A District and Unit Level Webelos-to-Scout Transition Plan and

the Unit Commissioner as a Key Enabler

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By

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Thesis:
1. Completion of a Thesis on any Topic of Value to Scouting in the local council.
2. The Topic and Final Paper must be approved by the Council Commissioner, or Assigned Assistant Council Commissioner, or the Dean of the Doctorate Program and the Staff Advisor for Commissioner Service.

Title of the Thesis: A District and Unit Level Webelos-to-Scout Transition Plan and the Unit Commissioner as a Key Enabler

Hypothesis of the Need/Problem: Retention rates in scout programs have dropped in recent years. More than 70% of new Boy Scouts come directly from the Webelos program; but 1/3 will drop out in the first year.

Short Description of the Thesis Goals: Examine ways to strengthen a district and unit level system for Webelos-to-Scout transition in which the Unit Commissioner plays a key role.

State the Expected Benefits to the Council: Improved retention rate of traditional Boy Scouts.

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Approvals:
Approval of Dean of the Doctorate Program or Council Commissioner: APPROVED DISAPPROVED

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If Disapproved, state reasons for disapproval and suggestions for improvement:

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Chief Scout Executive recently stated that there is a 58% loss of boys between Webelos and Boy Scouts, though 93% of all Boy Scouts were Cub Scouts (BSA Pub. 510-714, 2016). This statement, by itself, is quite alarming, but it only paints part of the picture. Within the first six months, the typical boy scout troop will lose 40-50% of the Cub Scout Webelos who join or bridge into the unit (BSA Pub. 3868, 1983). Compounded with the high rate of attrition of Webelos I who drop out before completing Webelos II\(^1\), their Arrow of Light award, it is clear that the Boy Scouts of America has a significant problem. This rate of loss has a disastrous effect on the receiving troop’s New Scout Patrol and demographics.

There are many reasons that partially explain the decline in membership in Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting for Webelos aged youth, that is, 5\(^{th}\) grade or 11-years-old. When Cub Scouts was started in 1930, its main purpose was to prepare boys for Boy Scouts. It now appears that Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are being thought of as two separate entities instead of one continuing program. As a result, the Webelos-to-Scout transition is more important than ever (BSA Pub. 510-714, 2016).

\(^1\) The name of the oldest group of cub scouts has changed over the years including Webelos II and Arrow of Light Scouts. For the sake of consistency, the term Webelos II will be used throughout this document to refer to the age group of cubs that are about to transition to Boy Scouts.
This thesis explores the loss of Webelos II youth during the transition period from the beginning of the Webelos II period through shortly after graduation into a Boy Scout troop. I address the Webelos-to-Scout transition by correlating elements of the national transition plan with ideas that can be affected by unit commissioners and other district volunteers. Local commissioners potentially connect local unit and district resources to improve the effectiveness of the Webelos-to-Scout transition.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE NEED: WEBELOS-TO-SCOUT TRANSITION PLAN

Cub Scouting is designed for boys under age 11. Webelos is designed for the oldest Cub Scouts to help them prepare for Boy Scouts, and Boy Scouting is designed for boys ages 11 through 17, who are old enough to be on their own in the out-of-doors. The BSA’s *Webelos-to-Scout Transition* (BSA Pub. 18-086, 2006) states, “The passage from Cub Scout pack to Boy Scout troop should be smooth, with no time lost in between. By the time Webelos Scouts are ready to cross over, they and their families should be familiar and comfortable with the youth and adult leaders of the troop, their role in the troop and troop activities, and feel excited about beginning this new adventure.”

However, the “Chief Scout Executive recently stated . . . that, when asked if their son is crossing over, parents are known to reply, “We’ve ‘done’ Cub Scouts. I’m not sure we are going to ‘do’ Boy Scouts” (BSA Pub. 510-714, 2016). This anecdotal observation summarizes many of the issues at the base of the low Webelos crossing over rate. The following list of issues that affect successful cross over was identified by the Heart of America Council (Boy Scouts of America Heart of America Council, 2017):
● “Youth are tired of the Cub Scout program after five years. They do not have an understanding of the Boy Scout program.”

● “Webelos Leaders don’t know anything about the Boy Scout program and are not encouraging their boys to move on. They see it as an end to their volunteer involvement in Scouting.”

● “More activities competing for time.”

● “Boy Scouting is not seen as “cool” among their friends.”

● “They are not asked.”

A successful implementation of a Webelos-to-Scout Transition plan (WEST) must address the above observations and sentiments that capture many of the concerns that hinder successful graduation to Boy Scouts.

2 RESEARCH

To form a comprehensive picture of the Webelos-to-Scout problem and avenues for improvement, general research was conducted. The research took the form of a literature review of histories, official BSA publications, Commissioner College dissertations, interviews, and knowledge based on writings and plans of other scouters and districts.

2.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE WEBELOS PROGRAM

To gain insights into the Webelos-to-Scout transition, it is prudent to better understand the history and purpose of the Webelos program and its relationship to Cubs and Boy Scouting. Of the references in the bibliography, the following were particularly

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law. The vision of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare every eligible youth in America to become a responsible, participating citizen and leader who is guided by the Scout Oath and Law. Along these lines, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was founded in 1910 and quickly grew to be the largest youth organization in America. As early as 1911, unofficial programs began to appear for boys under age 12, but the first official BSA younger boy programs were not registered as Cubbing packs until 1930. In 1941 the symbol of the Arrow of Light was used as the first badge for the newly created Webelos rank for Lions aged 11½ who passed most of the requirements for the Boy Scout rank of Tenderfoot; but the Webelos Den program did not begin until 1954 for boys aged 10½.

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2 Cubbing was the term used to refer to the new program for younger boys when it was first fully launched in 1933.

3 The initial rank structure for Cub Scouts was Wolf, Bear, and Lion with all Cubs belonging to the WeBeLoS tribe. Webelos was an acronym for Wolf, Bear, Lion, and Scout.
2.1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: SCOUT RETENTION TRENDS

Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts continued their strong and rapid growth through the 1960s\(^4\). However, in this time period many of the older Cub Scouts were dropping out before they were able to join a Boy Scout troop. The BSA began implementing changes in the Cub Scout and Webelos program primarily to focus on transitioning Cubs to Boy Scouts\(^5\). The new Webelos program introduced in 1967 was successful in helping boys take the big step from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts: more Webelos graduated from Cub Scouts and joined a Boy Scout troop.

Boy Scout membership began declining in the early 1970s and continued to decline into the 1980s\(^6\) (see Figure 1). At this time, the National Council conducted a nationwide survey that revealed that roughly one half of graduating second year Webelos did not join a Scout troop and many Webelos drop out before they graduate. Because of this survey, the national council created a Webelos-to-Scout Transition plan (WEST or WTST). An implemented Webelos-to-Scout transition plan improves the number of graduating Webelos who join a troop, though the attrition rate is still roughly half of all Webelos II.

\(^4\) BSA membership peaked in 1972 with 6.5 million Scouts. This period was the transition in our culture away from the 1940-1960 nuclear family orientation, the end of the Communist scare with its emphasis on statism and atheism, and the shift in income demographics. It coincided with a decline in church membership nationally.

\(^5\) One symbolic change was to alter the meaning of the term Webelos to mean “We’ll Be Loyal Scouts”.

\(^6\) During the 1970s, the BSA implemented an Improved Scouting Program that was ultimately disastrous and lead to a very large decline in membership. In the late 1970s and through the 1980, the BSA returned to the basics and was able to stall the hemorrhaging membership losses.
2.2 MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

With the historical perspective as a foundation, it is appropriate to review the official literature of the BSA to gain understanding of the recommendations of the National Council for membership growth and retention related to WEST. The following publications were especially useful: Membership Committee Guide, the 2006 and 2011 versions of Webelos-to-Scout Transition pamphlets, Webelos-To-Scout Transition The
Commissioner's Role, and the article “How to have a smooth - and successful - Webelos transition” in Scouting magazine. Additional insight was found in The Voice of Scouting (Alder, 2016). Section 2.2.1 summarizes information on the year-round growth plan with a focus on elements that correlate to WEST, followed by an overview of the national BSA WEST methodology in Section 2.2.2. The WEST methodology is presented as (1) guiding principles in Section 2.2.2.1, (2) key events in Section 2.2.2.2, and (3) key personnel in Section 2.2.2.2.

While the Boy Scouts of America is one of the nation’s most popular youth organizations, there still are opportunities for growth. As the Membership Committee Guide (BSA Pub. 33080, 2012) details, “Since ours is a membership organization, we must seek opportunities to retain our current members and to increase our new membership.” The Membership Committee Guide identifies five sources of membership growth; this analysis will focus on “growth from program transition (Webelos Scout to Boy Scout …) ([which is a] joint responsibility of membership committee and commissioner staff)”, as well as consider two of the other five sources: “growth from youth recruitment” and “growth from increasing tenure/more youth registered.”

2.2.1 Year-Round Guide to Scout Recruiting: Patrol Plus

The BSA Year-Round Guide to Scout Recruiting (bsa.org Recruiting Guide, 2017) suggests that a troop should add at least 10 new Scouts every year to maintain the troop’s health and avoid shrinking membership. To this end, the BSA guides troops to develop a year-round growth plan, sometimes referred to as Patrol Plus (BSA Pub. 18-821, 2007) that embraces all methods of recruitment, and engages other unit and district resources. The three suggested elements of a year-round plan are (1) graduate Webelos into a Troop
(similar to item 3 on page 5 of *Membership Committee Guide*), (2) hold a troop open house, and (3) youth-to-youth recruiting (similar to item 2 on page 5 of *Membership Committee Guide*).

2.2.1.1 **GRADUATE WEBELOS INTO A TROOP**

This aspect of the year-round plan is the primary focus of this thesis. This aspect is designed to improve pack-troop relations, and increase retention/recruitment. The troop membership chair, a position that is frequently unfilled in troop committees, will need to work closely with a pack, have a year-round plan, and help new scout families feel welcome. It is possible that more than one troop draws new scouts from the same pack. Councils should encourage troops to work together to design a plan that allows them to cooperate for the sake of Webelos retention. Troops should help the packs develop a Webelos-to-Scout plan. I will discuss graduating Webelos into a troop, also known as the Webelos-to-Scout Transition Plan (WEST), more in Section 2.2.2 through the end of the paper.

2.2.1.2 **TROOP OPEN HOUSE**

Patrol Plus suggests that each unit host a recruitment rally or an open house. The best way to recruit boys is to engage their imagination with an interactive presentation or fun troop activity. An open house or rally are two examples of troop activities that are key to a Webelos-to-Scout transition. I explore this in Section 2.2.2.

2.2.1.3 **YOUTH-TO-YOUTH RECRUITING**

Scout-age boys do not consider receiving a flier as a true invitation to join a troop (BSA Pub. 18-821, 2007). A personal invitation from an enthusiastic Scout is more
effective. BSA suggests a fall recruiting campaign where there is some sort of prize for the best recruiter. I discuss direct youth recruitment in Section 2.2.2. It is a key element of WEST.

2.2.2 EXPLANATION OF THE NATIONAL WEBELOS-TO-SCOUT TRANSITION PLAN

The national WEST program is a broadly generalized set of principles rather than a fully proscribed program. Councils and districts identify local needs and craft-solutions based on local conditions.

2.2.2.1 OVERVIEW

The Den Leader Guide (BSA Pub. 220-852, 2014) states: “Every boy graduating from a Cub Scout pack deserves the opportunity to continue his Scouting experience. The purpose of the Webelos-to-Scout transition plan is to give every boy a sampling of the troop program, leadership, advancement opportunities, and the excitement of Boy Scouting.(sic) A key factor in (this) transition is the establishment of a working partnership between the Webelos Den and the Troop … every Webelos Den should be linked to a Troop” (Alder, 2016). Ultimately, the troop’s WEST follows the annual membership cycle (BSA Pub. 33080, 2012; bsa.org Improved WEST, 2017). The troop’s WEST is designed to facilitate recruitment of new Scouts from Cub Packs through a persistent effort to form strong relationships between Scout units and members and Cub units and members.

There are several ways a pack and troop can work together to enhance the Scouting experience of their boys. Troops and Webelos should have joint activities to help Webelos develop Scout skills, better understand the Scout program, and feel welcome by the troop.
To help assure maximum transition requires cooperation between the pack, troop, district, and commissioner (bsa.org Improved WEST, 2017; BSA Pub. 18-086, 2006).

The guiding principles of WEST are that Cub Scouting is viewed as an integral part of the entire Boy Scouting family. The *Webelos-to-Scout Transition* (BSA Pub. 18-086, 2006) recommends that “Ideally a community organization would have both a pack and a troop with leaders who work together to help Webelos Scouts into a Boy Scout troop the same way schools move students from elementary school to middle school.” Just as progressing from one den to another is considered a natural progression in a pack, advancement from a pack to a troop should be seen as a rite of passage. This view of progression into Scouting as a rite of passage will be reinforced if a chartered organization sponsors multiple units, those units have a large amount of overlap, and if the chartered organization reinforces character development. The district committee and commissioner staff should encourage chartered organizations to sponsor the entire family of Scouting.

History has shown that more Webelos Scouts join Boy Scouting when an entire den joins the troop together (BSA Pub. 18-821, 2007). Ideally, the entire Webelos den will move as one into a troop, where they will become a new-Scout patrol with the guidance of an experienced Scout (the troop guide) who will help them adjust to the new adventures Boy Scouting offers. Their troop will likely also provide an Assistant Scoutmaster who will oversee (but not “lead” the way their Den Leader did) their bonding and overall success. This can lead to lifelong friendships because these new Scouts will likely remain an intact patrol for the next seven years (Alder, 2016).
Early in the program year, troops and packs should align and begin coordinating a Webelos-to-Scout transition for every member of the effected Webelos den. While it is common for youth from a den to all transition to the same troop, it is not necessarily true that every troop’s “personality” or emphasis will meet the needs of each youth. For this reason, it is recommended that all the Webelos have the opportunity to visit more than one troop in order to find the best fit. It is likely that more than one troop will be aligned with a specific pack, so it is important that all responsible parties establish consistent and good communications. The process should focus on the youth as individuals rather than as a collective. The pack and troop and unit commissioner should collect pertinent information on all second year Webelos, and begin a tracking sheet to monitor the progress of each youth towards their graduation to a troop (see the Appendix B for a sample Webelos roster). The national Webelos-to-Scout transition literature, the *Year-Round Guide to Scout Recruiting: Graduate Webelos Scouts Into a Troop*, suggests a timeline of tracking which I paraphrase as follows:

- **August:** key personnel collect information on all second year Webelos and start the plan of upcoming events for the program year
- **September:** the troops send letters of introduction to the Webelos families and begin including them on troop newsletters
- **October – January:** maintain communication among the key transition personnel to track Webelos advancement status and participation in joint activities
• February – May: maintain communication with Webelos families to assure that they are aware of all troop activities and are familiar with the Scout program – especially summer camp

• May – August: follow up on all Webelos and new Scouts to make sure that they are registered, and active in the new troop, and that they will attend summer camp

An important part of the year-long transition plan are joint activities so that the Webelos will get a better understanding of Boy Scouts by attending activities or events with Scout troops. The joint activities should be meaningful and inclusive of the Webelos, and allow opportunities for the Webelos and their families to become familiar with the patrol method and the Boy Scout program. The activities should help to stimulate youth interest in the Boy Scouts. Some suggested Graduate Webelos Scouts Into a Troop timeline of activities are summarized as follows:

• August - September: plan a joint campout or other outdoor activity for October; allow the Webelos to see a youth lead patrol plan an activity

• October: conduct joint camping trip or other outdoor activity

• November: Scouts attend the den meeting to teach the Webelos II about how troops work and to present the schedule of upcoming events

• January: Webelos and family member visit a troop meeting; Scouts visit Webelos I to introduce them to Scouting

• February: crossing over ceremony; assure new scouts attend troop activities

• April: troop activity especially for new scouts; summer camp orientation for new scouts
• May – August: assure new scouts attend troop meetings and activities

The current BSA presentation of the WEST encourages activities for Webelos, but the only activity that it specifies is a campout in October (see above), while the *Membership Committee Guide* (BSA Pub. 33080, 2012) suggests a few additional activities:

• Webelos Scout Den/Boy Scout Joint Activities. Troops should be encouraged to invite Webelos Scouts to visit a troop meeting and to attend a troop campout to encourage them to join their troop.

• District-wide Crossover Ceremony. This could leverage local Order of the Arrow ceremony team to make it a special event. District graduation ceremonies should be held in addition to pack graduation ceremonies, not in place of them.

• Recruitment towards summer camp. This special emphasis is aimed specifically at nonmember youth who are graduating from the fifth grade. Spring recruiting efforts should be conducted to enable members to participate in summer camp.

• Join-in-Camporee. Invite prospective Boy Scouts (especially boys who will complete fifth grade) to visit as a day guest of a district camporee.

• Troop Open House. A troop open house can be an effective way to recruit new scouts. The open house should be a short, lively program with an explanation of troop activities and a calendar of future troop events.

Previous versions of the WEST also suggested Webelos Woods which is a program to introduce Webelos and their parents to the fun and excitement of Boy Scouting. The
best troops in the council are usually involved in the program. Some councils have
Webelos-to-Scout graduation ceremonies at their Webelos Woods events which are often
presented by members of the Order of the Arrow ceremony teams. This is a great way to
get boys excited about Boy Scouting.

2.2.2.3 **Key Roles**

Several key personnel should work together to track the progress of all second year
Webelos towards becoming a Scout. Troop leaders, pack leaders, unit commissioner, and
district Webelos transition chair all play key roles. The specific responsibilities for each
player are outlined in very general terms in *Webelos-to-Scout Transition* (BSA Pub. 18-
086, 2006). Overall, the responsibilities focus on clear and consistent communication for
inviting, tracking, and following-up on each individual youth. Discussion in this section
highlights a few of the key responsibilities of the commissioner and district staff.

The unit commissioner plays a key role by providing continuing program support,
helping to establish working relationships between the troop and the Webelos II, and
facilitating the meetings between the troop leaders and the pack leaders. Ideally, the same
unit commissioner would serve any packs and troops that are already aligned, and/or the
unit commissioner would be a key person to help establish a pack-troop alignment. Every
district should have a system to identify and track each Webelos II to ensure that he has
the opportunity to continue his Scouting experience as a Boy Scout. With the help of the
district Webelos transition chair, the unit commissioner collects and updates a roster of all
fifth graders and Webelos II youth; the unit commissioner is in a unique position to help
maintain and update the Webelos tracking form because of the regular contact with each
of the units. The unit commissioner should also regularly report on the progress of each of

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the Webelos and the status of the unit’s WEST to the district commissioner and the district
Webelos transition chair, who in turn reports to the district membership committee.
Finally, as each Webelos graduates, the unit commissioner assures that new Scouts have
completed a Boy Scout application, that they have a copy of the troop's activities, and that
they know when and where the troop meets. The unit commissioner and the district
Webelos transition chair should follow up with any youth that does not register with a
troop.

The unit commissioners, roundtable commissioners, and district Webelos transition
chair should work together to coach recruiting and retention to unit leaders through
individual contact and formal training events. In early fall, the commissioner corps should
provide special coaching during a special roundtable aimed at Webelos leaders and troop
leaders: Webelos-to-Scout transition is an integral part of annual recruiting plan (BSA Pub.
510-714, 2016).

2.3 EXPLORATION OF IMPLEMENTATIONS OF TRANSITION PLANS

Because the actual implementation of WEST will vary, it is useful to research and
review WEST plans, successes, and challenges from other scouters. A very rich source of
material are the dissertations written by commissioners at Colleges of Commissioner
Science and made available on their web sites. Colleges of Commissioner Science libraries
that were consulted include but are not limited to Piedmont-Appalachian and Atlanta Area
Council. It is extremely interesting to note the large number of dissertations that focus on
WEST or WEST related topics. This indicates the severity of the WEST problems, and
the widespread nature of the problem. The following sections will correlate observations
from various dissertations and other sources, and then will present some correlated implementation strategies to address their perceived difficulties.

2.3.1 IMPLEMENTATION

In his thesis, Commissioner Walton (Walton, 1996) reported a 20% increase of Webelos II crossing over to a troop when his district implemented a WEST system with some specific protocols. The critical step was to pair Webelos II dens with Boy Scout troops in their neighborhood – ideally sponsored by the same chartered organization – and have the same unit commissioner provide service. The other critical component, also recognized by Commissioner Martin (Martin, 2012), was the establishment of accountability through a standardized reporting mechanism, i.e., regular review and reports of the Webelos II tracking sheet between pack, troop, UC, ADC, and DC.

Commissioner Martin (Martin, 2012) suggests that WEST should begin when a Bear becomes a Webelos I because the entire Webelos program should be considered a transition program. A good WEST program teaches the boys the differences between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and starts them on their path to Eagle Scout.

The fundamental principle to this implementation is a strong relationship between den and troop that included regular joint activities such as campfires, day hikes, invitations to pack meetings and courts of honor, and service projects, as well as joint roundtables and parent orientation meetings. Districts, with support from the Order of the Arrow, should also sponsor a district activity such as “Webelos Woods” in which some of the best troops in the district participate to introduce Webelos to the excitement of Boy Scouting. Other
successful events are “Webelos Walk” (Haynie, 2011), “Webeloree” (Amon, 2010), and a strong Webelos outdoor program facilitated by a local troop (Roach, 1992).

In addition to the youth activities, commissioners reported (Burkett, 1985) that training for the adult leaders is also important since it improved the overall quality of the Webelos program and clearly set expectations for WEST partnerships. One of the adult training events offered in the Atlanta Area Council was an experimental annual “Activity Badge” workshop that provided practical and fun training for den leaders to improve their delivery of program elements. This was shown to improve transition by keeping Webelos excited and engaged with scouting so that they had a desire to continue their adventure after graduation.

2.3.2 TIPS TO PARENTS

Other successful WEST implementations have improved transition by specifically targeting the parents of the Webelos. Because many Webelos fall through the cracks due to a lack of understanding of the Boy Scout program and the adventure it offers, it is important to begin an early education and orientation of the parents about what lies ahead. While this is usually considered the role of the troop committee, some districts have had success by making the orientation an earlier emphasis facilitated by the district. The district can assist by directly contacting Webelos II parents to let them know about the locations and meeting times of multiple troops in their area, giving them pointers on how to pick a troop that is right for them, providing examples of typical annual programs as well as the council’s summer camp so that they can become excited about the opportunities. Troops that target parent education have reported improved retention, and I suggest that councils should develop methods to improve parent education about Boy Scouts.
3 OBSERVATIONS

3.1 METHODOLOGY

To form a comprehensive picture of the Webelos-to-Scout situation and avenues for improvement, general research was conducted at the local level. The research took the form of interviews, discussions, and e-mails with the district executive, district committee chair, district commissioner, former district membership chairs, council commissioner, council membership chair, and the committee chairs and scoutmasters and cubmasters from 15 different packs and troops (see Appendix A).

3.2 OBSERVATIONS

In the Monticello District of Stonewall Jackson Area Council, the retention trends for the past several years are less than ideal, but are not inconsistent with national membership trends (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). While Cub Scouting has seen modest growth for the past few years, the retention of Boy Scouts and the retention of Webelos have lagged. Exact Webelos-to-Scout retention numbers are not reported because they have not been directly tracked in a systematic fashion. This lack of tracking is anecdotal evidence of a systematic area for improvement through commissioner service. Monticello District Director Scott Lancey provided the following retention information:

- More than 2/3 of the Scouts who begin the Webelos program in the 4th grade will not be a part of the program by the beginning of the 5th grade.
- Over 1/3 of the new Boy Scouts we register from graduated Webelos dens will drop out of the Boy Scout program before they have completed one full year of Scouting.
The overall retention trend coupled with the information provided by the district director highlight the value for a WEST program.

![Retention Rate in Stonewall-Jackson Area Council Youth Retention](image)

**FIGURE 2: RETENTION RATES IN STONEWALL-JACKSON AREA COUNCIL. THESE RATES ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE RETENTION RATES REPORTED IN THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA ANNUAL REPORTS.**
Discussions with the district executive, district committee chair, district commissioner, former district membership chair, unit commissioners, and unit leaders have revealed that the local implementation of the Webelos-to-Scout transition could be improved through more complete and consistent application. Many district-level parts of the Webelos-to-Scout transition plan are not fully implemented because of a shortage of volunteers. For example, there are not enough active unit commissioners in Monticello District to provide adequate service to all the scouting units, so it is unlikely that unit commissioners are able to fulfill their key role in facilitating relationships between troops and dens in the district.

When a single unit commissioner services all units chartered by a single organization, some councils have observed a resultant increased retention. In the
Monticello District, there are 68 units chartered by 50 organizations. Of the 50 charter organizations, 14 of the organizations charter more than one type of unit. Of the 14 that charter more than one unit, only 2 of the organization have a unit commissioner assigned who services all of the units. It is likely that retention could be improved by realigning unit commissioners such that a single unit commissioner services each of the remaining 12 multi-unit organizations. Encouraging the 36 single-unit organizations to charter another unit is another area for improved retention and growth through natural of troop-den relationships.

Lack of volunteers also affects the district committee. The Monticello district committee is stretched thin, so that often sub-committee chairs are frequently the only members of the committee; thus, the Webelos transition chair and the membership chair are likely the same person. Scouters have reported similar situations in other councils. With the wide range of responsibilities falling to a small number of volunteers, recommended practices may fall by the wayside.

One standard practice that has suffered from lack of volunteers is monthly tracking and reporting on the progress of each individual Webelos scout. The unit commissioner is supposed to track transition progress for their unit, and report it to the ADC and DC, who in turn report it to the appropriate member of the membership committee and district chair. The purpose of this reporting and tracking is stated in the Webelos-to-Scout Transition Plan: the district Webelos transition chair and unit commissioner work together to follow up on Webelos Scouts who have not joined a troop. Early identification and follow up is important for resolving concerns and encouraging retention. Since reporting is not happening regularly, follow up with youth, parents, and leaders is not happening. The lack
of reporting is not a problem by itself, but it does signify that there is a lack of accountability and that few volunteers outside of an individual unit are actively promoting Webelos transition in a holistic and sustainable manner.

4 ANALYSIS

In a perfect world the Webelos-to-Scout Transition plan is parallel to the annual recruitment plan. The Webelos-to-Scout transition plan is an annual recruitment plan targeted to a very specific set of youth. The Webelos-to-Scout transition plan is a two-pronged approach with parallel emphasis at the district and unit levels, and it emphasizes accountability and activities. This section outlines the principles and elements of transition plans, correlates them to local implementation, and suggests actions based on established principles.

4.1 EVERY WEBELOS DEN SHOULD BE LINKED TO A TROOP

A key factor in transition plans is the establishment of a working partnership between the Webelos den and the troop. The ideal partnership would link dens with troops in the same neighborhood – ideally sponsored by the same charter organization – and have the same unit commissioner provide unit service. Local implementation of this principle is not universal since not all dens are teamed with a troop. To compound the situation, the district commissioner staff is not fully populated so that not all units have a dedicated unit commissioner, and the assignment of unit commissioners does not explicitly consider den-troop pairings. The result of these situations is that many dens do not have a strong working partnership, and they do not have district facilitation via the commissioner corps to
establish a strong working relationship. My recommendation is that the established principle of den-troop pairings be strengthened through new actions:

- District membership committee conduct analysis to identify likely den-troop pairings
- District commissioner considers den-troop pairings and chartered organization sponsorship when assigning unit commissioners to serve units
- District recruits additional unit commissioners

4.2 Give Every Youth a Sampling of the Troop Program

The purpose of the Webelos-to-Scout transition plan is to give every boy a sampling of the troop program, leadership, advancement opportunities, and the excitement of Boy Scouting. This is accomplished through joint activities, a well-executed and high quality Webelos annual program, and a close interaction with Boy Scouts via activities and den chiefs. Joint activities will be discussed later. While this thesis does not explore the quality of local Webelos dens or den chiefs, I have observed training trends for the past five years that have shown fewer opportunities and lower enrollment for Webelos-den-specific program helps and den chief training. My recommendation is that the established principle of troop program exposure be strengthened through new actions:

- Unit commissioner help dens identify troops that could provide den chiefs
- Unit commissioners make troops aware of an opportunity to serve local packs
- Unit commissioners and district volunteers offer training at Roundtable and Scouting-U about improving the Webelos program and den chiefs
4.3 FOLLOW ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP CYCLE

Webelos-to-Scout transition should be continuously implemented, not something that starts a week before crossover. At the local level, each unit differs. Commissioners visiting with multiple units observed that some units do a good job of starting the transition early, while other troops do not start transition until the day before the crossover ceremony. District scouters, especially the unit commissioner, need to do a better job of coaching unit leaders on Webelos-to-Scout transition. My recommendation is that the established principle of following an annual membership cycle be strengthened through new actions:

- Unit commissioners and roundtable commissioners should coach packs and troops about effective crossover
- Unit commissioners and roundtable commissioners should coach packs and troops about Webelos-to-Scout transition plans
- Unit commissioners and district membership committee should coach troop committees about Webelos-to-Scout transition as an important part of their annual recruiting effort

4.4 JOINT ACTIVITIES

Joint activities are a critical element of a Webelos-to-Scout transition plan because these activities are the usual opportunity to give every youth a sampling of the troop program, leadership, advancement opportunities, and the excitement of Boy Scouting. Unit level activities are not judged in this thesis beyond discussion of the roles of the district and commissioner resources for improving activities in the scope of the Webelos-to-Scout transition. The key role of the unit commissioner in this principle area is to facilitate the
partnership between the den and the troop. The unit commissioner should regularly inquire of the den and troop leaders about their plans for joint activities, and follow-up by getting a feeling for which Webelos did and did not attend.

District level activities are also very important in the Webelos-to-Scout transition annual plan. There are several activities, such as camporees, that the district and commissioners can execute or facilitate. In the Monticello District of the Stonewall-Jackson Area Council, the annual Apple Harvest fall camporee is a good example of a district event that supports Webelos-to-Scout transition. The timing of the camporee exactly coincides with the national annual membership cycle. The design and execution of the camporee is precisely to encourage Cub Scouts to attend for a day to be exposed to the fun and adventure of Boy Scouting. There is an implied expectation that troops will invite Webelos to camp one night with the troop. However, the utility of the camporee as a membership growth opportunity is not emphasized to the troops, nor is training provided for how to leverage the camporee to strengthen Webelos dens and Webelos-to-Scout transition. While Apple Harvest is well advertised at Roundtables, this form of publicity may have limited reach if the district Roundtables are not well attended. A possible area for improvement could be to use Roundtable as an opportunity to identify packs that are not attending Apple Harvest or are not camping by compiling a list of units who do not attend Roundtable together with those who give a negative response. This collected information and the camaraderie of Roundtable is a good place to initiate or strengthen pack-troop pairings.

My recommendation is that the established principle of joint activities be strengthened through new actions:
• Unit commissioners suggest and follow-up on joint activity plans as part of the “membership” portion of the biannual joint detailed unit assessment
  o Unit commissioners suggest that two metrics be tracked by the unit: number of activities and attendance by Webelos at the activity
• Roundtable commissioners offer training about using district camporees as part of membership growth plans
• Roundtable commissioners provide training for how to use district camporees to strengthen Webelos program delivery
• Unit commissioners encourage unit attendance at district camporees, and suggest den-troop pairings if they do not already exist
• District volunteers collect feedback and commitments from Roundtable attendees about attendance, and follow-up with units not attending or with negative responses

4.5 WEBELOS TRACKING

5 THE NATIONAL PLANS AND THE PLANS IN VARIOUS COUNCILS

OF WEBELOS GRADUATION BY USING A WALL CHART THAT LISTS THE TRANSITION RECORD OF EACH PACK. WORK WITH UNIT COMMISSIONERS TO FOLLOW UP ON WEBELOS SCOUTS WHO HAVE NOT JOINED A TROOP” (EMPHASIS ADDED). THE NATIONAL COUNCIL AND VARIOUS BOY SCOUT COUNCILS HAVE PROVIDED WALL CHARTS AND TRACKING SHEETS THAT CAN BE USED FOR THIS PURPOSE (SEE FIGURE 4, FIGURE 5, AND FIGURE 6 IN THE APPENDIX A – RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The research for this thesis primarily took the form of interviews and correspondence with leaders and volunteers with experience and insight with Webelos-to-Scout transition in the Stonewall-Jackson Area Council and Monticello District. The following is a list of direct correspondents from whom I gathered data.

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Appendix B). The national committee has provided details on the timeline for tracking in *Improved Webelos Transition* (bsa.org Improved WEST, 2017) and the *Membership Committee Guide* (BSA Pub. 33080, 2012), and it has provided specific instructions to each of the key members of the transition team in *Improved Webelos Transition* (bsa.org Improved WEST, 2017). From discussions with Monticello District leaders, it is evident that this principle of WEST is not widely used. Den leaders may track the progress of their Webelos toward advancement and transition, but that information, apart from crossover date, is rarely formally or regularly shared with troop leaders or recorded. The tracking of individual youth is not uniformly implemented as a standard part of contacts with unit commissioners, and therefore there is little reporting or accountability to ADC, DC, or district membership committee. This tracking and reporting is already an assigned role of the commissioner corps.

Effective transition does not end at the crossing over ceremony: the crossing over is not complete until the Webelos is officially registered with a troop. It is a very common condition that a cub joins a new troop, but is not officially registered until charter renewal. It has also been observed by unit volunteers that a pack assumes that the receiving troop has taken on responsibility for tracking the youth and removes the youth from their roster, while the troop may not be fully ready to receive the youth so that a Webelos scout may fall between the cracks and no unit notices. As part of their responsibility, the unit commissioner for a pack should track the registration of every graduating Webelos and make sure that the youth application is collected and turned in to the council registrar.

The program transition is not complete until the youth has been firmly established on the trail to Eagle, for example making steady progress towards the rank of First Class.
The unit commissioner should follow up during membership inventories for the first 12-18 months after cross over to track the attendance of the new Scout and check their advancement. The unit commissioner should inquire about such things as current rank, number of troop meetings attended, number of campouts attended, and registration for summer camp. If the new Scout is not making progress or has fallen through the cracks, the unit commissioner and the district Webelos transition chair should follow up with the youth and family to attempt to resolve concerns.

My recommendation is that the established principle of Webelos tracking be strengthened through new actions:

- Unit commissioners make tracking of individual Webelos a part of their regular membership inventories
  - Unit commissioners highlight or maintain a separate roster of Webelos scouts
  - Unit commissioners verify that when Webelos transition out of a pack (drops from the pack roster) that they are registered with a troop (appear on a troop roster). This can be partially done in a breakout session of the monthly commissioner staff meeting.
  - Commissioner staff work with District Executive to correlate Webelos transition rosters with “Youth Eligible to Join a Troop” membership reports.
- Commissioner staff report Webelos transition status to district membership committee
- Unit commissioners attend crossover ceremonies and collect membership applications
Unit commissioners and district membership committee follow up with graduated Webelos who do not appear on a troop roster

5.1 UNIT LEVEL KEY ROLES AND COMMUNICATION

The national transition plan and various local implementations recognize that unit leaders have the most obvious and impactful role in the Webelos-to-Scout transition. Strong and consistent communication between den and troop is present in various degrees for units that are paired, but it is obviously absent from units that are not paired.

Effective Webelos-Parent-to-Scout-Parent transition is an element of Webelos-to-Scout transition that is underemphasized. In 2017 the BSA introduced a new committee position with the responsibility to engage new members and parents. The new committee position, New Member Coordinator, helps with new member recruitment and helps new members and their families get connected with the program. One of their jobs is to welcome parents, keep them informed, and encourage them to help with at least one specific task or project each year.

Unless they have previous scouting experience or older children in a troop, the parents of cubs are likely to know little to nothing about the Boy Scouting program, and they may not understand that Boy Scouts offers a new adventure better able to serve the needs of their growing child. While the Webelos den program is designed to expose and

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7 Until recently, every unit was recommended to have a Webelos-to-Scout transition responsible adult (such as an assistant scoutmaster or committee member), and should also have a scout parent unit coordinator.
prepare the Cub Scout for Boy Scouts, this period should also be used to educate the parents (and Webelos leaders) about the Boy Scout program. The personnel concerned with Webelos-to-Scout transition should use methods and resources such as videos, brochures, conversations, parent meetings, etc. to engage cub families with the Boy Scout program. The den and troop leaders should assure that the parents are aware of the transition plan, key dates, the purpose behind activities, and how a troop differs from a pack. Webelos-to-Scout transition coordinators must do all possible to remedy what the “Chief Scout Executive recently stated . . . that, when asked if their son is crossing over, parents are known to reply, “We’ve ‘done’ Cub Scouts. I’m not sure we are going to ‘do’ Boy Scouts (Boy Scouts of America, 2016).”

My recommendation is that the established principle of unit level roles be strengthened through new actions:

- Roundtable commissioners encourage troops to include Webelos dens in appropriate district activities such as camporees
- Unit commissioners remind packs and troops of district events and recommend they attend together
- Unit commissioners suggest joint activities as a goal in their annual service plan discussed with the unit Key 3 at joint detailed assessments
- Unit commissioners and district membership committee encourage units to have a trained New Member Coordinator
  - District volunteers help provide New Member Coordinator with resources (such as videos and brochures) to help them engage with parents
5.2 DISTRICT LEVEL KEY ROLES AND COMMUNICATION

The key role played by district level scouters should be strengthened and reinforced to improve the retention of Webelos as Scouts. The district membership committee should have a member-at-large who is trained and focused on Webelos transition, including the critical component of tracking individual Webelos and aligning Webelos dens with Scout troops. The district commissioner should receive regular reports on the progress of all Webelos so that the district commissioner and district committee can follow up with Webelos who are falling through the cracks. The unit commissioners must ensure that they fulfill their key role to facilitate den-troop partnerships. The district program committee should make sure that there are district events such as camporees or Webelorees, that encourage Webelos dens and Scout troops to strengthen their relationship. Overall, there are many district scouters who should provide training and coaching to unit leaders. While local district execution of these roles is not absent, it is my opinion that they are not robustly or completely followed. Local districts will benefit from an increased focus on fulfilling these district scouter roles, and the key scouter to strengthen this program is the district commissioner or assistant district commissioner working closely with the district membership chair.

My recommendation is that the established principle of district level roles be strengthened through new actions:

- District committee member-at-large for Webelos transition should work with the program and training committees to provide training to unit volunteers about transition plans
• District training committee should provide WEST training opportunities for adults, and den chief training for youth
• Roundtable commissioners offer transition orientation and training to packs and troops in the fall
• Program transition become a regular part of district committee reports to gauge a valuable metric about membership growth

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Joint unit activities are essential for fulfilling the purposes of the Webelos-to-Scout transition plan. While some units have successful joint activities, some other dens have reported attending activities where the visiting Webelos are anything more than observers. Just as many districts aid their units by providing literature, coaching, and supplies for events such as Cub Scout recruiting rallies at schools, WEST on the District level could help WEST on the unit level by providing unit activity templates and coaching.

Districts could also offer surrogate unit activities that bring together multiple dens and multiple troops to showcase the scouting experience and establish or strengthen partnerships. An example activity that meets these criteria is a district camporee held in the fall that showcase many scouting skills that Webelos are invited to attend and camp with a troop. Other district activity examples include Webelos Woods, Webelos Walkabout, and a district wide Webelos crossing over ceremony that is held in addition to the unit cross over ceremony. An enriching element to these activities could include a ceremony team from the local Order of the Arrow lodge assisting with a Webelos “tapping out” at the fall camporee and at a special cross over ceremony in the spring.
6.1 CONCLUSION

A successful implementation of a Webelos-to-Scout transition plan must address the above observations that capture many of the concerns that hinder successful graduation to Boy Scouts. A Webelos-to-Scout transition plan is a broadly generalized set of principles rather than a fully proscribed program that allows councils and districts to identify local needs and craft a solution based on local ground truth. While the transition is ultimately implemented at the local unit level, district scouters and resources can and should be leveraged to support the units. The district should accept its accountability for broaching the gaps that exist between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts.

A part of this accountability includes explicit tracking by unit commissioners of the relationships and progress of Webelos, dens, and packs. Another part of the district responsibility is to better leverage the roles of the unit commissioner as perhaps the best situated individual to facilitate contact and effect change. The trend of high attrition of Webelos who do not fully transition to Boy Scouting must be reversed because it has a disastrous effect on the receiving troop’s New Scout Patrol and demographics, but more importantly it demonstrates that more of the nation’s youth are not able to participate in one of the best character and citizenship programs in America.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Commissioner College hosted by the Heart of Virginia Council for consistently providing a quality training and fellowshipping opportunity. In particular, I would like to thank John Nicolay for his
encouragement for me to persist and re-tool my thesis when my original topic became obsolete because of recent program changes; and for his comments on my thesis drafts.
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY


9 APPENDIX A – RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

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<td>Director)</td>
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### FIGURE 4: SAMPLE WEBELOS ROSTER SHEET PROVIDED BY R. F. WALTON (WALTON, 1996)

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<td>Mike Pm</td>
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<td>789-6543</td>
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**Troop Leadership:**
- **TROOP LEADER:** Steve Pm
- **TROOP Sargent:** John Pm
- **TROOP COMMISSIONER:** Jane Pm

**Den Meetings:**
- **Den 1:** John Pm, Mike Pm
- **Den 2:** Steve Pm, Terry Pm

**Crossover of Webelos:**
- **1st Choice:** John Pm
- **2nd Choice:** Mike Pm

**Unit Commissioner:** Jane Pm

**Assistant District Commissioner:** John Pm
FIGURE 5: SAMPLE JOINT ACTIVITY TRACKING SHEET PROVIDED BY R. F. WALTON (WALTON, 1996)
FIGURE 6: BSA WALL CHART (ITEM 34194)