

5 TIPS TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR MARCHING BAND STUDENT AND KEEP YOUR FAMILY SANE



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Having a teenager participate in the band program is indeed rewarding, however it does present its challenges. Below are five (5) tips that have been provided by parents who have found a way to negotiate those challenges while teaching their children about organization and time management to allow them to fully enjoy the marching band experience without undue stress. COMMUNICATION is key!

1. Respect the Marching Band Season.

Band students are some of the busiest in the school so it's important to avoid overbooking their schedules during this time of year. Hopefully, your school offers a seven-period (or more) day to provide more flexibility but either way, visit with your child to discuss what would work out best in their fall schedule so that they aren't too overloaded. For example, a student may choose to postpone their Driver's Education class to the second semester or they might choose to take their Health Class online. Students should also check to see if they can receive Physical Education credit for marching band as many districts do provide this. If provided at your school, this semester may also be a good time to sign up for a study hall to get a jump on the evening's homework assignments.

Although the summer breaks can provide opportunities for students to knock out courses in summer school or online, leadership camp, band camp, Scouts, and church programs can allow little "leftover" time for students to take advantage of these options. In fact, many families even schedule their vacations during the small amount of time remaining in the summer to ensure "family time" while preventing the missing of band practices. Conflicts can arise in special circumstances but every effort should be made to plan family gatherings so that they are not during band camp.

Consider using a shared calendar like Google Calendar so that everyone in the family has everyone else's color-coded schedules. Busy families know that this is the only way to ensure that everyone is where they are supposed to be when they are supposed to be there. Review the schedules weekly and update as necessary.

For more long-term planning purposes, it is recommended that students and parents plan the academic schedule well in advance. All four (4) years can be planned out ahead of time so that students are college or career ready at graduation. Meet with counselors annually to remain current on what the students' options are to be sure that they can continue in band for all four years. This simple step can save last minute surprises down the road.

2. Protect and Preserve Free Time.

When there are week-ends with no band activities, build a bubble around it. Remember that marching band students put in numerous extra hours at school. They deserve the break when they can get it! Resist the temptation to fill the open week-end with other "to dos" so that they have the time to decompress and rest. Balance their chores. Pitch in as necessary to be sure that your teen isn't too pressured. They need to remain focused. With more than one child, whether all are in band or not, it's important that all of their activities are covered in some way. Plan in advance for coverage – participate in trusted car pools for transportation, stagger attendance at their events if you have to, and know that it's OK if one of the kids has to wait a little bit at times. Consider allowing your child to get his driver's license as soon as state law permits as this will help alleviate many transportation issues.

3. Teach Organizational Skills.

By high school, most teenagers know their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to organization. Band students have been known to leave their instruments at home (not at your house, I'm sure) so it may help to post an "exit checklist" by the front door so that that your child has everything needed to get through the coming school day. (Just a reminder that checklists can change throughout the marching band season.) Another option is to put all items needed for the day right at the door the night before. Set a routine. For example, after students get home from marching band rehearsals, they will probably have dinner then hit the books. As teens can tend to procrastinate (maybe that doesn't happen at your house), help guide them in their practice habits as well. Check phone, TV, and video game use to help them avoid distractions. Kids may need help in managing all of their activities but once a routine is established, it will be much easier to maintain the schedule.

4. Provide for Good Nutrition.

Most high schools have staggered lunch periods which can start as early as 11:00 AM. To sustain your child, be sure that he takes a snack (protein bar or piece of fruit) to grab at the end of the day. After-school band practices are rigorous and teenagers need protein to keep up their focus and stamina. Considering that band students may not get home until after 6:00 PM on practice days, the best plan is to have nutritious meals ready to go so that they can eat as soon as they come home. It will help them to re-charge so that they can begin their homework right after dinner. A frozen pizza may work once in awhile but growing teens need a balanced diet so avoid processed foods as much as possible. Many parents plan make-ahead meals over the week-ends so that they are readily available during the week. A band mom's best friend can be the crock pot. Encourage your teen to drink lots and lots of water to remain hydrated.

5. Ensure Health and Wellness.

Just like in sports, band students should get an exam before school starts to be sure that they are in good physical health. If the band program does not require it, consider having this done on your own. Be sure that your child is properly outfitted for rehearsals. Sunscreen, towels, hats, cotton shirts (sunglasses?) are more obvious but quality footwear is often overlooked. Shoes are vital because the students are on their feet for hours and hours during rehearsals each day. Band students should be physically measured for a good fitting athletic shoe. It's important that parents know that this is a worthwhile investment. The kids won't think about this. Keep a close eye on your child. If there are complaints of sore muscles, try foam rolling the affected muscles to help relieve the stress.

In addition to the above tips, your band student will appreciate it if you try to get to know the other students in his section. Learn their names and help support them as well (bring cookies, etc.). This will help you know who your child is talking about when sharing band stories or referring to their band friends. It will also allow you to become even more engaged in the joys and rewards of music-making being experienced by your child. If you are a first-time band parent, reach out to the band boosters association. They will help guide you in the expectations of having your child in band.

A special thanks to Lynda Wilson and the parents of Alter High School's Band Program.