



Selecting Students: Ambassadors as Socially Influential Leaders

Although staff provides structure and support for the SSA program, students are key to effective program implementation. Therefore selecting the right students is essential to program success. We have seen programs struggle because student selection was done without proper intention. Remember, the “right” students aren’t necessarily those with high academic achievement or great athletic skills. Look for students with social clout – those that their peers look up to, listen to, and mimic. These are the students that are most likely to stand up and speak up when they see mistreatment.

Safe School Ambassadors:

- Are socially influential: They are students who have influence over their respective peer groups. List all the cliques and social groups on your campus, and write down the names of the “opinion leaders” of each group – the students whom others in that group respect and follow.
- Have social/verbal skills: Where there are several influencers in a group, seek out those with more developed social & verbal skills, those who speak their minds, communicate well within their circle, and are not shy amongst their group.
- Have a strong sense of justice and concern for others, especially those in their immediate circle of friends. They are very loyal to their group and “watch out” for its members. They have strength of character, even though they might have been in trouble before. This can be a difficult characteristic to discern because it is often not evident until precipitated by some emotional event or experience, like “sticking up” for one of their own in an inter-group conflict. This nature to “do right” may have brought them into conflict with staff members, especially for breaking rules they may at the time have felt were relatively insignificant.
- Together represent all the diverse cliques of the school population. Therefore, students from all ethnic, social, and interest groups should not just be invited to participate but should be actively recruited through personal outreach.

Do not select only a group of “Safe School Angels” or only those students who are frequently in leadership roles. They will not have influence over all of the groups on your campus. Do your best to identify students from all the diverse cliques, especially some that are underrepresented in other school activities.

There are two main avenues for identifying potential Ambassadors. We find schools get the best results when they use a combination of the two.

Student Peer Recommendations

Elicit recommendations from students (or a subset of students). Many schools ask students to complete a survey identifying the peers that they respect and look up to, students they perceive as leaders, and students they would talk to if they had a problem or concern of a personal nature. The students that are recommended are then invited to apply for the SSA program. **See *Peer Recommendation Form***.

*If you also ask students to identify adults they trust and would talk to, you will have some good leads for recruiting faculty and staff members to serve as training participants and Family Group Facilitators.

Staff Recommendations

Ask for recommendations from teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff members through both formal and informal channels. It is helpful to describe the program at a faculty meeting first, and then provide written materials that include an SSA recommendation form, which can be turned in to you or another contact person by a certain deadline. **See *Staff Recommendation Form***.

Student Orientation

Once you have identified potential students from the surveys and recommendations, you invite these students to an SSA Orientation. The orientation helps students gain important information and make an informed decision about whether they want to participate in SSA. It is important to note that Students are not required to become Ambassadors. Instead, they have been carefully identified and invited to join. Their participation is a mutual agreement, and with this participation they will contribute to making a difference on campus. The mere act of identifying students as leaders is an important step in helping them recognize their leadership potential. **See *student notification letter***.

We recommend conducting a **30-45-minute** orientation **several** weeks in advance of the training. You may want to nominate over forty students to make up for those who choose to not participate. By doing the orientation, you will hopefully inspire students to take the next step and commit to attend the training. It will be helpful to explain:

- The purpose of the program
- The principles that guide it
- The benefits of involvement
- How the program operates
- The nature of the training
- The commitment that is required

Selecting Ambassadors

During the orientation, you may want to hand out **ambassador applications**. After collecting these applications, you can then send home **permission slips** to



the parents and guardians of interested students. From these processes, you make your final selection of Ambassadors. **See *ambassador application and parent permission Slip***.

When deciding which students to include consider the following:

- Are boys and girls equally represented?
- Does the distribution by grade level match what you want?
- How well represented are the various social/interest groups?
- Is there a good representation of students from different ethnic/racial groups?

If certain cliques or groups are underrepresented, you may want to reach out to individuals from these groups and see if they would like to participate.

If you have more than 40 applications and/or permission slips, you can establish a **wait list**. Not all of the selected students will show up on the first day of the training. Some might be absent, forget, or change their minds at the last minute. If this happens, you will have the names of students you can call on to participate.

***Important note:** Our SSA program trainings are designed to address topics relevant to age group and according to psychosocial and developmental stages. For an Elementary level training select students from grades 4-6. For a Middle School training select students from grades 7-8. For a High School training select students from grades 9-12. Contact your Community Matters coordinator with any questions or requests to deviate from these groupings.