

CONSTITUTION OF STUDENTS COUNCILS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In order to equip students with life skills such as confidence, management, communication etc, and to revive co-curricular activities in public schools by actively engaging students, the District Administration/District Education Authority decided to constitute elected students councils in such schools. It was further envisaged that such an initiative would not only inculcate sense of responsibility amongst the students but also introduce democracy and democratic values at grassroots level, and that too in a country where regrettably democracy has failed to take roots even after more than 70 years of its establishment.

Since the term 'students union' had developed a negative connotation over the time, the District Administration and the District Education Authority painstakingly avoided using it. Also no one wanted to give the impression of 'unionism' in our schools. Unlike students unions therefore, where students with political inclinations/ambitions generally participated, the criteria for students' councils were such that only hardworking, capable and disciplined students could participate and get elected.

In the pilot phase, the students' councils were introduced in High and Higher Secondary schools only. It was thought that once perfected, the concept might be expanded to other schools too. Every council comprised President, Vice-President and General Secretary hailing respectively from the three senior most classes of a school. Only those students were eligible to contest the elections who had secured top three positions in last annual exams. In case of disinterest by anyone, next in line/merit became eligible. Similarly, high attendance, punctuality, and good conduct were also included in the criteria to ensure that only the best students in all respects could come forth for the elections.

As regards the elections, the schedule was announced well in advance to enable eligible and interested students to run their campaigns for at least one week. On the day of the elections, which were held simultaneously in the entire district, election symbols, ballot papers, voting screens, ballot boxes, polling agents, etc. were all used to give students as much experience of elections held at higher levels as possible. A senior teacher acted as the Election Commission to oversee the process, and to take and address complaints/election petitions, if any. The responsibilities of the students' councils so elected were decided as under:

- a) To become a role model for other students by exhibiting best discipline, performance, conduct and character.
- b) To arrange co-curricular activities such as *Bazm-e-Adab*, speech/debate, essay writing, painting, sports and other such competitions.
- c) To lead special initiatives such as promotion of book reading amongst the students, improvement of writing skills, green schools, etc.
- d) To guide/encourage on how to access the online magazine, *Roshni*, and how to contribute to the same.
- e) To help the school administration in maintaining discipline at the campus.
- f) To assist the school administration on special occasions such as parents' day, sports day, annual functions, August 14 events and more.
- g) To communicate the problems faced by the students, and their opinions on various issues, to the school administration.
- h) To convey the messages/announcements by the school administration to the students, as and when needed.
- i) To guide the new comers/fresh admissions.
- j) Other responsibilities as and when assigned.

In order to ensure that no aspect/element was ignored while simulating general elections, the office bearers of students' councils were even administered a formal oath before assuming their responsibilities. A central ceremony was held at Government Girls High School Khursheed Abad, Muzaffargarh, with none other than the Minister for School Education himself administering the

oath, and whereby the elected members vowed not only to serve their fellow students and assist their teachers but also to forget the bitterness of the past, if any, and take along those who had contested elections against them. Similar ceremonies were held in other *tehsil* headquarters simultaneously too where the Assistant Commissioners administered oath to those elected.