

Working with a new principal and activities director

May and June are the time of year when we hear of retirements of principals or changes in positions resulting in the appointment of new principals. Many schools do not have activities directors or have an athletic director who spends a small amount of time overseeing the activities program in addition to the larger job of working with athletics. Many of the ideas below will work for student leaders and advisors who are working with veteran administrators as well. Here are suggestions for dealing with this challenge and opportunity:

- 1. There is a ton of issues and initiatives on the plate of every principal. Thus, **time to meet is always limited.**** However, every principal has a desire to get out and see what is happening in their school and thus need excuses to get away from their desk and interact with students. Student Council can provide the mechanism to allow those “visits” to happen.
- 2. This summer, invite your principal and/or activities director to breakfast with Student Council officers and cabinet.** Schedule it in advance; plan it for a local restaurant with a separate room or “back table” area. Make sure all or most council members are committed to attending. Use council funds to pay for the principal and advisor(s)’ breakfast (approve in advance) and have council members chip in to pay for their own meal. Be prepared to share the council’s goals for the year with the principal, and to talk about expectations and goals the principal has for the new school year. Allow time to get to know each others interests, hobbies and talents. Plan a time to meet again during September before, during or after the school day. If the principal is new to the district or to your building, share school traditions and important aspects of the schools history. Consider a gift of a school shirt, sweater, etc. to welcome the principal. How can the Council help the principal to get the new school year off to a good start?
- 3. Plan for a regular monthly meeting with the principal or the whole administrative team.** It could be over lunch. The meeting could be the Student Council officers or consider a meeting of the President and Vice President along with the President and Vice President of each class government. Create a student leadership TEAM to meet with administrators. Although the principal may have an “open door” policy to meet with students, having a set meeting time with an agenda written by student leaders and added to by the principal establishes a regular line of communications. Student Council officers should have a “Report from the Meeting with the Principal” on each Student Council agenda based on discussions at this meeting.
- 4. Invite the principal to address the Student Council at their first meeting.** Allow other students to see the principal outside of his/her office. Consider a similar invitation once each marking period. The key to good relations is interaction.
- 5. Invite the principal to attend Student Council sponsored events.** Sure the principal can always come to any activity they want to, but it would be a lot nicer if they received a written invitation well in advance of the event. Involve the principal in Homecoming ceremonies...maybe to hand out flowers to the Queen and her court. Allow the principal to be visible with students. Could the principal be in a skit for the Talent Show, have a small walk on part in the school play or musical or participate in the Student Faculty Volleyball game?
- 6. Work with the principal to hold a lunch meeting once every two weeks with randomly selected members of the student body.** Open new lines of communication for the student body. Have the Student Council President or other officers attend the lunch so that they hear student opinion and can also help some of the quieter students at the lunch feel more comfortable.

- 7. Involve the Activities Director or an assistant principal as advisor to the school's InterClub Council.** Under the leadership of the Student Council Vice President, ask each club to send their Vice President along with the captains of athletic teams to a monthly meeting to discuss activities and activity issues with the AD or an administrator. This organization, under Student Council's leadership bridges communications gaps and allows other school leaders to have input in issues important to the student body.
- 8. Make sure when you plan a Staff Appreciation event or gift that the administrators are included in that recognition.**
- 9. Plan a "Student-Administrator" Switch Day.** Work with the school administration to shadow members of the Administrative Team for a day. Open the opportunity to a student (by application) or limit it to Student Council or Class Government officers. What better way to understand the challenges of the life of a principal than to live it for a day.