

Get Off to a Positive Start

How you start the year off can set the tone for the entire school year, so wise advisers pay a bit of attention to establishing a positive tone from the beginning with group members, the faculty and administration, and the student body.

Group Members

The start of the year with your group members should be a mix of fun activities and more serious messages.

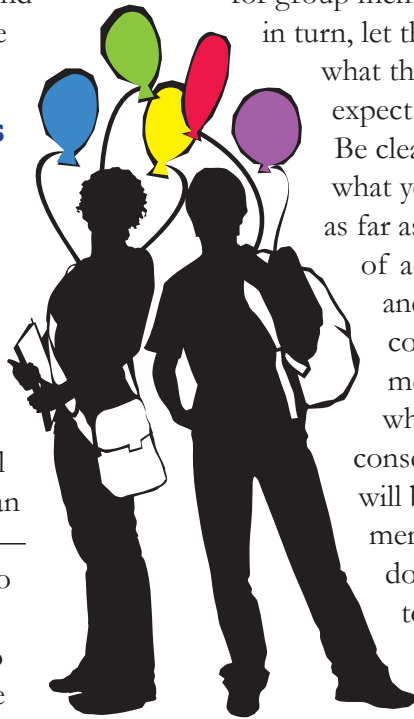
- **Spend time on teambuilding.** You'll want to start out on an upbeat, friendly note—after all, who wants to belong to a boring organization?—so do something fun before school starts, if you can, like getting together at a member's house for a pool party or a local park for a barbecue. If that's not possible, be sure to make time at the first meeting for icebreakers and get-to-know-you activities.
- **Provide every member with a handbook** for the year with a directory of members and

their contact information, a calendar of events, instructions for things like filling out purchase orders and making announcements, etc. Include a page with your expectations for group members and in turn, let them know

what they can expect of you. Be clear about what you expect as far as number of activities and time commitment and what the consequences will be if members don't live up to expectations.

- **Create a scavenger hunt** with information about staff members your students should know. Have them work in pairs to go around and get signatures of people like the principal's secretary, the bookkeeper, the head custodian, the head cook, and other important people they might need to work with during the year.

- **Talk about responsibilities.** Along with the fun activities, be sure to take some time to talk about the responsibilities of being a student leader. Whether they like it or not, students and faculty members will look to student leaders to be role models and will hold them to a higher standard of character and behavior. Some advisers have student leaders sign a code of conduct that they agree to abide by while they are members of the organization.
- **Set some goals.** To be effective, members of an organization should have a sense of a common purpose—something they are striving to achieve, or some reason for being together. As a group, you can accomplish great things and make a difference in your school's culture. Don't let your members aimlessly pick up where the group left off last year, jumping right in to plan fall activities without thinking about why they are doing them and if they really want to do them. What do *they* want to accomplish this year? Set five or six broad goals together and plan the year's



activities to support the goals. The goals should be selected by all the members of your group, not imposed by the adviser or the officers. Post the goals in a conspicuous place and refer back to them often. When a new activity is proposed ask, "How would that help us achieve our goals?"

Faculty & Administration

Help your faculty and administration see the value in your organization and develop a positive impression of your student leaders with both informative and welcoming activities at the start of the year. Try these activities:

- Welcome teachers back on the first day with a spirit line where your members line the sidewalks and cheer for the teachers as they enter the building. Give each one a welcome back gift—a lanyard, keychain, coffee mug, etc.
- Organize a breakfast or luncheon for teachers during one of their in-service days before school starts. Introduce your officers and have members serve the food and provide set-up and clean-up.
- Send a letter to the faculty or present your organization's goals for the year at the first faculty meeting and ask for their support in helping you achieve them. Stress all the ways your activities support

and extend the curriculum. They will be much more supportive of your planned activities if they know there's a reason behind them. Post the chart paper from your brainstorming sessions when you planned the year's activities and selected the goals on the walls of the faculty lounge so they can see the work you've already done before the year has even started.

- Arrange a meeting with the principal to introduce your student officers. Let the officers present the organization's goals for the year and link the activities planned to the goals. Be sure administrators understand that there's a purpose behind all the fun and games.

Student Body

Engage the student body right from the start and raise the profile of your organization with fun activities on the first day of the new year:

- Decorate with balloons and welcome back signs, greet students as they enter campus, and hand out bookmarks or some other token to all students. Check out www.firstday.org for lots of ideas for activities on the first day of school.
- Involve the local businesses and ask them to add welcome back to school or good luck notes on their signage.
- Plan some low-risk activities

that include everyone in the first week or two of school. One way to include everyone is to create a construction paper shape that goes along with your theme for the year or your school's mascot with every one of your students' and teachers' names on them and hang them all around the school on the walls.

- Put up a display with photos from last year's activities and a description of what your organization is all about. Work to send the message that all students are welcome and invited to participate in your activities.

With attention to setting a positive tone for your group members, faculty, administration, and the student body, your year will be off to a great start.

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