Like many schools, Shorecrest Middle School has moved away from thinking of student activities as “extra” curricular and embraced a cocurricular model. However, principals still must lead the charge when it comes to developing a successful student activities program.

Paperwork, student and parent conferences, faculty issues, student discipline, and administrative tasks—with all these responsibilities, how can principals find time to get involved in student activities? Perhaps the more pertinent question is, How can a principal run a successful school and not be involved in student activities? If principals don’t support student activities, teachers won’t either. The role of today’s classroom teacher is more demanding than ever, and teachers have little time or energy to devote to voluntary activities.

By Marsha Hirsch
A principal's active involvement helps create a positive climate and reassures teachers that activities are not fluff, but serious extensions of the educational and social programs already present in the school.

**Something for Everyone**
At Shorecrest Middle School in Petersburg, Fla., we have a wide variety of student activities in addition to the athletic program: math, science, creative writing, cultural awareness, community service, and chess clubs; forensics; math bowls; leadership council; junior thespians; and early childhood helpers. To give all students, even those involved in the after-school athletic program, the opportunity to participate, our clubs meet during lunch.

When we developed our activities program, one of our primary goals was to create clubs that would attract as many students as possible. We wanted to provide a wide range of activities that met the varied interests of all students. We also recognized the importance of advisers' genuine interest in the activities they sponsored; therefore, we held faculty meetings to brainstorm club suggestions. We feel that our efforts have been successful because 85 percent of our students are involved in at least one club or athletic team.

**Growing Student and Teacher Leaders**

Every activities program needs skilled student and faculty leaders to guide the various clubs. How do we train advisers? Because I have attended many leadership and activities advisers conferences and also have presented workshops on leadership and team building, I have been the primary source of training for the faculty at Shorecrest Middle School. I usually start each faculty meeting with an icebreaker or activity that teachers can use with students. This hands-on approach allows the teachers to experience the activities before they try them with students. I encourage principals to attend activities adviser workshops to acquire skills and tools they can share with their staff members. Our advisory system supports leadership training as well. The advisory coordinator and I use professional magazines, Internet resources, and leadership and team-building books to provide advisers with activities that they can use in their weekly meetings.

This year, the open house for parents was a leadership opportunity for students. For several weeks prior to the open house, the students and I developed the script for the evening and rehearsed it regularly. Rather than having teachers explain their courses, the students were the stars of the evening. Using a panel format, students discussed the curriculum and the athletic and club opportunities and invited parents to participate in a question-and-answer segment. The evening was a huge success. Parents marveled at the students' poise and sophistication. The faculty also appreciated shifting the focus from the teachers to the students. The open house received a great deal of support and praise and was recognized as a strong student-centered activity.

**Being Visible**
Principals can demonstrate support for the activities program by being visible to students and teachers. Each fall, I am involved in the club selection process. I explain the cocurricular activities to the students during an assembly, and I supervise the registration process. Sometimes I meet individually with students to offer guidance and gently steer them in the direction of a particular club. I also emcee our weekly assembly and use the venue to

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show the faculty and students that their principal supports student activities.

Technology provides another way that principals can participate in student activities. For example, each Shorecrest Middle School student receives a personal e-mail account and access to the Middle Way Conference, an online conference for the exclusive use of Shorecrest Middle School students, teachers, and administrators. The conference provides a wonderful venue for recognizing student accomplishments and encouraging student participation in school events. I monitor the conference regularly, participate in student exchanges, and alert teachers to strands I think they would be interested in following.

Principals can demonstrate support of student activities by continuing to create new clubs and activities. One example is the forensics club on our campus. After I was contacted by another school to see if we were interested in participating in a countywide forensics competition, I became the group’s adviser. The students met in my office whenever we had free time—before school, during lunch or study hall, or after school. As forensics became an established group on campus, faculty members were eager to support it, and finding a teacher leader was easy.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance and the value of teachers seeing the principal in the trenches of student activities. When no one wanted to sponsor the student council, I took it over, changed its name to the leadership council, and gave it a different approach to student government. Council elections had been popularity contests, and when our attempts to change the process were unsuccessful, we discarded the election process. We held an assembly and explained that students interested in membership on the leadership council should apply for a position. Using the application process has changed the tone of the council. A cross section of students applied, and they were not all from popular groups. Representation on the council became more balanced, and students from different groups learned to work together. The faculty embraced it, and soon others were interested in getting involved. Eventually, I appointed a full-time leadership adviser to the council.

One last way for principals to demonstrate support of student activities is quite simple: Go to the events! Students and parents are delighted to see their principal at sporting events, theater productions, band concerts, and the like. And it supports the faculty members who volunteer their time to see their principal in attendance.

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