

Dear Ramay or Woodland Junior High Band Parent,

Have you been inside Fayetteville High School yet? There are dozens and dozens of hallways, hundreds and hundreds of students, and countless opportunities for... for what? That can make your mind suddenly race with thoughts of all sorts of opportunities—positive and negative—that your teenager will face.

I suppose it could be a scary thing to drop off your 15 year old on the first day of school. I suppose the concerns of “Will he fit in?” or “Will she make friends?” or “Will he find a group to join?” could be nearly overwhelming to a parent.

Luckily, I didn’t have to struggle with those fears for my own sophomores. You see, they were in the band. They had the luxury of “belonging” from the very beginning. “Belonging” is so important to a teenager, yet each teenager is so very different. The Fayetteville High School Band is a place where all sorts of diversity can smoothly blend into unity.

Although my own two children both love band, they couldn’t have approached it more differently. My daughter, a woodwind through and through, loved the excitement of variety—new shows, different uniforms, switching instruments. (I suspect that she switched from alto sax to tenor to bari for very noble reasons—like who she’d get to sit by depending on which she played.) She loved the cooperation, the color guard’s performances, the freedom of third quarter. My son, who thinks that brass—mainly the trombone section—is really all that matters, loves the discipline—work until it’s perfect, straight lines, great music. He loves the competition, the practicing, contests, working to be the best—then showing off a little in the stands. Just as my own two have vastly different outlooks, I know that the other 200+ members bring their own personalities and differences too. Somehow though, it works.

I asked each of my children, “What is the best thing about being in band?” Neither one of them hesitated for a second. “Friends. It’s all about the friends.”

Of course, it’s the friends. Did I expect them to mention the development of musical skills or the discipline of focus or unified efforts of teamwork that pay off with self confidence? No, those are trivial things to a teenager. They are just byproducts of being in the band—they just happen along the way. To them, it’s all about the friends. And in the grand scheme of things, what could really be more important to your teenager?

So that’s what’s in it for your 9<sup>th</sup> grader. What’s in it for you?

1. Comfort. Knowing that your teenager is anxious to get to school early to “hang out” in the band room is a good feeling—they want to go to school!

Seeing your sweaty teenager laughing with his section members after a hot August practice is another good feeling. Hearing beautiful music coming from the stage where your teenager and his friends are seated is a great feeling.

2. Quality time. (That is not a misprint.) When you sign up to park cars for Razorback games, your teenager is trapped with you for three hours with nothing to do but... *talk*... to you. Sure, it makes money for the band boosters, and our band directors probably think that's why we do it, but, no, uninterrupted time with your teenager is the reason to volunteer for that fund raiser.

3. Pride. They put on great outdoor concerts on Friday nights in the fall. (You'll notice that they allow football players to play their game between songs.) How 200+ goofy-acting teenagers snap to attention and perform an amazing show is simply a miracle. (The band directors would argue, however, that it's hard work and discipline—not magic.) Seeing all that purple step perfectly onto the field—then spotting your teenager in the middle of it—that is a spectacular feeling of pride.

In closing, I have to go back to the “sense of belonging” that I mentioned at the beginning. FHS is a big school. It seems that it would be easy for individuals to feel lonely among so many if they don't “belong” somewhere. Students at FHS are fortunate to have many opportunities to find a place to “belong”—sports, choir, cheering, art, clubs of all kinds...and, of course, the band.

I look forward to seeing you at the first football game. I'll be sitting in the section with all the other band parents—and I'll be wearing purple.

Helen Eaton