

5 PRACTICAL TIPS FOR BUILDING PURPOSE AND COMMUNITY IN THE BAND PARENT ASSOCIATION

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Whether kids are just starting kindergarten or entering their final year of high school, there are many good reasons for parents to volunteer at school.

It's a great way to show your kids that you take an interest in their education, and it sends a positive message that you consider school (and thus the band program) a worthwhile cause. Not only will the school reap the benefits of your involvement — you will, too. (KidsHealth®)

By interacting with the students, as well as the band program personnel, parents gain firsthand understanding of the child's responsibilities when it comes to their many musical experiences. KidsHealth® also highlights that this type of direct involvement also provides a means to, "tap into trends and fads of school life that can help you communicate with your kids as they grow and change (all without intruding on their privacy or personal space)."

Band parent associations are filled with such parents—those who want nothing more than to become involved in their child's education and to provide assistance as needed. At times, however, these well-meaning organizations can run amok due to organizational deficiencies as well as an unclear sense of purpose. This led me to visit with a number of active band booster parents to get their input on which strategies help most in keeping their association running smoothly and efficiently thus contributing to its success as a driving force with a clear purpose. The "5 Practical Tips" below are provided solely BY band parents FOR band parents.

1. Have Purpose.

PLAIN AND SIMPLE: The purpose of the band parent association is to assist the director(s) and band staff by taking on as many of the non-musical responsibilities as possible so that they are provided with maximum time to educate the students. The director is encouraged to communicate which tasks can be assumed by the parents then the leadership determines how those jobs will be organized and subsequently completed. More specific goals are set as determined by program need. Items such as procuring a new truck, providing meals prior to football games and, of course, planning fund-raisers, will need many volunteers. To minimize confusion, everyone should have a solid understanding of what their job is and be provided with the means and training by which to do that job efficiently.

2. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

Even if the turnout is low at meetings or there is a sense that emails aren't being read, take heart. It is important

to continue to disseminate information to all parents no matter the level of response generated. Eventually, it WILL lead to increased participation. Open communication should be cultivated so that there is a sense that everyone can contribute and that their feedback is valued. Well-organized and purposeful meetings should be held regularly (monthly, quarterly) but only as needed and the dates should be calendared well in advanced with minutes shared immediately. Programs like Charms, UTutti or other web-based platforms can assist in calendaring all events and remaining organized. To promote transparency and encourage engagement, ensure that parents know that all meetings, even board meetings, are open to all. Use platforms like Google Drive to post meeting notes, financials, procedures, job descriptions, etc. It is important to keep documents like these available on a shared directory to refrain from having to re-create the wheel each year. It also shows that the association is a well-oiled machine and this promotes confidence among all.

3. Build Camaraderie.

Parent social time is important plus it can be a great deal of fun. Plan a casual dinner or other types of group events as time permits at events like marching band competitions. Parents can sit together in the stands and even "meet up" at a given restaurant during the breaks. Applications like WhatsApp and GroupMe are useful tools for group texting and informing each other about such gatherings. This is a wonderful way to communicate in a more casual manner, to promote fellowship, and to build camaraderie among people of similar interests. Connect new parents with experienced parents through mentorships. Be sure that each new parent has a go-to person assigned to answer questions and help solve any problems. This will also assist in building trust and mutual understanding. Consider asking the band staff to arrange for a Parent Marching Band Night where they would teach parents some basic breathing, marching, and formation techniques. Parents get a real kick out of this plus it builds relationships among the parents as well as with the staff—not to mention an increased understanding of the incredible coordination and concentration that it takes for their students to participate successfully in marching band.

4. Promote Retention and Growth

Organize a feeder school night for middle school students to perform with the high school marching band. In addition to participating in the halftime show in some fashion, these younger musicians also sit in a group in the stands right next to the high school band. They play along on the simpler "musical cheers" which students will have learned from their

middle school director and the high school cheerleaders even visit their section to lead them in learning cheers thus helping them get into the spirit. Prior to the game, the high school parent association could host a casual dinner combining the middle and high school bands. During this event, a "Parent Mixer" could also take place by inviting the high school and middle school band parents to get together at the same dinner. This type of meet-and-greet will help parents get to know each other and see first-hand how their students relate to one another because of their common interest. The principal could also be invited to provide a few short remarks to the middle school parents about the high school band program and how much he/she is looking forward to the students "coming up" and participating in the band program.

5. Pass the Torch

Ensure continued leadership by recruiting new parents to serve in the organization. Make it your job to find a replacement for your duties and don't be afraid to bring up new parents but do it early. It's important to fill positions with new parents so that there are no vacancies as the association progresses from one year to the next. Posting open positions is one way to accomplish this but it is always best to approach people on a personal level when asking them to volunteer for a specific task. The person being recruited may give it more thought when asked in this way plus the direct communication allows for questions to be answered as well as potential fears to be put aside right on the spot. Consider what tasks that parents with younger children might be able to do more comfortably from home vs. parents with no additional children who may have more flexibility in their schedules. It is also important to remember that many boosters are working parents so their availability may be more limited.

Congratulations on having become an involved parent through your school's band parent/booster association. The profound impact that the band program will have on your child will be enhanced even more as a direct result of YOUR participation.



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