

Shifting Our Paradigms:

Early affiliation of Webelos Scouts with a Boy Scout Troop.

Could this more positively effect Webelos to Boy Scout transition and reduce attrition?

By

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that I am the author of this document and any assistance I received in preparing this report is fully acknowledged. I have also cited in APA format all sources from which I obtained ideas, data, and words. Sources are properly credited according to the APA guidelines.

Signature _____

Date: _____

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ABSTRACT

This study represents an attempt to identify the factors leading to the problem of loss of Webelos scouts who have crossed over into a troop and offer realistic recommendations to reduce or reverse the trend. The Boy Scouts of America is hemorrhaging one of its most precious resources, entry level Boy Scouts, during and just following the Webelos to Boy Scout transition period. The retention rate of entry level Boy Scouts continues to remain unacceptably low despite all efforts to control the problem. With low rates of retention of entry level Scouts many Troops find it difficult to replace the natural attrition occurring from Scouts aging out of the program which creates wide gaps in the age demographics of their units. This greatly complicates conduct of the Patrol Method within the troop and limits the ability of the unit to provide the total Scouting experience. To ensure Scouting remains the vibrant program that it is now into the next century, we must improve this situation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND GOALS

The purpose of this paper is to propose a change in the manner Webelos Scouts are integrated into a Boy Scout Troop to reduce attrition during the first six months after they bridge up into a unit.

Specifically, this paper will address the following issues:

1) What is the rate of attrition for Scouts who have bridged up into a Boy Scout Troop from a Webelos Den after six months?

2) What are the causes for this attrition?

3) Can an earlier affiliation with a Boy Scout Troop improve this situation?

4) How could this be implemented and what would be the expected results?

The Boy Scouts of America has a significant problem retaining those Scouts who have bridged up from a Webelos Den. Each year Cub Scout Packs across America hold Blue and Gold Banquets during which a Crossover Ceremony is conducted to transition second year Webelos Scouts into a Scout Troop. Often this is seen as the completion of the transition process as opposed to only the initial phase in this process. As a result, many troops lose 20% of these youth prior to their first meeting after crossover. Of the crossed over Webelos who actually begin to attend meetings the typical unit will lose 40 - 50% of those youth within the first six months (Boy Scouts of America, The Troop Leaders Role). Yet, it is still estimated that 70% of all Boy Scouts were Webelos (Henderson, 2000). This has a disastrous effect on the New Scout Patrol, the Patrol Method, and the practice of leadership within the troop by unbalancing the age demographics; too many chiefs and not enough Indians, if you will. In smaller troops and/or poor recruitment years when only 3 or 4 bridge up, the loss of 2 new scouts can render the New Scout Patrol, a patrol in name only.

There are many reasons for these losses, some attributable to the Pack, some to the receiving Troop and some external to both. I shall concentrate on those that a troop can effectively impact. The first of these is that most Webelos Den Leaders, Parents and Scouts do not understand how a Boy Scout Troop functions and are not prepared for this very significant change.

This is not to state or infer that Webelos Leaders have not read about or even received some limited instruction on this topic, but most have had only minimal experience with or opportunities to observe the functioning of a troop in close quarters. It is the difference between theory and practical experience. After all, the Patrol Method within a “boy led troop” can sometimes look like trying to herd cats, in and of itself! This can be frightening to parents accustomed to their son being under the constant attentive direction of a Webelos Den Leader. Many of these parents are very hesitant to place little Johnny in the hands of the youth leadership of a Troop, especially if there are wide gaps in the age demographics of the boys.

Another problem is that the unfamiliar structure/regimentation of the troop meeting and having to take instructions from other youth can be intimidating and/or threatening to some youth 10 - 11 years of age, especially if this requirement is not fully explained prior to them being suddenly thrust into this situation (Caldwell,2006). Often this has not been done and can result in a negative experience for the new Scout.

The current method of transition is for a Webelos Den Leader to contact a Scoutmaster or vice versa to arrange a visit or visits with a troop and participate in at least one appropriate outdoor event a couple of months prior to crossover to meet the minimal requirements for the Arrow of Light (Caldwell, 2006). Often however, the Troop is not quite sure just what to do with the den when they visit and/or join the unit on a campout or other outdoor event and only a minimal attempt is made to involve the den in the Troop experience in a meaningful way. Usually the visiting den assumes the role of outside observers and, given the Webelos fairly limited attention span, they quickly get distracted, bored and/or start to act out in a manner which can create a negative response with the older scouts making any enriching socialization very difficult at best. This does nothing to contribute to a welcoming, inviting experience on either part. On outdoor events the Troop often does not effectively integrate the den in such way that the Webelos get a taste of how a troop and patrol function in the field. This is usually due to lack of understanding concerning just what Webelos Scouts are allowed to do on campouts. Once again the den is frequently confined to the role of observers only and feel ostracized to some degree. In both these situations familiarization, integration, and communication are keys to success.

After thinking critically about all of the above issues and reflecting on my 17 years experience as both a Cubmaster and Scoutmaster , I have become convinced that a earlier affiliation with a Boy Scout Troop by a Webelos den could do much to improve this situation . The remainder of this paper is an attempt to suggest a model as to how this could be effectively implemented, test the model and examine the results to determine if a broader adoption within Scouting as a whole could significantly improve Webelos retention rates during their first six months of life with a Troop.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing a possible response to the problems identified in my problem statement I found it necessary to consult the following Boy Scout of America (BSA) document, Boy Scout History and Traditions; Insignia and Ranks. This document gave a historical perspective on the purpose behind establishing the Webelos rank and elimination of the Lions rank in 1967 (Ingram, 1997). This was done specifically to prepare boys to move up from a Cub Scout Pack to a Boy Scout Troop and reduce attrition. This document cited a survey conducted by the University of Michigan to determine why in 1960 Cub Scouting lost 30% of its registered boys during the year. The report was presented in 1964 which led to the creation of the Webelos rank to give the older boys a unique set of achievements and experiences to better prepare them for Boy Scouting. It was also designed to help retain interest as they moved from Cub Scouting into Boy Scouting since many boys were lost during this period (Boy Scouts of America, History and Traditions). Both issues remain relevant today and were taken into consideration in my approach to this problem.

Next in order to gain insight into the perspective of other scouts who have delved into this topic I conducted a review of dissertations on the subject of Webelos to Boys Scout Transition on the Palmetto Council, York District website listing, ultimately focusing on the following three in particular; “Growing Our Own Boy Scouts’ -- Webelos to Scout Transition, By Wendy Henderson, District Commissioner Terrora District, Daniel Boone Council, next “Webelos Transition: Problems and Suggestions” by David M. Caldwell, Assistant District Commissioner For Cub Scouts, Reedy Falls District, Blue Ridge Council and “First Class in the First Year: The Webelos Connection” by Robert Ormseth, Roundtable Commissioner, York District, Palmetto Council. These three works contributed a great deal of support to my belief that Webelos Transition is a process that continues after a Scout bridges up into a troop and that earlier interaction between den and troop could be greatly beneficial. They also stressed the importance of educating parents and Webelos leaders concerning the differences which exist between Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting before and during this period of transition (Ormseth, 2009).

Finally, the works cited above addressed the need for an earlier exposure of Webelos Scouts an Den Leaders to basic Boy Scout skills, which is difficult when the Den Leader is preoccupied with getting his Webelos through the Arrow of Light requirements within the final year of the Webelos experience without additional support of some kind. Again a earlier and more significant union between a second year Webelos Den and troop could do much to facilitate this.

In order to gain a better understanding of the current method of Webelos to Scout transition, understanding that it has been over 12 year since I was a Cubmaster, the following BSA publications were consulted, "Webelos-to-Scout Transition, The Troop Leaders Role"; BSA No. 3868, "Webelos To Scout Transition"; BSA No.33870 and Webelos Leader Guide, 2006. The information contained in these documents was extremely useful in helping me determine the best structure for testing my proposal and evaluating its effectiveness. This was somewhat complicated because to be effective and useful, my proposal must meet the requirements of both the Webelos den and the Scout troop with out violating any of the restrictions pertaining to what activities Webelos Scouts may participate in which may conflict with those of Boy Scouts. In this accommodating issue, BSA publication Guide to Safe Scouting, was invaluable. It provided me a functional checklist for issues of safety and youth protection and reassurance that this could be accomplished at all. I was pleasantly surprised to learn how much latitude existed within "The Guidelines" to accomplish my previously stated goals .

Last but not least, to evaluate my contention that there was little difference in the functional abilities and maturity of a 10 year old Webelos Scout and 11 year old new Boy Scout who has just crossed over into a troop I consulted Louis Marino's paper submitted in 2009 entitled, "Teaching Cub Scouts Using Age-Appropriate Teaching Methodology and Child Development Strategies". Marino, in his paper asserts that Webelos II Age boys are capable of thinking conventionally and performing "second-order operations" requiring the ability to use internalized abstract operations which is the final stage of logical development. He further states that The Webelos II age scout is well suited for all of the following deductive teaching strategies, presentation/demonstration, drill/practice w/reward and recitation, which are those primarily used when teaching new Boy Scouts.

Although dealing with Scouts of this age is sometimes something a kin to “trying to lasso the wind”, It can be done and with the additional elements of youth leadership and adult mentoring which we have within the structure of a Scout troop there is no reason for this to fail other than lack of commitment to the proposal on the part of the troop itself.

Significance

This research is important because recent attempts to reduce the attrition of new Scouts who have bridged up into Scout troops has been only minimally effective. New Scouts coming from Webelos Dens are the live blood of troops and the primary asset of Boy Scouting as a whole. Every means possible to reduce the loss of this critical asset must be taken to insure Scouting is a viable, vibrant movement for the next 100 years. This research proposal will attempt to offer a significant improvement over the current method of Webelos to Scout transition in order to reverse this trend.

METHODOLOGY

The method chosen to conduct this research is to chart a new course for Webelos to Scout transition which stresses a much earlier affiliation between the Webelos den and a Scout troop. This thesis will then be tested on one den as it navigates this new course for a period of time as an experiment to verify its feasibility, determine its merit(s) and evaluate its potential for wider implementation within our local district/council and Scouting as a whole. Data used to evaluate the plan will be obtained through direct observation of all participants and interviewing adult leaders in both the den and troop to determine their evaluation of the plan and its validity. This is not intended to be a scientific in-depth analysis of the data but a more realistic user friendly evaluation of the success of the experiment from a leaders perspective. Specifically the following questions will be ask:

- (1) Given your experience with this experiment do you think it was successful? Why or why not?
- (2) Do you feel it is an effective way to approach Webelos to Scout transition and is it an improvement over the old method? Why or why not?
- (3) How did the Scouts in your den / troop respond to this experiment? How would you describe their experience?
- (4) Based on your experience in this experiment do you feel that retention of Scouts during the Webelos to Scout transition period would be improved under this system?
- (5) Do you feel the plan used in this experiment has potential for wider application within the district/council and or Scouting as a whole?

The Proposal

I am proposing that the current method of Webelos to Scout transition, as outlined in my problem statement, be modified to facilitate a much earlier affiliation and interaction between a Webelos den and Scout troop and that the transition period itself be considered a process progressing through three distinct phases, those phases being, Pre-crossover, Crossover, Post Crossover. Specifically what I am proposing is that a Second year Webelos den identify, establish contact with, and attach itself to a Scout troop at the beginning of the new program year in August as opposed to February - March time frame as is now the practice.

I am not talking about merely visiting with the troop periodically during the year, but actually co-locating with the troop and functioning as a “Patrol in training” if you will, within the structure of the troop. The Den will still remain a part of the Pack and will continue to attend Pack meetings as is now the practice but will meet with the Troop on a weekly basis and participate in troop meetings as much as possible within the parameters of the Guide to Safe Scouting and structure of the Troop.

The Den, or “Patrol in Training”, if you will, would participate with the Troop during the meetings Pre-opening activities, Opening Ceremony/Announcements phases, with the Denner or Den Chief functioning as Patrol Leader but during Skills Instruction phase would move to an adjoining space or area to conduct a Den Meeting and work on age appropriate activities while the troop conducts its planned activities. Occasionally, there would be opportunities for the den to participate with the troop in Skills Instruction when the topics being taught are age appropriate and mutually relevant which may be more frequent than one would think understanding that there is a Webelos Scout requirement for 12 of the Tenderfoot Scout requirements, five of the eight Second Class requirements and three of the First Class requirements (Ormseth, 2009). During the Patrol, Inter-patrol and Closing portion of the meeting, the Den could return and participate, functioning as a “Patrol in Training” once again. Finally, During the Patrol Leaders Council the Den would be represented by the Den Chief.

The Experiment

During the months of August through October 2009, an experiment was conducted involving the second year Webelos den of Pack 96 and Troop 53 of the Long Cane District, Blue Ridge Council, in which the Den was attached to the Troop and functioned as suggested in the proposal above. The Den at this time consisted of 9 youth and 1 Den Leader. Troop 53 is a traditional Boy Scout troop, consisting of 18 registered youth organized into three patrols, it has 1 Scoutmaster and 9 Assistant Scoutmasters, approximately six of which are usually present for any meeting or activity. The Troop has a fully functioning Troop Committee consisting of seven members, the Pack does not have a committee at this time. Troop 53 meets each Tuesday evening at 7:00 pm and participates in a minimum of one outdoor activity per month. All Troop activities are planned annually during the troop planning meeting, which is conducted by the boys themselves.

Troop 53 emphasizes , boy leadership in all of its endeavors, adults function as mentors and only intervene when ask to by youth leadership or there is a problem which the boys cannot handle and/or requires adult intervention.

In this experiment, The Den met with the Troop and participated in the meeting as if it were a patrol within the troop itself. The only portion of the meeting which was conducted separately was the Skills Instruction and Patrol Meeting segment during which Den retired to a separate area of the meeting site to conduct its activities while the troop continued its planned activities. The Den would return for the closing and sometimes the Inter- patrol activates just as suggested above. This experiment was intended to remain in effect through out the year however, The loss of the first year Webelos Den Leader forced the Pack to combine both Webelos dens until a new Den leader could be found This made the continuation of the experiment untenable. In no way was this cessation attributable to a failure of the experiment, quite the contrary!

RESULTS

In early February of 2010 the questionnaire outlined in Appendix I was distributed to the respondents previously identified with interviews being conducted in the week of February 15th. All adult Scouters within the Den and Troop participated totaling 10 individuals providing written responses to all relevant questions and being orally interviewed concerning the success of the experiment and potential expanded implementation within scouting in general. A summary of responses to all relevant questions and results of the interviews conducted follows.

(1) Given your experience with this experiment do you believe it was successful? Why or why not?

In response to this question all respondents answered in the affirmative. The Den Leader was particularly impressed with the opportunities for Scout to Scout interaction that this experiment provided noting how the older Boy Scouts quickly assumed the role of mentors to the Webelos Scouts and how effective this mentoring was in role modeling behavior for them. He expressed some surprise as to how well the older Scouts accepted his Webelos and how quickly his Webelos began to “look up to” the older Scouts. He especially liked the ability to receive support from the troop in conducting his den activities, in the form of Boys Scouts being readily available to assist as Den Chiefs. He stated that it seemed that the repetition of the Scout Oath and Law during The meetings opening and closing ceremonies was beneficial in helping the Webelos complete their Arrow of Light requirements and get used to the cultural differences between the Pack and Troop. After observing how the troop functions first hand, he had a better understanding of how a pack and troop differ and felt this early opportunity to allow his Webelos to acclimatize to this difference was very beneficial. The Troops Assistant Scoutmasters generally echoed the observations of the den leader but, more from the point of view of the leadership opportunities it offered the Boys Scouts. They liked the fact that, especially in a troop that is fairly small in size, they could see a greater opportunity for the application and reinforcement of the Patrol Method.

(2) Do you feel it is a effective way to approach Webelos to Scout transition and is it an improvement over the old method? Why or why not?

All respondents stated that they did believe it was clearly a better method but some felt that certain assumptions or prerequisites need to exist prior to implementation, namely the location where the troop was meeting should be of proper size to accommodate the additional boys especially given the relatively high energy level of the Webelos age Scouts. Also mentioned was the believe that troop adult leadership must believe in this system and support its implementation. It was suggested that in a troop that was not particularly well organized and/or did not function using the model of a traditional Boys Scout Troop this could limit its success. The greatest factor to success mentioned in responses to this question revolved around the increased time afforded the Webelos Scouts to acclimatize to the differences between the pack and troop and more complete integration of the den within the structure of the troop making them feel more a part of the experience and not just as outside observers. General agreement was expressed that at least the second year Webelos who participated in the experiment did have the requisite maturity and ability to focus for this experiment to work. This was an attitude that was changed by the experiment itself after some of the Assistant Scoutmasters had previously expressed some reservations.

(3) How did the Scouts in your den/troop respond to this experiment? How would you describe their experience?

Its was the impression of all respondents that both Boy Scouts and Webelos responded well during the experiment. The Webelos reaction was uniformly positive and enthusiastic, they seemed to enjoy the interaction with the older Scouts especially having the benefit of being able to do so within the comfort zone of the den itself. The Boy Scouts in the troop were initially somewhat hesitant but when they recognized that the Webelos were actually looking up to them as role models and that they posed no threat to how the troop would function, namely the troop “becoming just another big Webelos Den”, this hesitancy dissipated rapidly. When ask directly whether they felt that troop operations was negatively impacted by the integration of the Webelos den all stated no but did stress it took sometime getting use to their exuberance and they had noted that at least initially the noise level within Scout Hall increased dramatically. One Assistant Scoutmaster stated that he felt, based on his observations, that this issue was best handled by the troops youth leadership assisted by the den leader without them becoming involved.

(4) Based on your experience in the experiment do you feel that retention of Scouts during the Webelos to Scout Transition period would be improved under this system?

The unanimous response to this question was they could not tell given the fact that the experiment only ran 3 months as opposed to one year as had been planned but all of them indicated they felt that the experiment showed great promise to overcome most, if not all of the issues, identified in problem statement.

(5) Do you believe the plan used in this experiment has potential for wider application within the district/council and or Scouting as a whole?

All respondents felt that there was a great deal of potential for wider use of this model within our district/council and Scouting as a whole but this should be considered on a case by case basis. One respondent did feel that some units might be better served by the old system and should have the option of selecting between the existing model and the one outlined in this paper.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scout retention is one of the most daunting problems facing Scouting today. Every effort must be taken to insure every scout who signs a registration form remains active. Understanding that 70% of all Scouts were Webelos the retention of this demographic group is essential to the health and vitality of Scouting as it enters the next century. Our current rate of attrition of this important demographic group within Scouting is unacceptable (Henderson,2006). I believe strongly that an earlier union between second year Webelos dens and Scout troops will do much to stem this tide. The research I have conducted in examining this issue supports this conclusion and as such, I am prepared to make the following recommendations concerning how Webelos to Scout transition should be conducted:

(1) Late in the program year of a Webelos I den, a Boys Scout Troop within the same geographic area should be identified By the Den Leader and an agreement reached to attach the den to the troop during the next program year. The den will meet with and integrate itself with the troop as outlined in the methodology section of this paper but maintain a connection to the Pack by continuing to attend all Pack Meetings. The den will conduct its activities during the Skills Instruction portion of the Troop Meeting in an area away from troop activities . After Crossing over the den will then become the New Scout Patrol within the troop and fully integrate its activities with those of the troop severing its ties with the Pack.

(2) That Webelos to Scout Transition be viewed as a continuum beginning with the selection of a troop to affiliate with, continuing during the entire year of Webelos II and ending when the New Scout earns Tenderfoot with a troop.

(3) During the year of affiliation between the Webelos II den and the troop the den should be considered and treated by the troop as a “Patrol In Training” becoming a “ New Scout Patrol” at crossover”. This will dramatically reduce to trauma sometime associated with the sudden termination of a dens links to the pack and create a much more natural feel to the transition process for the transitioning Scout(s) and Leader(s) as they move from Pack to Troop. It should also provide the Troop a new Scout at crossover who is much better prepared to begin his journey as a Boy Scout because he should by this time have fully mastered all of the fundamental joining requirements and be well on his way to earning his Tender foot.

Socially, at crossover, this new Scout will have already established relationships with the older Scouts and Adult Troop Leaders and feel a part of troops organization.

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Appendix I

To :

From: Richard L. Turner, Unit Commissioner, Long Cane District, Blue Ridge Council, B.S.A.

Subj: Questionnaire concerning Webelos to Scout transition experiment.

In order to evaluate the Webelos to Scout transition experiment you participated in, you are asked to respond in writing to following questions concerning this experience. Your responses will be used to evaluate the experiment to determine if earlier interaction between second year Webelos Scouts and a Boy Scout Troop can positively impact Webelos to Scout transition. Please Attach your responses to this questionnaire.

(1) Given your experience with this experiment do you think it was successful ? Why or why not?

(2) Do you feel it is an effective way to approach Webelos to Scout transition and is it an improvement over the old method? Why or why not?

(3) How did the Scouts in your den / troop respond to this experiment? How would you describe their experience?

(4) Based on your experience in this experiment do you feel that retention of Scouts during the Webelos to Scout transition period would be improved under this system?

(5) Do you feel the plan used in this experiment has potential for wider application within the district/council and or Scouting as a whole?

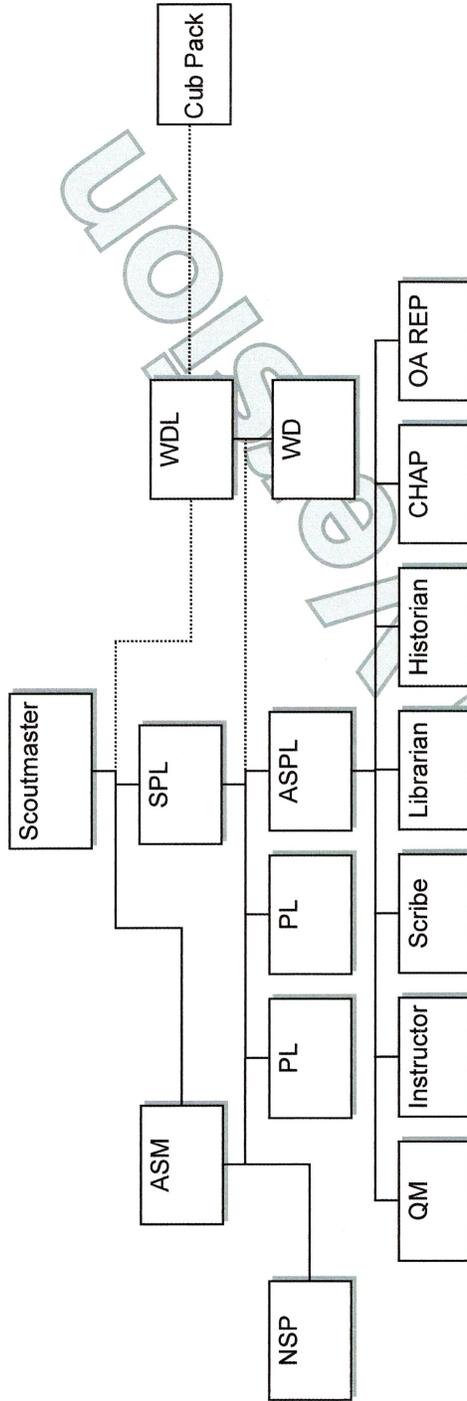
At no time will names, addresses, social security numbers, or other proprietary information be divulged in this study. Your prompt response to this questionnaire is requested. If you have any questions concerning this matter I can be reached at (864) 554-5543.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard L. Turner

Appendix II

Troop Organization W/Webelos Den



- ASM = Assistant Scoutmaster
- SPL = Senior Patrol Leader
- WDL = Webelos Den Leader
- NSP = New Scout Patrol
- PL = Patrol Leader
- ASPL = Assistant Senior Patrol Leader
- W = Webelos Den
- QM = Quartermaster
- CHAP = Chaplain Aid
- OA REP = Order of The Arrow Representative

Appendix III

Sample Troop Meeting Agenda

Pre-opening	Boy Scout Troop is joined by Webelos Den in age appropriate games or other activities.
Opening Ceremony	Boys Scout Troop is joined by Webelos Den and participates in Pledge of Allegiance, Boy Scout Oath and Law.
Skills Instruction	Webelos Den relocates to separate area and conducts den meeting activities.
Patrol Meetings	Webelos Den relocates to separate area and conducts den meeting activities.
Inter-patrol Activities	Webelos Den returns and participates as appropriate.
Closing	Webelos Den joins Boys Scout for closing and Scoutmasters Minute.
After the Meeting	Den Chief Represents Webelos Den in Patrol Leaders Council Meeting.