

Minimizing a Loss in Council Youth Membership Due to School Access Limitations

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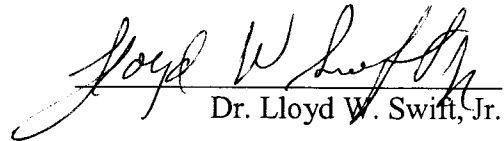
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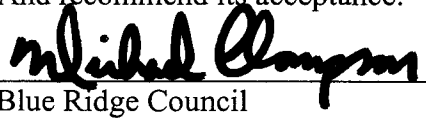
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I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by Michael L. Thompson, entitled "Minimizing a Loss in Council Youth Membership Due to School Access Limitations". I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

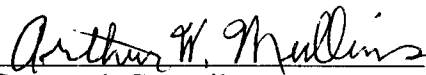

Dr. Lloyd W. Swift, Jr.

We have read this Dissertation
And recommend its acceptance:

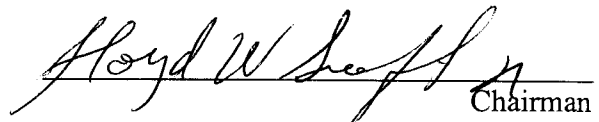

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine some effective methods that could be utilized to minimize a loss in Council youth membership as a result of limited school access. For the past 99 years, the Boy Scouts of America has complemented our Nation's educational system by teaching youth the values and skills needed to become productive members of society.

However, following the June 28, 2000, United States Supreme Court ruling, which reaffirmed the Boy Scouts of America's standing as a private organization with the right to set its own membership and leadership standards, some school districts have restricted access to Boy Scout councils. This action has negatively impacted the number of new youth participating in many Councils across the Nation. Similarly, other issues have also impacted school access, such as the number of instructional hours that are mandated by State and Federal entities (e.g. – the United States Congress, the United States Department of Education, the State Legislature, the State Department of Education, etc.).

In general, the information collected indicated that a variety of strategic activities are being used by Councils across the country to mitigate school access limitations. Some of the approaches being utilized include an introspective review of a Council's internal operations, such as the actual effectiveness of current marketing techniques, how to better retain present members, how to more adequately orient families to the Scouting program, etc. More outward or collaborative approaches include building stronger relationships with school administrators and

principals, clearly articulating the benefits of Scouting to local schools (e.g. – Scouting can help with a child’s self-esteem, behavior, study habits, and community service), etc.

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INTRODUCTION

For several years, the goal of many local Boy Scouts of America (BSA) recruiting programs has been to provide the Council with an organized, year-round approach to membership growth. The membership recruitment process went unchallenged for decades. However, a significant change occurred after the United States Supreme Court ruled on June 28, 2000, that the Boy Scouts of America, a private organization, could determine its own membership and leadership standards.

Based solely on the opinions of some people who have not concurred with the BSA's membership policies and moral-centered beliefs, several school districts throughout the country denied the organization public school access for membership recruitment purposes, regardless of the legal ruling from the United State Supreme Court. Therefore, according to the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, on January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Part of this Act included the Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act. It specifically prohibits public elementary and secondary schools, local educational agencies (LEAs), and State educational agencies (SEAs) that receive funding via the United States Department of Education from denying access to the BSA to meet on school premises or in school facilities. If one or more outside youth / community groups are permitted to meet on school premises or within school facilities before or after school hours, then the BSA must be afforded the same access rights.

A second factor is that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and similar legislation within many states also mandated specific instructional time in the classroom. This increased emphasis on how time is utilized within the class provides less opportunity for non-instructional activities, such as recruitment presentations from local Boy Scout councils.

While such obstacles are not desirable, they are a fact of reality for several Councils. Therefore, it is incumbent upon those affected to develop successful practices that will mitigate any negative membership consequences resulting from limited school access. Two essential components of high performing Councils are adequate financial resources and the ability to enroll new members. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to share some of the membership methods that may be used to minimize a loss in Council youth membership due to school access limitations.

REVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

The reduction of membership within the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) can be reflected in recent statistics received from the BSA Southern Region Office. The aggregate National membership figures provided below reflect data changes when comparing December 2007 to December 2008.

Tiger Cubs experienced a 4.3% reduction in members from 241,851 to 231,471. Cubs Scouts had 0.3% fewer members with 800,729 versus 798,060. Webelos Scouts had a 1.4% membership reduction with 645,406 youth participating versus 636,104. Total Cub Age Membership figures (Tiger Cubs, Cubs Scouts, and Webelos Scouts) shows an aggregate decline of 1.3% (1,687,986 versus 1,665,635), which also accounts for a 1.1% reduction in the number of Total Cub Age Units (50,780 versus 50,213).

Boy Scouts experienced a 0.8% reduction in members from 851,572 to 844,939. Varsity Scouts had 1.7% fewer members with 62,016 versus 60,940. Total Scout Age Membership figures (Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts) shows an aggregate decline of 0.8% (913,588 versus 905,879), which also accounts for a 0.6% reduction in the number of Total Scout Age Units (50,334 versus 50,051).

The only membership category to experience an increase was Venturing. It had a 2.7% gain in members from 254,259 to 261,122.

Explorers with the Learning for Life program experienced a 14.3% reduction in members from 170,924 to 146,564, which also accounts for a 9.2% reduction in the number of Total Exploring Units (7,548 to 6,857).

Finally, overall Total Youth Membership figures indicated that the BSA experienced a 1.6% reduction in members from 3,026,757 to 2,979,200, which also reflects a 1.1% decrease in units registered (128,582 versus 127,119).

In speaking with several Professional Scouters (e.g. - Mike Bernhard, Scout Executive, Blue Ridge Council, Greenville, South Carolina, Chuck Ezell, Area Five Director for North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, and Larry Brown, Area Eight Director for Arkansas and Oklahoma), their experience indicates that school access issues are directly responsible for some of the membership reductions recently experienced by the Boy Scouts of America.

METHODS

Increasing or maintaining membership depends upon the quality of adult leadership, publicizing the Scouting program (activities and opportunities), ensuring availability of units, effectively transitioning between programs, direct (or targeted) advertizing or promotion, peer contact, contact through other organizations, and lost member retrieval. This report will show how each of these elements can have a positive effect on membership.

Adult Leadership:

One of the very first steps to any unit's membership recruitment success, regardless of school access limitations, is to have appropriate adult supervision. Hence, each unit should carefully appoint at least one adult (e.g. – a Unit Recruitment Coordinator / Round-Up Coordinator) to help develop and deliver their recruitment / retention efforts. Within the Cub Scout program, this person would have to take a more hands-on approach. However, if working with older boys, they may want to merely serve as an advisor since the Boy Scout program was developed to be boy led. Of course, such decisions will have to be made on a unit-by-unit basis. If possible, an adult selected for membership activities should know the organizations / clubs and people in the local area. Excellent organizational, recruiting, and people skills are desirable. An understanding of the community's demographics, economic characteristics, and youth populations would be especially helpful when selecting the appropriate adult. Recruiting should

include a year-round growth plan and requires constant contact with other units (such as a Troop communicating with its area Cub Scout packs), the District Membership Committee, the Unit Commissioner, etc. For example, with respect to Boy Scouting, a successful year-round membership plan may include graduating Webelos Scouts into the Troop, hosting a Troop Open House, and encouraging frequent boy-to-boy recruiting.

Articulating the Benefits of Youth Membership:

With access to our potential membership base being reduced by school policies, it is critically important that members and units be able to clearly and concisely articulate the benefits of being a youth in the Boy Scouts of America. Some of the key benefits include having the ability to participate in an exciting program, receiving recognition for one's performance, the ability to use local facilities for outdoor and indoor activities (e.g. - summer camp, the Council Office to conduct meetings, etc.), having the opportunity to attend National High Adventure Bases (e.g. – Philmont, the Florida Sea Base, Northern Tier, etc.), the ability to participate in Regional, National and International events, and the ability to attend numerous training activities in a variety of areas (e.g. – leadership skills, outdoor skills, career topics, etc.).

Other Sources of Membership Growth:

As a District and Council, we could easily focus on the negative membership aspect of having limited school access. However, we should use this limitation as an opportunity to strengthen our other sources of membership growth. First, some units cannot accommodate additional youth due to space and/or leadership limitations. Therefore, this presents us with an opportunity to grow from the creation of new units. Sometimes, especially with Cub units, we

can divide the youth and start a new unit elsewhere. The creation of a new unit may give an underserved geographic area of the District and / or Council a new way to entice youth who would have otherwise remained non-participants in Scouting. Of course, to create new units, you must have a chartered organization. Careful attention should be paid to approaching potential chartered organizations from their point of view, while not compromising the standards set by the Boy Scout of America. While chartered organizational relationships do help the BSA, we in turn can help the organizations achieve mutual objectives for the youth in the local community (e.g. – citizenship awareness, religious values, physical fitness, etc.). Secondly, transition from one BSA program to the next becomes more critical with school access limitations. We should pay particular attention to ensure youth move successfully between being a Webelos Scout to becoming a Boy Scout and from Boy Scouting to Venturing. Third, we must keep current units active and chartered. With access to our membership pool being reduced by educational recruitment policies, we must certainly focus on retaining our current units. Our Commissioner Staff can play a critical role in this effort.

Different Membership Techniques:

The Heart of America Council in Kansas City, Missouri, is aggressively addressing its school access limitations. Since they are having difficulty in promoting within area classrooms, they are effectively utilizing the following membership techniques: when possible, recruiting in school cafeterias and bus loading zones, placing BSA yard signs close to area schools, and mailing promotional DVDs to the parents of children. Along with the promotional DVDs, they also include a sample of Trail's End popcorn, a listing of the upcoming recruitment nights, and a letter from the local Scout Executive. They encourage the family to

watch the BSA recruitment video at home, and, as mentioned above, the popcorn has been provided for their viewing pleasure. Additionally, the Heart of America Council also provides its recruitment volunteers with a detailed script to ensure everyone receives the same presentation regardless of where they may reside within the local Council. The consistency in message, according to Bruce Allen, Council Vice President for Membership, “sell(s) fun to the boys and sell(s) values to the parents, particularly the mothers.” (2007 Annual Report, Boy Scouts of America). These efforts have been highly successful, as they retained 88 percent of the boys who attended school nights during a recent Fall Membership Blitz. To ensure the successful retention of some of these new members, they also conduct a family campout in each District specifically for Cub Scouts and their families, which accounted for 5,000 participants during 2007.

Attracting New Members:

Successful membership within a Council, with or without school access limitations, is much more than just having the ability to recruit and retain youth. While Councils must learn how to cultivate new members, they must also know how to successfully market the mission, values, and fun of Scouting, effectively deliver family orientation activities, and ensure new members are fully engaged. To do this, the following activities may be helpful: post flyers / posters on local bulletin boards, place yard-type signs on the property of current members for the benefit of their peers (Scouting-age youth), provide tray liners to local restaurants, use local church bulletins to post Scouting-related messages, mail postcards directly to families inviting their youth to join Scouting, design “bring a buddy” unit activities, have unit members disseminate creative emails to non-Scouts inviting them to attend an upcoming meeting, hold

specific seasonal events for youth within the community (e.g. – a Trick-or-Treat at the Council Office), set-up model campsites or pinewood derby tracks as promotional tools at high visibility locations (inside malls, on the corner lot of a bank that has a prominent location, etc.), ask daily and non-daily newspapers to run an article about your recruitment efforts, and develop a DVD that conveys the specific exciting opportunities available within your Council’s Scouting program (footage from summer camp, Troop campouts, District / Council Camporees, National Jamborees, OA Fellowships, etc.). Nationally, the BSA released a recruiting DVD in 2008 called “Cub Scouting On Target.” Before that, in 2007, the DVD was piloted in 28 councils, which resulted in a 15 percent increase in new boy sign-ups when compared to the previous year. (2008 Cub Scout Round-Up Campaign Council Guide, 2)

Locally, it is very important to continue to think outside the box. For example, use the internet to recruit new members. If you have Explorer youth, research school district web sites for names and contact information of the academic and advisement personnel related to an Explorer Post’s field of interest (e.g. – Veterinary Science, Law Enforcement, etc.). Send these adults specific email information regarding the Unit’s activities (when and where you meet, etc.), and they can possibly share it with their youth members at school.

As leaders, we must do our best to stay updated on both current technology trends and twenty-first century verbiage. For example, do you know what the following words / acronyms mean?: NANO, MP3, My Space, Facebook, Wii, SAT, LOL, and Snoop Dog. If not, you may have a more difficult time relating to today’s youth. Therefore, if you do not have an understanding of today’s “youth” world and terminology, how do you expect to recruit and retain them? Secondly, young people communicate using cutting-edge technology. Hence, your unit may need to look at using text messaging via cell phones, Facebook, and other modes of

communication as the most effective means of sharing information with your youth, but this is ultimately a unit decision. At times, this requires us, as adults, to leave our comfort zone and become more technologically savvy.

When you do attract new members, it is critically important to know which unit is most ideal for their needs. Given the high cost of fuel, many families pay close attention to transportation costs. Therefore, you should be aware of where your units are located. You can create a “google” map of your District that identifies the exact location of every Pack, Troop, Team and Crew. Such a map, that can even be posted online, makes referring new youth to a unit quick and easy. (An example of such a map can be found at http://www.scccbsa.org/html/resources/unit_locator.html.)

Peer-to-Peer Recruiting:

One of the best ways to overcome school access limitations is by peer-to-peer recruiting. According to a National survey, 70 percent of respondents said they had never been asked to join Scouting (Marketing Vital to Membership, Money, and Manpower Goals, December 2002, 1). Face-to-face communication has always proven to be most effective for recruitment purposes. Testimony from a boy to his friend about the fun and excitement of Scouting leaves a lasting memory. This can be done in several ways. First, you can use an informal invitation that solicits several prospective Scouts and their families to a membership recruitment activity. Secondly, a direct invitation is also appropriate at times by using personal letters, phone calls, etc. One important factor to remember is the impression that older boys have on younger peers. This can be used to your recruiting advantage. Units can even use printed materials to assist with peer-to-peer recruiting. For example, with adult assistance, a commitment card can be used by a Scout

to list those friends that he plans to recruit and their contact information. Next, the unit can provide an invitation(s) to the Scout for each invitee listing the day, time, and location of the upcoming unit meeting. Finally, each Scout could also be provided business card-type reminders to give to their invitees at school / church on the day of the unit meeting.

Religious / Non-Public Educational / Community Relationships:

Public schools are just one segment of society that has aided the BSA's previous membership efforts. Religious institutions, non-public schools, and other community organizations provide potential membership success stories for Districts and Councils. One of our strongest membership producing entities for nearly 100 years have been churches of all denominations (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Latter-Day Saints, Interfaith Ministerial Associations, etc.). Secondly, while public schools in particular have placed limitations on school access, there are numerous private and parochial schools and Homeschool Associations that are very supportive of the Scouting movement. Finally, many community organizations still provide significant support to Scouting. While these community organizations are not always rich in potential youth members, they are able to serve as chartered organizations and / or provide financial / in-kind contributions (e.g. - a building to meet in, etc.). Some of these community organizations include service clubs (e.g. - a Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.), fraternal organizations (e.g. - Alpha Phi Omega, Elks Lodges, etc.), and military / veteran groups (VFWs, the American Legion, etc.).

“Soccer and Scouting”:

One way that some Councils have successfully mitigated a loss in Council youth membership due to school access limitations is by utilizing the “Soccer and Scouting” program. This program was highlighted by our National Commissioner’s podcast (Tico Perez) in the summer of 2008. Studies conducted on behalf of the Boy Scouts of America indicate that Hispanic / Latino families are not aware of the Scouting program and its many benefits; hence, this lack of understanding can create little motivation to have their children join the Boy Scouts of America. This can be a major obstacle in some states to achieving sufficient membership levels within a Council. For example, it was mentioned at the BSA’s Southern Region Board meeting on February 19, 2009, that approximately 60% of all Scouting age youth in the State of California are Hispanic / Latino. The same BSA studies indicate that soccer was the extracurricular activity most preferred by Hispanic / Latino youth. National recommends specific time-tested steps to establish “Soccer and Scouting” in a local Council. First, you have to determine where the Hispanic / Latino youth live within your Council. Second, visit schools that contain significant Hispanic / Latino enrollment. The leaders within each school may be able to share details about the youth they serve and even offer some leads about possible adults who could serve as unit leaders. Third, visit Hispanic / Latino churches in the local area (Catholic churches, Spanish-language protestant churches, etc.). Fourth, contact those persons who assist with immigrant services and / or cultural advocacy groups. Fifth, see if you can identify Latino members of the community who may be willing to serve as “Soccer and Scouting” coordinators. Sixth, locate persons / organizations that would support the use of their property for “Soccer and Scouting.” Seventh, use all available resources to distribute the

“Soccer and Scouting” program to Hispanic / Latino youth in schools, churches, etc. (The Racing Report, Highlights from the Track, 1 – 2).

Re-registration Focus:

Re-registration is also an issue that Councils must watch very closely, especially given the fact that the ability to attract new youth is hampered by limitations in school access. “Lost boys” are those who do not re-register with a unit. A process should be in place and utilized on a routine basis to follow-up with youth who drop from local membership records. All Councils can get a list of dropped youth from ScoutNET by visiting “Membership Reports” and then selecting the “Non-Renewed Member Report.” Once this list is in hand, a Council can send the parents a letter and/or survey asking why their child did not retain their active membership status, establish a time and location for all renewal applications and fees to be submitted to the local Council Service Center, and organize “Lost Boy Call Blitz” teams within the District and Council to contact youth who are no longer registered. These types of efforts can be highly successful. For example, the Buffalo Trail Council in Midland, Texas, utilizes many of these activities, with volunteer assistance, and has been successful in the past with re-registering 15 to 25 percent of their “Lost Boys.” Their Scout Executive, Lyman Gifford, says, “Having used this method for nearly 15 years in four different Councils, my experience has been that you can reduce drops and strengthen programming at the same time. It lets individuals know we care about them and that we are genuinely concerned about the quality of programming they are receiving.” (The Racing Report, Highlights from the Track, 2).

Equally important during the re-registration process is to not overlook the chartered organization or take your relationship with them for granted. Section Three of the National

Charter and Bylaws issued by the United States Congress to the Boy Scouts of America emphasizes their importance to our movement when it states, “the purpose of this corporation (the BSA) shall be to promote, through organization, and cooperation with other agencies...” This makes the BSA very unusual in that it offers its program to any community organization that is compatible with Scouting’s purposes and beliefs. Therefore, because they are so basic and critical to every unit in the BSA, we should remain mindful of the need to maintain successful relationships with our chartered organizations. To accomplish this, each unit should meet in person at least once a year with their Chartered Organization Representative (COR), communicate via telephone several times during the year, invite the COR to Unit activities (e.g. – Court of Honors, etc.) and other Council and District activities (e.g. – Council / District Camporees, Council / District Banquets, etc.).

Improve Public School Relationships:

Finally, nothing ever stays the same. While limitations to school access may or may not be a current threat to a Council’s membership efforts, we should be mindful of how important it is to maintain and improve a positive relationship with our public schools. This could help to more quickly re-establish school access or prevent access limitations in the future. One of the best ways to do this is to build respectful relationships with school administrators and principals. In fact, in some Councils a local school superintendant / principal may serve as the Council’s Vice President of Membership or as a Member-at-Large of the Council Executive / Advisory Board. With the Scout Executive’s approval, District Executives should also build professional relationships with local principals. Additionally, key Unit and District volunteers should make a point of knowing the leadership personnel within their local schools. One important aspect is

that a Council's approach to its public schools should be unified. Districts and units should ensure that their actions mirror the official policy of the Council. Understand the school district's strategic plan so you can incorporate certain aspects of it into your pro-Scouting discussions with school administrators. One helpful possibility may also include hosting an annual Council-sponsored recognition luncheon for principals and administrators. This could be complemented by having key Scouters serve on school board committees. Last, we must be sure to clearly articulate the benefits of Scouting to local schools (e.g. – Scouting can help with a child's self-esteem, behavior, study habits, community service, etc.). We should not merely assume that all school administrators know, understand, and appreciate the values, mission, and vision of the Boy Scouts of America.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of my study are positive. While school access limitations are certainly not desirable and they have directly contributed to a reduction in BSA membership across the country, there are many other ways to mitigate these losses. A heavy emphasis should be placed on developing new techniques and approaches to attracting youth to the Scouting program and to perform our current membership recruitment and retention activities more successfully. We can focus too much of our time and energy on the negative aspects of limited availability to public schools for recruitment purposes or we can refine our methods to more effectively target our total youth density market within the Council. We must do our very best to overcome these challenges, as every young person deserves an opportunity to participate in the program we call Scouting!

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to find ways to minimize a loss in Council youth membership due to school access limitations. Some of the approaches discussed included an introspective review of the Council's operations to determine how they could improve upon their current recruitment and retention activities. Secondly, a more outward approach was also examined to see how collaborative efforts could be maximized to increase membership opportunities.

In summary, there are many ways to overcome the negative affects on membership as a result of limited school access. They include providing the appropriate adult supervision for the unit's membership efforts, such as a Round-Up Coordinator or a Unit Recruitment Coordinator. Additional possibilities include clearly articulating the benefits of youth membership to our target audience, possibly creating new units, paying particular attention to our relationships with chartered organizations, making sure that boys transition from one BSA program to the next, developing different membership techniques, becoming more effective in attracting new members, understanding advancements in technology and terminology and how important they are to today's youth, never underestimating the power of peer-to-peer recruiting, realizing how the "Soccer and Scouting" program can help us reach Hispanic / Latino youth, building stronger relationships with churches, private schools, and community organizations, focusing on the re-

registration process, and always examining new ways to improve the Council 's relationship with the local public school system.

Membership, financial support, and the Scouting spirit largely determine the success of the world's greatest youth movement. Let us be resolved that school access limitations will not significantly impede our efforts to provide a quality program to the youth of the twenty-first century.

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