

FOCUS



ACTIVITIES WITH CLASS

Spring is often election time in schools, when new class officers are elected by their peers to lead the class for the following year. Typically these students run class meetings, plan fundraisers, and organize their class members to participate in Homecoming activities in the fall. Not much is expected of them during freshman and sophomore years and responsibilities increase for junior and senior years with planning for prom and graduation.

If your school follows this typical pattern, you might be missing out on opportunities to serve the needs of students and engage them in activities that will help them develop a real sense of class unity. The key to making class activities meaningful is to focus on the needs of the students in each of the grade levels and to strive to include all students in class activities.

FRESHMAN YEAR

As freshmen, students form their class unit, perhaps for the first time. If students from more than one middle level school come together in a high school environment, there will be a large number of students

who don't know each other. One of the first tasks of the freshman class adviser is to help the students become acquainted with each other, become familiar with the customs and traditions of the school, and develop a comfort level with their new environment. Engaging them in class activities right away can help students settle in and begin having a positive high school experience.

The patterns established in the freshman year often will carry through the rest of high school, so it is especially important that student leaders and the class adviser make an active effort to involve all members of the class. Although you will likely have a small group of very active students, do not let class activities become perceived as something that is closed to all but the "in" group. Encourage student leaders to find ways to involve everyone. Some activities that will help freshmen become acclimated to their new school and develop class spirit include:

ACTIVITY ORIENTATION. Freshman class advisers often work in conjunction with counselors and administrators to develop freshmen

orientation programs. In addition to helping them find their way around the school, remember to include information about the activities that are available for freshmen. Be sure to inform both students and parents about the research that shows that students who are involved in clubs and organizations do better in school. (For more on this check out the Herff Jones whitepaper "Cocurricular Activities Seal the Educational Deal" or the Alliance for Student Activities' Do the Math campaign at www.letxequalsa.com.)

CLASS SHIRT. Select a few upperclass student leaders to visit your feeder middle schools this spring to promote a t-shirt design contest for the current eighth graders. Select three of the best designs and have all eighth grade students vote on the one they like best. Have t-shirts created with this design and sell them at freshman orientation to create an instant identity for the class.

SUMMER MAILING. Often freshmen are overwhelmed with the details of getting to class and adjusting to high school life at the beginning of the year and by the time they are ready

to get involved they've missed many opportunities. Create a colorful oversize postcard with information about all the activities and opportunities that await freshmen at the high school and mail it to all freshmen in late summer. Include specific information about how to get involved and who to see for more information. Sending this home also will enable parents to know what's going on so they can support their children's efforts.

EXCLUSIVE ACTIVITIES. Many schools offer activities exclusively for freshmen to help students get to know one another. Consider hosting a barbecue before the first football game, a freshmen recreation night in the gym, or a "welcome to the high school" social event before school starts.

HOMECOMING ACTIVITIES typically offer an excellent opportunity to involve freshmen in a variety of fun events. Build in some low-risk activities like wearing a class color on a designated day or showing up at a specific game to be counted for their class so students can participate without fearing they will look foolish. Stress to student leaders the importance of reaching out to all members of their class for help with things like hall decorations, float building, service projects, and other activities.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

In the sophomore year class efforts typically begin to focus more on fundraising and leadership development, while continuing to build on the foundation started in the freshman year. It's a good idea to hold at least one activity to help the sophomores build a greater sense of class unity.

RING DANCE. Ordering class rings is often a rite of passage that takes place during the sophomore year. Some schools organize a Ring Dance around this event where students receive their rings in a ceremony and have a chance to dance and socialize with other members of their class. Open the dance to all sophomores, whether or not they purchased a class ring. To help give students a sense of how far they've come in their quest to graduate, put together a slide show that mixes photos of class members when they were younger and photos from the present. Be sure to include every member of the class in the show.

SERVICE PROJECT. A class service project could also serve to unify the class. Select a project that benefits the school or local community and be sure there is enough work involved for all members of the class to participate. A campus clean-up, where students pick up trash, paint trash cans, and plant flowers (spring) or flower bulbs (fall) is one project

that can accommodate a large number of volunteers.

FUNDRAISING. In most schools, each class needs to raise funds to support the activities of the senior year such as a class trip, prom, and graduation. The sophomore year is an excellent time to focus on fundraising. Rather than having a product sale, consider selecting a fundraiser that will bring members of the class together and provide students with experience in project planning. Consider a dance, a recreation night, a video game tournament, or some other opportunity for socializing as a class.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING. Sophomore year is a good time to invest in some leadership training for promising student leaders. Host a leadership lock-in or a one-day leadership training for any interested sophomores. Don't limit yourself to just the elected officers; often informal student leaders will benefit from leadership training and will become a larger pool from which to draw when selecting people to head up class committees in the future.

The groundwork you lay in the freshman and sophomore years by providing class activities and focusing on developing class spirit will pay off later in a more unified class.

