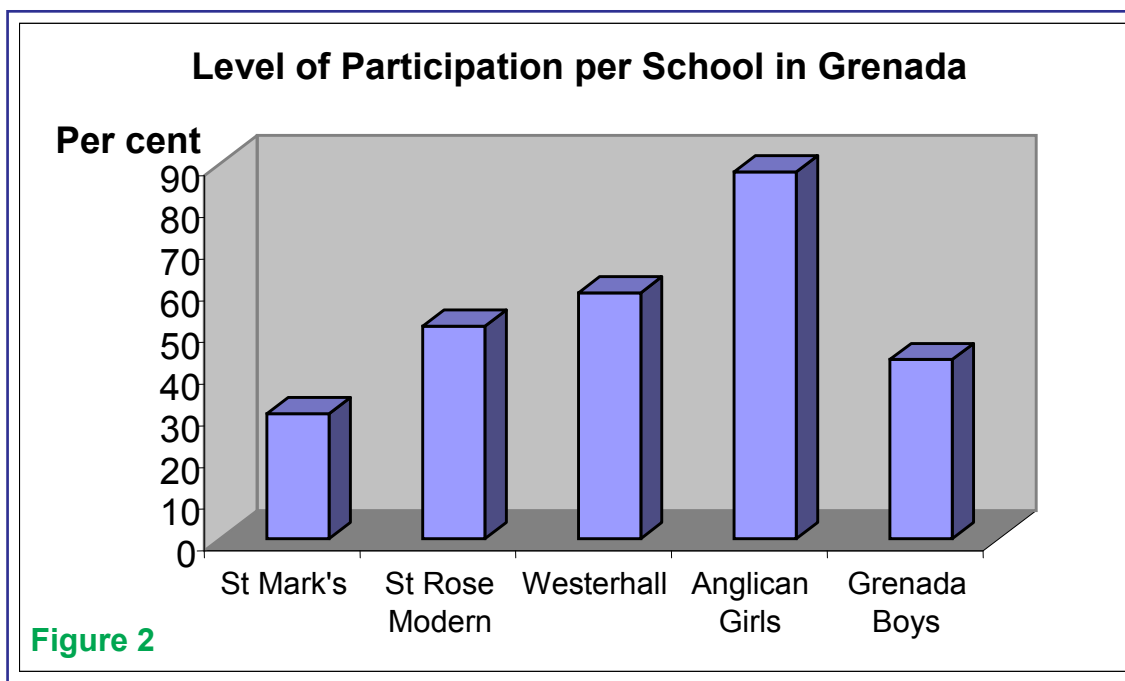
In Antigua and Barbuda, the overall participation rate was only 32 per cent. Although the participation at all-girl Antigua Girls School was 66 per cent, at the other schools the average participation rate was only 22 per cent.

Is the level of participation influenced by the level of academic achievement of the school?

Analysis of the survey results showed that the level of academic achievement at a school was not necessarily related to the level of participation in that school. In Barbados, for example, the highest rate of participation was found in the top performing Harrison College (50 per cent) but the school with the lowest academic performance (St. George Secondary) was next highest, with 48 per cent of its students indicating involvement.



Even more significantly, in Grenada the highest achieving school academically (St. Mark's Secondary School) was the school with the lowest level of student participation (30 per cent) while Westerhall Secondary, the lowest performing school, had the second highest participation percentage (59 per cent).



Motivations for Participation

In all countries surveyed, the main reason for participation given by the students surveyed was a desire to be more actively involved in their school. Other students said that they had been encouraged to become involved by their friends, who were also participating. In Barbados and Grenada, students also mentioned encouragement from their parents, while some students in Barbados and in Antigua and Barbuda joined clubs or other organizations because they thought it would look good on their reports.

Students' desire to be more actively involved in their school was the main reason for participation —





When asked why they did not participate in school-based activities, students in all four countries said that they were too busy or not interested. Students in Barbados, Grenada, and Antigua and Barbuda also said that the

activities ended too late for them to get involved. Only in Antigua and Barbuda did students reply that they were not aware of any specific reason for not getting involved.

Reasons for Non-participation in Antigua and Barbuda

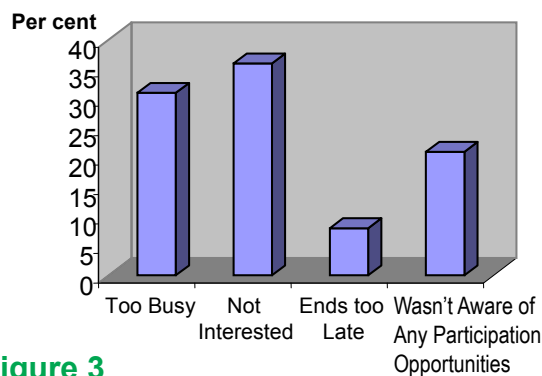


Figure 3

Reasons for Participation

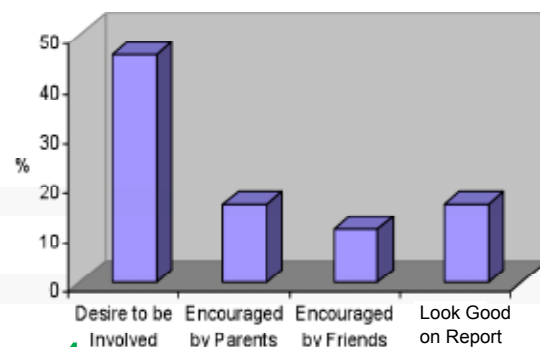


Figure 4

Participation in Students' Councils

Prevalence of Students' Councils in the four countries

Since 2007, the Ministry of Education in Barbados has mandated that every public secondary institution should have a Students' Council consisting of elected representatives of students with at least one Staff Advisor elected by the students. Eighteen secondary schools in Barbados reported having a functioning Students' Council (86 per cent of the total). Many of the Councils had been dormant until recently. Since the Ministry of Education made it mandatory, they have for the most part been revived. Nevertheless, it appeared that many of the schools were having problems getting the councils to thrive.

Although the Ministry of Education in St Lucia is preparing a revised school governance document, it makes no provision for the regulation of Students' Councils. The decision as to whether or not to have a Students' Council is left to the administration of each school.

Only 11 of the 23 secondary schools in St. Lucia have established Students' Councils.

In Grenada, the Ministry of Education does not make provision for the regulation of Students' Councils under the Educational Act. However, the Ministry was in the process, at the time of this study, of finalizing guidelines for Students' Councils. Fifteen of the 16 secondary schools in Grenada do have a Students' Council.

None of the schools in Antigua and Barbuda had an active Students' Council or any other organization that involved students in school decision-making, although students were able to join and participate in a range of school clubs that offered a basis for assessing participation.

Table 1 Prevalence of Students' Councils

Country	School Councils
Antigua and Barbuda	None
Barbados	Yes, all schools
Grenada	15 of 16 schools
Antigua	11 of 23 schools



Membership of Students' Councils

The system employed in each country where Councils existed was one in which there was a limit to the number of representatives per class and for that reason, the overall numbers were necessarily low. Members of the Students' Council were elected by their classmates to represent them, with at least one Staff Adviser. Under the Barbados system, students have the right, through the Students' Council, to:

- a) Democratically elect their representatives
- b) Have meetings with the Secondary School Board
- c) Meet with the Principal, and staff or both, on any matter affecting the students' welfare and interest
- d) Hold regular meetings to conduct business on their behalf, but with due regard to the smooth functioning of the institution

Are students aware of Students' Councils at the schools?

For the most part, students at schools in Barbados and Grenada were aware of the existence of their Student' Council, but in St. Lucia the level of awareness was somewhat lower. In Antigua and Barbuda, where there were no functioning Students' Councils, students were asked if they would like to have one. **Interest in a Students' Council was remarkably high regardless of location or level of school achievement.** Across the sample, 85 per cent of the students in Antigua and Barbuda reported that they would like to see a Students' Council set up at their school.

Do Students think Students' Councils are important?

Students said that it was important for them to have a voice in the running of their schools. They thought that:

- It was important for students to learn to speak up for themselves
- There were issues that mattered to students which teachers and other staff might not consider important
- That students know what is best for themselves and should have a say in decisions made by the administration that affect them.





In Grenada, some students expressed the view that the Council made it possible for students to share ideas among themselves.

Talking about why they would like a Students' Council, students in Antigua and Barbuda mentioned wanting to make a difference, wanting to solve student problems, wanting to share their views, and feeling that they would make a good leader.

Was there a difference in participation of boys and girls?

The level of involvement of boys and girls in Students' Councils was similar to their involvement in other organizations. Overall participation rates were higher for girls than for boys.

In Barbados, alone of all the countries in the survey, participation in the Students' Council was higher among the boys than girls, with 71 per cent of all Student Council positions held by boys. Conversely, in St. Lucia girls held 65 per cent of Students' Council positions, and in Grenada they held 64 per cent.

In Antigua and Barbuda, though both sexes displayed a high level of interest, a larger percentage of girls were interested than boys. When asked whether or not they would join a Students' Council if it were to exist, 76 per cent of girls said they would, but only 49 per cent of the boys said yes.

Except for Barbados, girls participated more in the Student Councils than boys _____

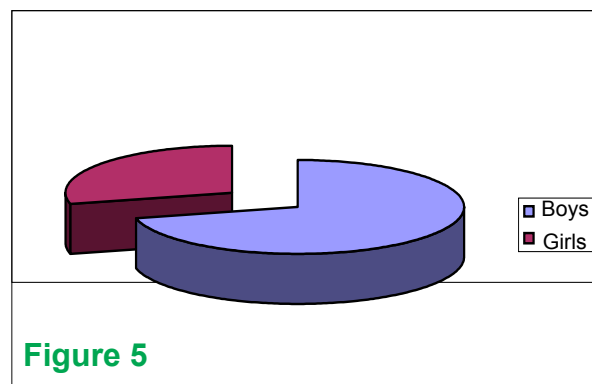


Figure 5

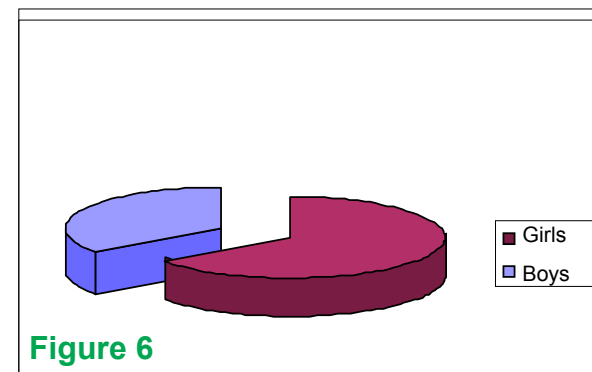


Figure 6



In St. Lucia, the feeling was that boys tended to believe that the council was boring, and 'not cool'. *"They just want to have fun, and the probably do not think that these groups are fun. They do not realize that it benefits you in the future."* Students in Grenada felt that boys were more interested in sports. One said, *"The boys are not even interested in going to class. All they want to do is play sports, lime on the block and do stupidity. . . I don't think that boys really know what it feels like to participate."* In Antigua and Barbuda there was also a concern that school-based organizations such as the Students' Council did not provide boys with the excitement necessary to garner their interest.





The organizations were seen as ‘nerdy’ or ‘girlish’ and individuals wishing to take part had to overcome the stigma attached to doing so —

Reasons for non-involvement in students’ councils

An indifference towards the activities of the Council pervaded the questionnaire survey, exemplified by the fact that, while the overwhelming majority felt that the Students’ Council was a worthwhile organization, they were not interested in being a part of it. The qualitative interviews gave some insight into the reasons for this. Common to all those surveyed was the fact that the Students’ Council and organizations like it suffered a negative image among a large portion of the student body, particularly the boys. The organizations were seen as

‘nerdy’ or ‘girlish’ and individuals wishing to take part had to overcome the stigma attached to doing so. This appeared to be easier for girls, as boys were seen to be more concerned with acceptance by their peers than their female counterparts.

Students in Barbados, St. Lucia and Grenada were asked to give reasons why they were not involved with the Students’ Council. The three most commonly mentioned reasons were that students felt the Council would be a waste of their time, that the students did not know that a Students’ Council existed, and that students were too busy. In all three countries, other reasons given for not participating were that the student in question did not get enough votes to be elected to the Council, that students at the school did not take the Council seriously, that it would be too difficult to deal with the school administration, or that the student might be considered a trouble maker for speaking up. Students in Antigua and Barbuda who were not interested in a Students’ Council gave similar reasons.





Reasons for Non-Involvement in Students' Council

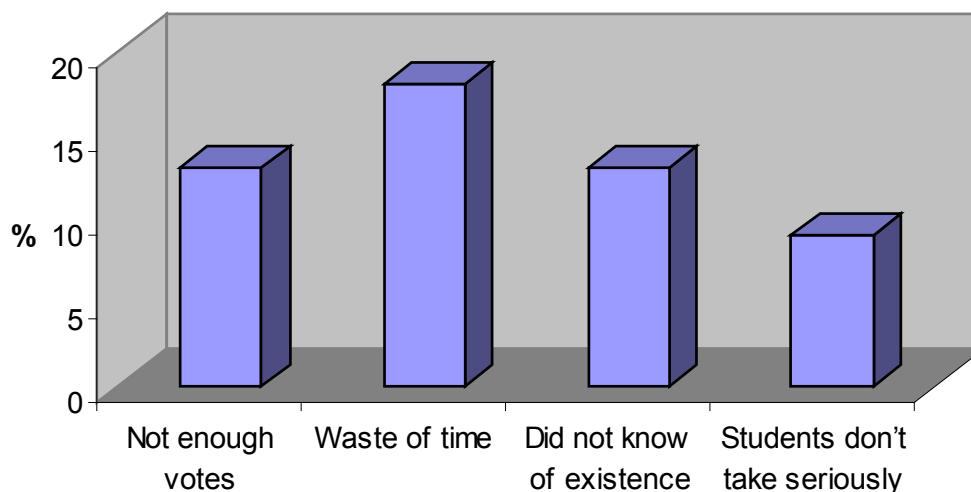


Figure 7

Other Reasons for Non-Participation

In Barbados, although most schools have Students' Councils, these were often struggling to thrive. The feeling expressed was that there was a lack of enthusiasm on the part of students, or lack of staff to organize and promote the Councils. The same lack of enthusiasm and interest was identified in St. Lucia, where there was also a feeling that staff had a role to play. One said, *"We can't find the right teachers to inspire and motivate the students."* Concern was also expressed that Students' Councils dealt with trivial matters and "did not advocate for empowerment or address serious school or other issues."

Though, from the questionnaire, a majority of students in Grenada considered their council to be 'very active', a number of students considered that the Councils could be more active, and cited a lack of enthusiasm by either the students or teachers as the reason for the lack of activity.



The prevailing view among the teens was that adults tended to be reluctant to encourage autonomy among the young

One student said that the Students' Council was *"not as active as it used to be, due to a lack of student commitment... They don't see the importance of it."*

Since there were no Students' Councils in Antigua and Barbuda, discussions with students dealt with overall participation in school activities. The desire of students to have a Students' Council was also addressed. The prevailing view among the teens was that adults tended to be reluctant to encourage autonomy among the young. Much of the blame for the lack of Students' Councils was placed at the feet of the respective school administrations. Despite this, it was felt by each student that their respective administrations would be supportive of them were they to form such an organization.

Did competing activities lead to lack of involvement in students' councils?

In every case, most of the students interviewed were involved in organized extra-curricular activities such as sports and clubs. Boys were most likely to be involved in sports, no matter where they lived: 81 per cent in Barbados, 78 per cent in St. Lucia, 62 percent in Grenada and 77 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda.

Much of the blame for the lack of Students' Councils was placed at the feet of the respective school administrations



Many girls were also involved in sports, but they generally cited a wider range of after-school activities, including church, clubs and choir.

The study also asked students about their involvement in doing chores around the home. In Barbados, 82 per cent of students did chores at home, while in St. Lucia and Grenada the figure was 94 per cent and it was almost 90 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda. Generally speaking, girls were more likely to do the cooking, cleaning and washing, although some boys were always involved. Boys, on the other hand, did most or all of the household repairs and most or all of the gardening. In general, students responding to the survey made it clear that the demands of these chores at home had no effect on their lack of interest in being part of the Students' Council. In all three countries which had Students' Councils, over 90 per cent in each school surveyed indicated that, regardless of what they do in their spare time, they simply were not interested in being a part of the Students' Council.

What needs to be done to encourage more students to become involved in student's councils?

Students were then asked what might be done in order to encourage greater interest and participation in the work of the Students' Council.

Although the ratio of support for the different alternatives varied from country to country, the four most frequently received responses were that the Council needs to be more fun, that it should also be better organized, that meetings should be held to explain the benefits of the Students' Council to all students, and that teachers should provide more encouragement.

Students made it clear that the demands of these chores at home had no effect on their lack of interest in being part of the Students' Council.



Barbados

Students in Barbados thought that greater promotion was needed to inform other students about Students' Council activities, and to generate interest in getting involved. One person suggested, *"I think there need to be brochures given out so that students can see that this is an organization in which I can say something to the board and see something come out of it and not be intimidated."*

Students also thought that it was the administration's responsibility to raise the overall level of interest in greater student participation. For them, it was important that the administration put some thought into new ways of encouraging students to join. As one respondent said, *"They can speak about it more at assembly or mention it at the beginning of term so that when new students come in they know that this is something that they can participate in and they are not left out."*

BARBADOS

What can be done to get more students involved in Student Councils?

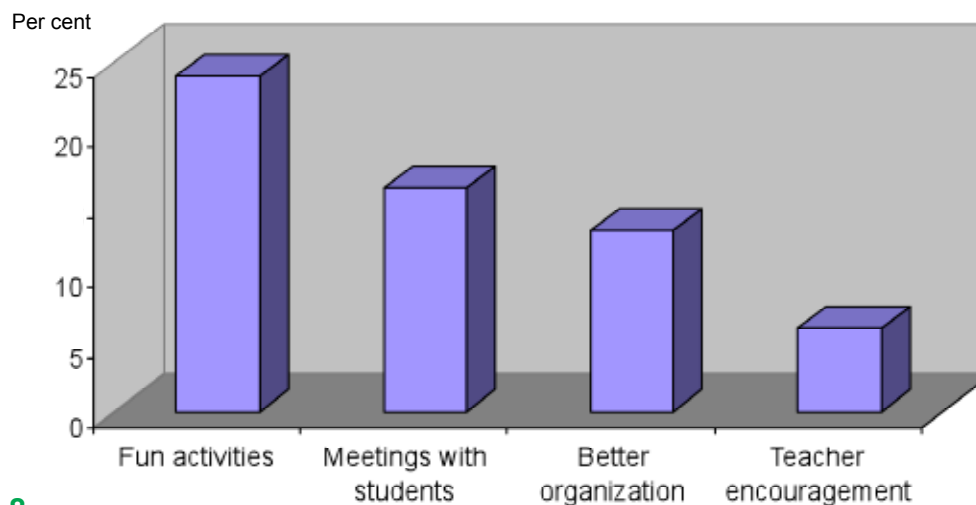


Figure 8

There needed to be greater promotion of the positive aspects of the council to allow students to see that it is an organization that is worth their time

St. Lucia

In St. Lucia, much of the discussions on what could be done to encourage greater participation centered around the changing of attitudes towards the council among the student body. Some felt that many students did not feel that the Students' Council was effective, as those who do join often approach the task with a lack of conviction. The feeling was that there needed to be greater promotion of the positive aspects of the council to allow students to see that it is an organization that is worth their time. This promotion it was argued needed to come from both the existing Council members, as well as the administration.

ST. LUCIA

What can be Done to get more Students Involved in Students' Council?

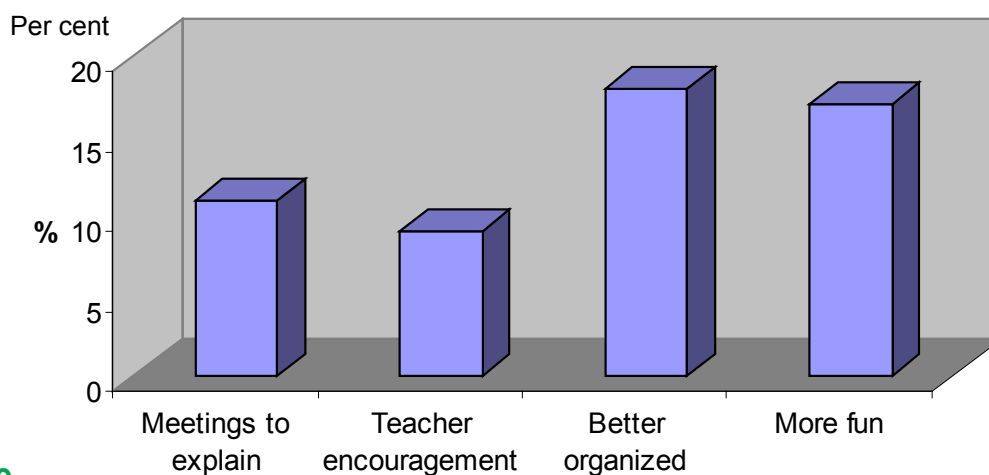


Figure 9

Grenadian students felt it important for administration to help them show that these groups were doing good things and that they were not just for 'nerds'

Grenada

In Grenada, students agreed that school administrations were doing a good job of facilitating the work of the Students' Councils, but, at the same time, they saw that there were still too many students who were not aware of the Students' Council's existence or work in their school, so more needed to be done to promote the Students' Councils. They argued that it was important for the administration to help them show that these groups were doing good things and that they were not just for 'nerds'. Most importantly it was felt that something had to be done to address the lack of male involvement in the organizations.

GRENADA

What can be Done to get more Students Involved in Students' Council?

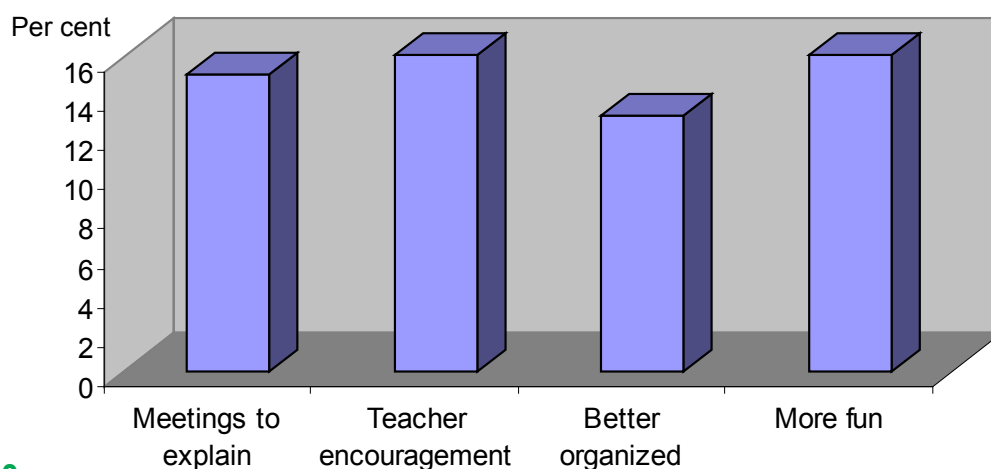


Figure 10

Antigua and Barbuda

Students in Antigua and Barbuda thought that having Students' Councils in their schools would be the perfect platform upon which the student bodies could make their views and concerns known to the school administration.

At the moment, they had no such opportunity. One student mused: *"We have certain problems in the school. For example we lack teachers at the moment. So it would be good if we had a group that could bring this forward to the principal."*

Antigua and Barbuda

Reasons Why Students would Join a Student Councils

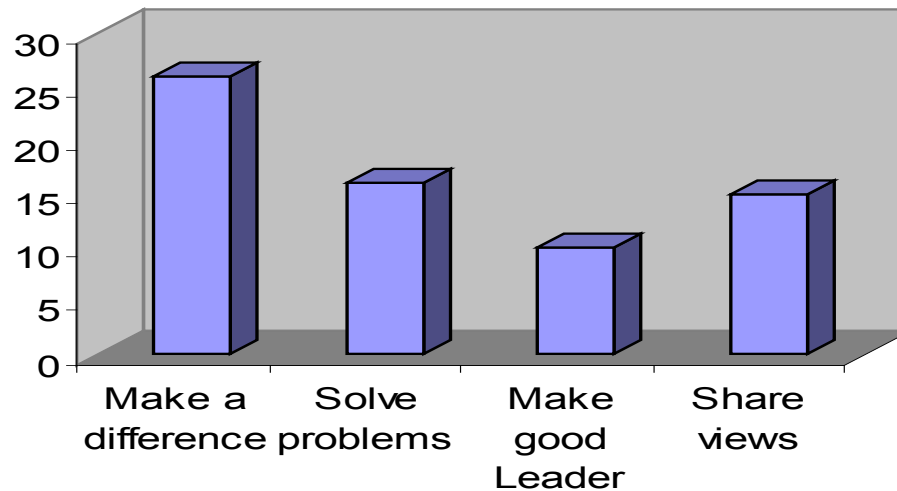


Figure 11

How to encourage more male participation in Students' Council

The lack of male participation in the Students' Council dominated the discussions in all countries on what needs to be done to involve more students. Interviewees in Barbados felt that special strategies should be employed to attract boys. Some teens argued that only when boys feel they have something to gain might they join the Council.

One of the clearest insights into why boys do not participate in the Students' Council at the same level as girls came from Barbados, where one student said, *"Boys try more to be accepted. For boys, acceptance is key, especially at secondary level, everybody wants you to do what they are doing and if you don't you are stupid or a nerd."*

The challenge, therefore, is to enable boys to feel that Students' Council or other school activities are acceptable.

As one respondent in Grenada said, *"You have to make the boys want to get involved."* Another person in Grenada noted, *"They need to have some more activities that will attract more boys"*

While one respondent in Antigua and Barbuda suggested that boys' participation in school activities could be made compulsory, another recommended efforts to encourage greater involvement, because the absence of desire to participate was in many cases masking a lack of confidence among the male members of the student body.





R e c o m m e n d a t i o n s

The establishment of an effective Students' Council is beneficial to the running of schools, from the perspective of both the administration and the student body. In addition to functioning as a link between students and school, Students' Councils give teens the opportunity to become responsible leaders within the school environment, while at the same time building the basis for effective participation throughout adolescence and into adulthood. With this in mind, a number of recommendations emerged from the study.

- **Government Legislation:**

Though a government mandate establishing Students' Councils would not increase the number of teens in schools where a Council already exists, it would provide opportunities for those who would otherwise be interested in becoming involved but have not been given the platform to do so. Although in countries such as St. Lucia, where no Government mandate exists, Students' Councils are nevertheless prevalent, other countries such as Antigua and Barbuda have shown a lack of initiative in this regard which might be remedied by a formal mandate.

- **Greater Promotion by School**

Administrations: School administrators were generally commended by interview teens for their role in the establishment and operation of the Students' Councils. However, the one area in which they were criticized throughout the sample was promotion. The advertisement of the Councils was left to the Council executive and it is clear that this system was not working. Teens in each of the three countries with councils called for greater attention to be paid by the administration to making students aware of both the existence and the activities of the Council. There was a strong view that this would greatly increase participation.

- **Targeted Interventions:** Although the male-female disparity in participation in the Students' Councils was not as great as for other organizations, with the exception of Barbados girls were generally more active than their male counterparts. Interventions must be targeted at increasing male participation along with more general methods of to stigma attached to this form of participation for boys, and an emphasis should be placed on benefits to be gained as a result of their involvement.

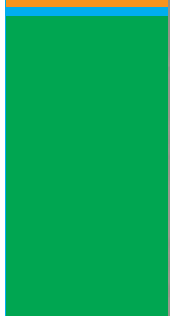
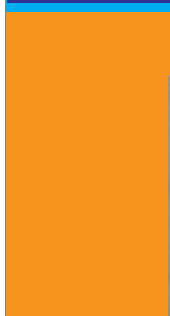


- **Teacher Involvement:** Students' Councils become ineffective when the link between the Council and the administration is non-existent. Those Councils that are most vibrant have teachers assigned who support them. This aids in maintaining order, as well as keeping the lines of communication open between

the administration and the Council. Therefore it is important to have the correct profile of teacher assigned to these Councils who understand the role of a Council, can serve as this liaison and be trusted by both staff and students. It is also important that this person is a permanent staff member for the purpose of continuity.

Conclusion

With these recommendations, Students' Councils in the Caribbean can become the effective partnership between administration and student that they were designed to be. Implementation of the recommendations in this study will serve the long-term goals of school management, staff and parents, and educate those students involved on the value of citizenship and participation. Attempts must be made to remove the stigma attached to this form of participation for boys, and an emphasis should be placed on benefits to be gained as a result of their involvement.



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