



## ASHBROOK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

*To Nurture and Challenge Academically Capable Students*

*From the Office of the Head of School, Dr. Christopher A. Schoberl*

**Is it Monday, Yet?** is my once monthly attempt to address developmental and topical issues we confront as we “challenge and nurture” our children. The topics I cover will be drawn from developmental and cognitive psychology, current research, and my own parenting and school administrator experience, and could just as easily be a response to local, national, or world events that have parenting implications. Keep your eyes on this spot in the final Compass of each month, and if you have any great ideas about future topics, please shoot me an email or text me... or, better yet, kick it old school and give me a call.

### Is it Monday, Yet? 1/28



### What Shirtless Dancing Guy can Teach Students about Leadership

For the first time in anyone’s memory, students met with the Head of School yesterday afternoon to discuss the creation of an Ashbrook Student Council. About 25 students from grades 5-8 took time away from their after school lives to spend time with me. OK, so I did offer pizza, and a few may have been inspired as much by that as by the opportunity to engage in a discussion with the Head of School! Still, the conversation was animated and students engaged enthusiastically with the task before them, *even after* the pizza was gone:

What would you like your teachers to know about why a Student Council is important to you?

Over the next 30 minutes, following the evaporation of the pizza, I listened to them as they talked with each other about what they wanted to see from student leaders elected to Student Council positions, or why a student government was important in the first place. I was amazed to hear them speak with such confidence and with what appeared to be some pretty good training, using words such as “stewardship,” “servant leadership,” and “voice,” and identifying different leadership styles as they

thought aloud about the sort of leader who would find success as a member of an Ashbrook Student Council. Indeed, their ideas have provided me with enough fodder for a solid leadership curriculum for the remainder of this year!

One idea I did not hear mentioned was the idea that leaders are in charge or have power. In fact, the only time that power was mentioned was to note that it should not be abused. Having spent a fair amount of time talking with students about leadership, this is the first time that the ideas of power or control have not been mentioned as central elements of leadership. Before me sat 25 students who understood that leadership was not about them, but about the people they served, and suddenly my faith in politics on a national level was rekindled!

In fact, the group seemed much more interested in the idea that they could all be leaders at certain times, depending upon the situation. This concept of context specific leadership, the idea that some of us have leadership thrust upon us based upon our unique experiences or skills, and that while we can all be leaders, we cannot all be leaders *at the same time*, often takes me weeks to get to when teaching a leadership curriculum to much older students, but these ideas emerged quite organically from this relatively brief discussion with my Explorer friends. Another element of this discussion that was refreshing was the clear balance between male and female voices expressing their opinions. In my experience, opinions about power and control as being definitive qualities of leadership, often bias the discussion towards limited notions of masculinity and antiquated ideas about autocratic or authoritative styles of leadership. In a similar vein, my personal definition of leadership really resonated with this group, where past groups have pushed back on the language as not strong enough.

The idea that leadership is the act of inspiring others to reach shared goals, appealed to these students. As we continued talking, I found myself regretting that I had not prepared for a discussion at this depth, and thought about an idea that I knew would resonate with them: the importance of *leading by following*. Though seemingly an oxymoron, when we talked a bit about it, students “got it,” and it was only as I was drifting off to sleep last night that I thought of sharing [the shirtless dancing guy video](#) as an illustration of this idea, a very important idea that came so naturally to our students.

Our students left the meeting pretty jazzed about next steps, and I was pretty jazzed about how far along they are in understanding what healthy leadership looks like. From notes taken by Sarah M., I will create a paragraph statement of purpose and job descriptions for the different positions they said they would like to see, which Allison L. has already started drafting, out in front of me as she was all during the Writing Workshop last summer. In the coming weeks, I will ask our aspiring student leaders, our Founding Humans, to help me revise this first draft.

Of course, for most students, the most visible part of student leadership comes during campaigning for positions and running for office, and so they are excited about the possibility of exploring a variety of leadership opportunities that they can run for. It is my genuine hope that the opportunity to join a Student Council will provide our students with the voice they feel is so important to the student experience. After all, who knows more about the student experience than the students themselves? While these positions will allow students an opportunity to represent their peers, we will also use our Student Council meetings as an opportunity to teach leadership skills.

In the months to come and once Student Council seats are filled, I will schedule several leadership training meetings, and use these as a way to inform a longer term commitment to leadership in general, including training in:

- public speaking,
- advocacy for others,
- authentic debate,
- conflict resolution,
- building leadership capacity in others
- equity in leadership access
- consensus building,
- agreeing to disagree/the power of compromise,
- improvising/adapting,
- leading by example,
- listening and listening with the heart or empathy, and
- the importance of vulnerable leadership (maybe another oxymoron).

In addition, we will spend some time discussing the structure of American government as a way to inform our efforts to represent the interests of our classmates, with a special emphasis on the difference between a democracy and a republic.

In this spirit, I invite you to share your thinking about leadership with your children, and maybe even volunteer to talk with our students as a guest speaker about your experiences with leadership. Hearing from you, their parents, about your leadership moments (as the leader or as the follower), or how you engage in leadership in your professional life, can be an important part of their leadership training, so please let me know if this is an opportunity you would like to pursue (figure on 30 minutes... and yes, we will serve pizza).

As a finale to our Thursday meeting, I shared the following with our aspiring student leaders: of the four student council presidents at Corvallis High School, all 4 are Ashbrook graduates! That's right, as I mentioned in a past Compass, Liam Gottleib in 9th grade, Pablo Garcia in 10 grade, Leion Garcia in 11th grade, and Janessa Minta in 12th grade, all hold the highest office in the land... in their respective classes at CVS, without student leadership experience while at Ashbrook.. THINK about what our current students will be able to do with a good running start of a position on an Ashbrook Student Council.