

SCHOOL ELECTIONS - notes for students



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Preface

School elections are an opportunity for learning through practice. Learning that is central to citizenship education, for leadership and life skills, and that is also challenging and fun to be part of.

This booklet has been produced in a participatory way, including educationalists and students, from 34 colleges, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, government and lay private, in North West, South West and Littoral regions of Cameroon. Two hundred and forty students and one hundred and twenty prefects contributed by describing the system currently used to put prefects in place in their schools, the advantages, disadvantages and their suggestions for improvement. They also explained what they had learned from having school elections, good and bad things. Two hundred and forty eight school administrators and staff also gave input. This helped us to identify good practice and bad practice and come out with a framework of modern, standardised guidelines, codes of conduct, background information and notes that were tested in six additional colleges during their 2009 elections. Feedback and comment was incorporated into these final booklets.

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Why have student government and elections in school?

Student governments in Cameroon started in our oldest schools, CBC Bali and Sasse College. Their role and how they are run has evolved differently in different schools. In no place do student governments mean that students start running the school, but there are aspects of running schools where students can and do participate and contribute to decision making. We believe that applying democratic principles will result in better schools. Our churches are run to democratic principles and strive to promote these. Our government is striving to promote democratic practices.

Having government, elections and citizenship education in school is part of the education we provide to each of our students, ‘in building a responsible society, we must start by making the individual responsible’ - our goal as Christian schools is to graduate students with good character, meaning with values of fairness, honesty and trust, ready to take responsibility for their actions and participate in ensuring responsible behaviours in wider society. Our tradition of student elections and prefectship are a valuable practical teaching and learning experience in these domains.

Democracy - background

People often use the word democracy when decisions have to be made or leaders have to be selected. We hear the word often these days, but what does it really mean? The word democracy comes from two Greek words, “demos” which means *people* in Greek, and “kratos” which is Greek for *power*. The root meaning of democracy is thereby ‘people power’ or ‘power by the people’ or more widely it is defined as describing a community, or a state in which the power of government resides in or is exercised by the people and for the people. Power can be exercised by people directly, or indirectly. Indirectly means that the people choose representatives, who act on their behalf. Most importantly, it is about people participating in the shaping and running of their society. Involving the people, through discussion of alternatives, hearing different points of view, consulting and shared decision making, and applying these decisions to how things are run, are as much a part of democracy as voting and elections.

We have said that the English word democracy has its origins in ancient Greek language, so it is not a new thing, neither is it a foreign concept. People in various societies have wanted to participate in the shaping and running of their societal affairs. Democracy is something that is constantly evolving and has different forms in different parts of the world, including China, India and Arab societies, as well as Africa. This has been a long tradition of most societies in Cameroon. Societies where people take part in the affairs and decision making of the society progress fast and enjoy peace and stability. Good governance is therefore portrayed by the practice and participation of the community. Divergent views, liberal thinking and democratic principles provoke development. Societies that have enshrined in their customs/cultures and traditions, basic tenets of good governance experience fast economic growth. When power is given to the leaders of society through democratic elections, which are free and fair, collaboration, participation and harmony results.

Democracy in its own form is a part of African cultures. Traditionally, in the selection and crowning of Cameroonian leaders, Chiefs, Fons and Lamidos, succession is hereditary, but democracy comes in because the successful candidate has to meet certain qualities. Kingmakers debate and discuss, they select according to leadership qualities of ‘candidates.’ This is more democratic than the past tradition in many European nations where the eldest son of a late monarch, or eldest daughter if there were no sons, became king or queen - regardless of their ability to rule. African traditional leaders and traditional councils also place a strong emphasis on consulting their people and seeking consensus. The systems of debate and deliberation that they use to govern are as democratic as modern parliaments. When African elders and chiefs sat under the famous Baobab tree, their aim was to talk and talk until they agreed. Historically African nations were ruled through agreement and consensus.

Our traditional systems sometimes receive criticism, that women and youths are excluded from certain things, that hierarchy dictates speaking order, the poor are overshadowed by those with higher status who are allowed to speak first. However the views of these groups are represented. Most villages have youth councils where matters concerning them are debated. Decisions arrived at are channelled through the village council to the chief who finally enacts them as laws, thus we see that the youths are involved in the decision making of the village. We have public, market place or village arena meetings where debates on issues concerning the community are held. After the debate a consensus decision is taken. Town criers summon people to meet in the palace so that every member of the community can be involved in the decision making process. Chiefs significantly are not usually the chair person in village councils so can not use their power as chief to influence the decision of the council. When the interests of people are overridden by leaders, civil strife invariably results in one form or another, civil strife that is a manifestation of the peoples power - democracy at work.

Democracy is also central to our churches. The bible in the book of Acts 6:1-7 and 1st Timothy 3:1-16 gives instances of elections. CBC and PCC carry out elections from the local churches to associations or parishes and then to highest organs like the General Council and the Synod. CBC follows a congregational system of democracy, where decisions are made at congregational level, by elected representatives. PCC differs in that each congregation votes representatives who contribute to decision making at a central level. We all believe in the fact that leaders are chosen by God and that we arrive at these God chosen leaders through holding elections at regular intervals. Where such elections have been manipulated somehow, or the people have failed to understand that in an election there is a winner and a loser, there is always strife.

Democracy in our schools

Prefects are sometimes referred to as student government. The dictionary definition of governance is ‘to administer or manage an undertaking or establishment.’ Government is ‘the system by which a nation or community is run’, ‘to conduct the policy, actions and affairs of a state or establishment’, ‘to guide, direct, lead, control’.

A function of prefects is to help the administration maintain a friendly and orderly atmosphere amongst the students and in the school in general. They assist in maintaining discipline, by guiding and supervising other students, they therefore are helping to manage, are guiding and leading for the smooth running of our school communities. They can best do this, if the student body choose and accept them into this position. When prefects are voted by students, they command more respect and obedience from those they lead.

When elections are fair and well run according to standards known by all involved then problems are avoided, and outcomes undisputable.

The responsibility of students during the election process

- Considering that holding elections is a learning process for the development of talents and potentials in students, and that it is a very serious exercise;
- Given that the election process will equip students with skills for leadership in their homes, jobsites and society;
- Mindful of the fact that life at one point or the other calls for us all to manage human and material resources:

all students are expected to:

- i. Actively participate in school elections.
- ii. Be familiar with the guidelines for running of school elections, the rules and regulations and codes of conduct for the various stages of elections.
- iii. Adhere to the above on their own part, and ensure that correct practice is respected by the school administration and all other parties.
- iv. Be familiar with the tasks of the different prefect posts, and the qualifications and skills required to fulfil these posts successfully.
- v. Reflect on their own skills and ambitions, the educational and career benefits of being a prefect, and be encouraged to participate as a candidate (see section 'Why be a prefect' overleaf).
- vi. Evaluate the candidates wisely, select and **vote** for individuals they believe will respect the school, their fellow students and duties of the post they are contesting.
- vii. Abstain from any campaign activity on behalf of candidates that involves intimidation, bribery, character denigration, untruths or deception.
- viii. Exhibit a disciplined mature behaviour before, after and during the elections.
- ix. Be content that the final announced result is true and fair.
- x. Follow the official appeal procedure to report any complaints or problems.
- xi. Respect the result of the election.
- xii. Collaborate responsibly and respectfully with prefects, staff and administration throughout the school year, to ensure that prefects elected, as individuals and as a team, are able to fulfil their purpose in the school community.
- xiii. Follow the official appeal procedure to report any complaints, or problems.

Why be a prefect?

Prefect ship provides practical lessons in leadership and management. It is a training, an additional qualification that will help you when you graduate, providing you with understanding and skills that will help you in your homes, to find employment, in your working life, and wider society. Several surveys have shown that a majority of successful managers, business people and leaders in society, in Cameroon and elsewhere were prefects at school.

Certain qualifications are necessary to be accepted as a candidate for prefect. You can prepare, while a junior student, so that you will be qualified when you reach class four or lower sixth.

Being a prefect, especially a good one, can be difficult and challenging, it requires extra work, but in the longer term you will reap the benefits.

In our survey of 34 schools we asked the questions

- What do you like about being a prefect?
- What do you dislike about being a prefect?
- What have you learned from being a prefect?

In their responses prefects said:

- That it makes them develop a spirit of hard work, because they have to balance duty and academics.
- They learn how to handle people with many different worries and concerns.
- It enables them to address a crowd, and to build self-confidence.
- Above all, they say that they learned patience, politeness and acceptance of open criticism.

They also explained that

- It helps them develop leadership skills, it teaches them humility,
- It is a great challenge to be conscious that people are watching them around the clock.
- Friends turn against you.
- Difficult decisions for common good have to be made.
- Leisure and study time is eaten up.
- Worries and isolation come in.
- They learn how to work in a team, through the support and collaboration with other prefects.

Responsibility of school administrations

School administration shall -

- i. Provide a policy and guidelines defining the aims and mission of its prefect system.
- ii. Create awareness amongst students and staff on the management of school elections, ensuring fairness, equity and uniformity.
- iii. Provide a code of conduct and eligibility for student candidates for prefect posts.
- iv. Publish the above documents on all notice boards, in the first term.
- v. Publish the specific prefect posts, and terms of reference for each, including qualifications for eligibility.
- vi. Ensure that a staff meeting precedes the election period, with all staff briefed on their roles in relation to student government.
- vii. Create and publish an appeal system. The appeal board being impartial, neutral persons.
- viii. Punish those who contravene rules, regulations and codes of conduct.
- ix. Form an elections committee that shall include administration, staff and students. This committee shall be sensitised in the organisational procedures and conduct.
- x. Develop student government as part of the social tradition of the institution, with election activity included in the school calendar.
- xi. Recognise that prefects are students, not workers, thus teachers shall cooperate with prefects as mentors, supporting, encouraging, guiding and counselling in order to develop sound leadership skills, Christian values and an orderly and fair school community.
- xii. Appreciate that prefects cite a most difficult aspect of their position being humiliation from staff and administration that undermines their post and relationship with fellow students.
- xiii. Ensure that teachers and staff are adequately aware of their own role in mentoring prefects, giving due regard and respect to prefects, recognising the challenging duty they have undertaken.

xiv. Requirements for prefect ship

Qualifications and experience

- i. Academic record must be above average.
- ii. Behavioural record must be exemplary, including absence or attendance record
- iii. Student must be registered in year four or lower six and have attended the college for >2 years.

Personal skills and aptitudes

- i. Self-confident: be bold and assertive.
- ii. Ability to speak in public, to students and adults.
- iii. Team working skills.
- iv. Be organised and resourceful.
- v. Be polite, honest, reliable, punctual and hardworking.
- vi. Demonstrable interest and ability in the area of the post applied for, be it health, sport, music.

Accountability

- i. Prefects are ultimately responsible to the principal, vice-principal and discipline master.
- ii. On a day to day basis prefects are responsible to the individual member of staff managing their post, as specified in the college guidelines for prefects.

Responsibilities

- i. Prefects must adhere to School rules and regulations at all times.
- ii. The main duty of prefects and dormitory captains is to maintain an atmosphere of friendly cooperation, peace, discipline and unity in the college.
- iii. Prefects should serve as councillors to junior students.
- iv. Prefects must liaise and collaborate with each other, as a team, to ensure efficiency and smooth running of their own area of responsibility and of the school as a whole.
- v. Prefects academic and behavioural standards must be maintained.
- vi. Prefects will always work in the interest of the school.
- vii. All discipline notes from prefects must be reported to the Discipline Master.

Limits to authority

Implementation of discipline is carried out by school authorities/employees. School authorities can use the services of prefects for supervision only.

General rules and regulations for prefects –sample

- i. The student community is called to live together in peace and discipline, to respect the rights of each and every one in the community.
- ii. Conscious of the tradition and culture of good and fair governance handed down over the years;
- iii. Desiring to uphold the principles of good governance so as to enhance the harmony of coordinated action;
- iv. In pursuant of cherished peace that is begot from the equity, discipline and peace that enhances a conducive academic milieu, we hereby put in place rules and regulations to serve as a guide for any student government.

Membership of student government

- i. The student government shall be constituted of students who have been democratically elected to posts of responsibility*. They will become members following an investiture ceremony by the school administration in a solemn general assembly of the school.
- ii. Prefects shall carry a badge that distinguishes their office of service.
- iii. Each prefect shall have a document defining his/her area of competence, roles and duties.
- iv. Prefects shall, in discharging their duty, act in love, assuming the role of senior brother/sister to the junior ones placed in their charge.
- v. The head prefect shall consult with the school administration on matters of policy, and sanctions.
- vi. Prefects shall promote discipline in all their domains, coordinated by the head prefect.
- vii. Prefects will ensure the smooth functioning of the school in matters of peace, order and discipline and strict respect of school rules and regulations without fear or favour.
- viii. The school administration will convene prefects meetings to revamp, revitalize and concert on matters affecting the day to day student life in the community.
- ix. The members of government prefects shall be boys/girls of integrity, who will teach by examples respecting the rules and regulations of the institution.
- x. The prefects will respect hierarchy, honour and obey their teachers and at no time will they usurp the place of the administration.
- xi. The prefects must give students appearing to have broken rules or regulations, an opportunity to give themselves a fair hearing, so they be corrected in love to deter any future occurrence of the crime.
- xii. The prefects shall not sublet their authority to their friends for convenience.
- xiii. They will in all school activities lead and serve.
- xiv. The prefect will in everything represent the school image positively. He/she shall ensure the pursuit of academic excellence and orderly behaviour.
- xv. His/her moral and academic life shall always be a model for the student community to emulate.

Corporal punishment is forbidden in Cameroon's schools, by Presidential decree, and by law # 98/004 14 April 1998. Part IV for students.

* If it happens that there is no applicant for a post then the administration must make every effort to encourage applications. If unsuccessful then at the end of the elections the school administration appoints.

*When only one applicant applies for a post, all efforts will be made to encourage others.

Prefect posts and the role and responsibilities of each

Each school has its own combination of prefect posts. Job description for each post should include –

Title,

Accountability, who the prefect is responsible to (equally, who is responsible for each post),

Main duties, the purpose of the post, eg. to promote sports in the school and assist the sports master in

The detail included in the description of each post is left to the discretion of each school, bearing in mind that the purpose of a post description is to aid school administration and -

- i. inform the applicant,
- ii. serve as reference for the selection committee,
- iii. serve as reference to the post holder, once appointed,
- iv. serve as reference members of staff responsible for prefects,
- v. serve as reference against which to award prizes to prefects who excel,
- vi. and for disciplinary measures when post holders do not fulfil their duties.

Our outline duty of refectory prefect specifies – 'Ensure cleanliness, order and peace during meals.' Individual schools may expand this to include specific tasks, like -

- i. responsible for prayers before and after meals,
- ii. responsible for announcement and distribution of letters,
- iii. draws up table list and appoints table captains,
- iv. ensures food is shared equitably on each table,
- v. releases approved quantities of food items from the store for each meal,
- vi. is the chairperson of the food committee. etc.

Stages in the running of school elections

Steps		Reasons
1	Announce elections and the timetable.	Mobilisation, awakening. Make those who plan to run start thinking about their capabilities and weakness.
2	Create an election committee made up of students, teachers, and the administration. Planning, Assign responsibilities Scheduling, Preparation of materials: check list below.*	Prepare and oversee organization of elections: comprising class reps, staff members, representatives of administration, with a chair appointed from amongst them.
3	Sensitise students on prefect ship and elections	Teach the significance of voting procedure, codes of conduct, elected leadership, choosing good leaders, accountability, etc.
4	Invitation to apply, made in presence of all students.	Transparency and equal opportunity.
5	Publish the different posts, including job description. Publish the general qualifications for prefect ship. Publish 'job description' for each post. Publish code of conduct for prefects. Brief and encourage prospective candidates. Make standardised application forms available from and returnable to known point - Vice Principal's office, or Discipline Master, as case may be.	Enable candidates to size themselves up and see exactly where to fit. Provide reference against which appointments are made, and that post-holders must fulfil to stay in post. Ensure that uniform information is submitted by all candidates.

School elections – notes for students

6	Reception and short listing of applications by elections committee, based on published conditions.	Ensure suitability of candidates especially on discipline and academics. Ensures that only qualified candidates enter the race.
7	Publication of approved candidates.	Transparency.
8	Candidates briefed: including that manifesto and campaigns must match the requirements and limitations of posts applied for.	Order and accountability.
9	Code of conduct for campaigns posted in strategic areas of school. Each candidate given a copy.	To avoid disorder and indiscipline.
10	Present candidates to school. Declare campaigns open Campaign code of conduct enforced – any use of sweets, biscuits, intimidation, unrealistic promises, character denigration disciplined.	Provides opportunity for candidates to meet students, adds colour to the school year, instils a culture of fairness, honesty, trust.
11	Candidates speak to students, presenting their manifestos to general assembly. Candidates submit copy of manifesto for filing.	Training in public speaking. Helps electorate judge suitability of candidates. For accountability and future evaluation of post holders.
12	Election conducted in individual classrooms and/or the hall by secret balloting.	Transparency and trust in the exercise.
13	Public counting of the votes at voting site, by class/school election committee. The ballot box must be emptied, each paper opened by one person who hands it	That students know free and transparency and trust. That students know free and fair democratic practice.

	<p>to a second person who calls out the names selected. Names are recorded by two separate people, on tally sheets.</p> <p>Invalid papers (that are unclear, altered, etc) are also called out, tallied and totalled.</p> <p>Numbers recorded on each tally sheet are totalled, checked and signed by two people.</p> <p>The result is declared immediately, verbally.</p> <p>If voting is in separate classrooms then three written copies of the result are signed by the committee present, one is pasted on the information board or wall of the class, the other sent to the central counting centre, the other to central notice board.</p> <p>If voting is in a single hall, then two signed copies of the result are made, one posted on the notice board, one filed by the principal.</p>	
14	Immediate official announcement and publication of results, on notice board at each voting site.	Transparency and trust in the process.
15	Orientation of elected prefects - coordinated by the discipline department with different duty post holders.	Helps elected prefects to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.
16	Installation and dedication by the administration	Newly elected leaders are installed in their functions (empowerment)

***Check list of election materials**

- i. List of prefect posts
- ii. Roles and responsibilities of each prefect post
- iii. Qualifications for prefect ship
- iv. Code of conduct for prefects
- v. Application forms for post of prefect
- vi. Code of conduct for campaigns
- vii. Elections guidelines for students
- viii. Ballot papers, printed
- ix. A ballot box – eg a large cardboard box / carton
- x. Tally sheets for recording the votes
- xi. Forms for declaration of winning candidates
- xii. Badges for prefects

Code of conduct for student election campaigns.

- i. School rules are to be followed at all times, including any schedule for campaigning.
- ii. Violations of rules and regulations and codes of conduct shall be punished.
- iii. Campaign speeches will contain only attainable proposals, and no insults or criticism of opponents.
- iv. Candidates and their representatives or supporters are forbidden to use any kind of intimidation, threats, materials, food or financial inducements, with the aim of influencing votes.

General provisions

- i. In the case of a tied vote, a re-run will be held. If there is still a tie then the head of institution will have the casting vote.
- ii. When a candidate runs for more than one position, and in their second or third choice turns out to be the only candidate the school authority must respect the student's choice and make an appointment for the others.
- iii. Any individual with a grievance concerning any aspect of the elections is free, and shall be encouraged to submit a written complaint following the school's published appeal procedure.

How to select who you will vote for

- i. Remember that you are choosing the people who will be leaders in your school community. Prefects can contribute to making your school a better place to live and study, they can make it an uncomfortable place for you to live and study. Choose well.
- ii. Realise that charismatic, ‘popular’ and brilliant students can make good leaders, but so can unassuming, diplomatic, low profile individuals.
- iii. Consider the role and responsibility of vacant posts, the qualifications and skills of the candidates vying for those posts and vote for someone who is able to do the job well.
- iv. Note that a candidate who tramples on rules, regulations and fair play in order to get elected to a post is likely to trample on rules, regulations and fair play while occupying that office.
- v. A candidate who spends money to get voted is likely to find ways to recoup the money spent once in office.

Application form for prefect position

A standard application form should be produced, that all applicants must fill and submit to the selection committee.

It could include the following notes.

- i. If you apply for more than one position, then a separate form must be completed for each post.
- ii. If you apply for more than one post then you must indicate which is your preference, second choice, third choice. If you receive the most votes for more than one post then this stated preference will be respected and the candidate with the second largest vote will be appointed to the other position.
- iii. Maximum of three applications per student.

Ballot papers

- A sample ballot paper will be posted on the central notice board representing the official candidate list.
- Ballot papers will be printed, by each school, immediately the candidate list is produced.
- One ballot paper will be required for each student – the correct number should be printed, otherwise some students may be unable to vote, or some to make multiple votes.

Ballot paper – sample

POST	CANDIDATE	Mark a cross to indicate one choice for each post
Senior girl	Evelyn	
	Grace	
	Sarah	
Refrectorian	Alice	
	Grace	
	Limunga	
Works prefect	Stella	
	Susan	
	Clara	
Religious prefect	Kate	
	Estelle	
	Winifred	
Sports prefect		
Health prefect		
Prep prefect		
Time keeper		
Library prefect		

Recording sheet

POST	CANDIDATE	TALLY	TOTAL
Senior girl	Evelyn	//// //// ////	15
	Grace	//// //// //// //// //// //	27
	Sarah	//	2
Refrectorian	Alice		
	Grace		
	Limunga		
Works prefect	Stella		
	Susan		
	Clara		
Religious prefect	Kate		
	Estelle		
	Winifred		
Sports prefect			
Health prefect			
Prep prefect			
Time keeper			
Library prefect			

Signed as accepted (by at least one teacher and two student members of count committee)

Counting committee member 1 _____

Counting committee member 2 _____

Counting committee member 3 _____

Post election coordination, management and smooth running of prefect teams.

Our prefect systems are to be treated part of the educational provision of our schools. We encourage students to be prefects, because it is a learning opportunity, a chance to gain skills and experience that serve as an additional qualification when they graduate. Research has shown that a majority of successful professionals, in business, management and other areas, participated in student government while at school. Many young people confirm that being a prefect was difficult and challenging, but that they benefited later in life, through success gaining employment and posts of responsibility and leadership - they appreciate the skills they built as a result of being a prefect.

- i. Periodic meetings between the administration and prefects will be held to ensure smooth functioning of prefect activity. Prefects as well as admin may call these meetings, which will provide mentoring to prefects as well administrative function.
- ii. Senior prefect will convene regular prefects meetings, for team building, mutual support, and smooth running of prefect duties.
- iii. An appeal session will be held every Friday night where those on punishment list can present and appeal their cases.
- iv. All discipline notes from prefects shall be reported to the teacher responsible for discipline.
- v. The names of students, crimes and punishments will be published. This will ensure that transparency and fairness prevails.
- vi. Administration will check against abuse of power, brutality, corruption and disrespect of hierarchy by prefects and dismiss offenders.
- vii. Administration will provide student government with stationery required to fulfil their duties.
- viii. Senior prefects will be members of the disciplinary council.