

# FOCUS



## ORGANIZING A SUCCESSFUL HOMECOMING

At many schools, Homecoming is the most challenging season for student activity advisors. Your student leaders are at their most inexperienced point of the year, and you likely have multiple events going on at once. It's a lot to juggle—so much so that at an advisor training last July so many off-hand comments were made about what a difficult time Homecoming is that a rookie advisor heading into his first year finally asked everyone to stop because they were getting him really worried about what he was heading into!

Until you've been through it, it is hard to understand why something so challenging can also be rewarding. If you are a new advisor—or an experienced one who is finding the challenges outweigh the rewards—use the following tips to effectively organize your activities and save your sanity.

### **CONSIDER YOUR PURPOSE.**

Homecoming at most schools has many traditions that have accumulated over the years and the reasons for them may have been

lost over time. It's a crazy, busy time of year that students love, and that's great, but the purpose of it isn't to be crazy busy. Have a discussion with your student leaders about the reasons for having Homecoming and set some goals for it. Then, plan activities that will support those goals.

If there are activities that have traditionally been done that just aren't working any more, eliminate them or see if there's a way to update them to make them serve your purpose. "Don't trash all of them the first year, but evaluate all of your activities on their effectiveness and practicality," says Bob Martin, activity director at Gervais HS in Oregon. "At the end of Homecoming, go over all the activities and see if they achieved the intended goal. Should you keep them for next year? What can be tweaked and improved?"

### **ENLIST OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

in the effort. If there are traditional activities that your group has decided it doesn't want to do any more, ask other clubs and organizations on campus if they'd like to take on one of them. The

offerings to the student body still will be as plentiful—it just won't be your organization that's doing everything! You can also enlist other organizations when a new idea comes up that sounds good but would be adding too much to your plate.

Involving other organizations also is a great way to involve more of the student body in the week, especially if they aren't the groups that typically sponsor spirit-related events. Once they've gotten involved, students in those groups will be more inclined to participate in other Homecoming activities and they will bring their friends.

**GET HELP** from faculty, staff, and parents. There is usually so much going on during Homecoming Week that one person really can't be responsible for it all. Get the class advisors involved and divide up the work between the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior classes. "Find some adults on staff or parents willing to help with the supervision piece of Homecoming," says Aurora Taylor, activities director at Sherwood HS in Oregon. "Helping with supervising float

building, hall decorating, and so forth means less things to have to attend for the advisor and more time for the advisor to focus on the details of Homecoming.”

As an incentive for staff members to help out, remind them that spending a couple of hours with students in an informal setting such as float building goes a long way toward helping build a positive rapport with students.

**FOCUS ON THE DETAILS.** Once your theme is selected and the broad outline of the week’s activities is determined, get your student leaders to “think about the small details needed to complete the tasks at hand. Once the details are developed, it’s easy for students to take on specific responsibilities to give them a focus during (leadership) class,” says Mike Verhulst, activities director at Parkrose HS in Oregon. “If you have 30 kids in class, and 60 things to do, it’s pretty easy for kids to focus on two things instead of all 60. I guess it’s a way to see the trees through the forest.”

**DIVIDE AND CONQUER.** Take the long list of projects that need to be organized and divide them up among all your student leaders so no one person has too many

things to worry about. “If you are fortunate enough to have a class that has the entire student council, have the kids work on two projects during Homecoming season: the first being completion of individual class requirements (i.e. halls, float, etc.) and the second being a committee dedicated to part of the bigger Homecoming picture,” says Taylor. “Sample committees we have at Sherwood HS include: assembly script, assembly decorations, dance logistics, dance decorations, court, half time show, parade, and publicity.”

**PLAN AHEAD.** It’s too late this year to use this tip, but for next year, take advantage of the ability to start your planning early. At Gervais HS, activity director Bob Martin meets with the incoming ASB Council and starts planning activities in May and June. “We then have at least one meeting in July and the discussion about Homecoming activities continues,” he says.

At Sherwood HS, “we always set our theme in May so the kids can theoretically plan over the summer,” says Taylor. “Some groups actually do plan, but most don’t. That being said, it still saves three-plus days of headache arguing about themes in the fall.”

**THE CHALLENGES** of organizing Homecoming activities will all be worth it when you can look back at the rewards of engaging students actively in their school, enhancing a positive school climate, and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

## WHY DO WE HAVE HOMECOMING?

There is some dispute about who held the first Homecoming, although the NCAA, Jeopardy! and Trivial Pursuit recognize the University of Missouri-Columbia as having the first homecoming in 1911. To inaugurate the new location of the annual game against arch-rival University of Kansas, Mizzou’s athletic director Chester Brewer asked alumni of the school to help by “coming home” to attend the game. The celebration also included a parade and spirit rally with a bonfire and more than 10,000 people attended. This model of a parade and a rally centered around a football game spread across the United States, first at colleges and universities, then at high schools.

