**ORGANIZATION**

**Mission:** To bring together the home and school, that parents and teachers may cooperate in the musical education of the child.

**Goals:**

* To raise funds to aid the instrumental music programs to allow students to participate regardless of ability to pay.
* To provide operational support the various instrumental music programs at Westhill High School.

**Organization History:** The Westhill Band Parents Association (WHSBPA) is a sub-group under the Westhill High School PTO and has been in existence since 2002. As a sub-group under the Westhill High School PTO, we share some joint responsibility in promoting PTO causes for the school and Stamford Public schools (e.g. notify our organization members of Board of Education votes, all school events, etc.), however, our operational and fundraising activities are primarily for the promotion of the Instrumental Music Programs. The organization consists of a board and any parent/guardian of a student in an instrumental music program at Westhill High School is a member. WHSBPA has enjoyed a good relationship with the Westhill PTO.

**Description of Programs:** Please note, the Westhill Band Parent Association supports music programs that have components beyond the school classroom. For example, the association is not currently supporting keyboarding classes held only at the school (but may have to expand if the program expands to performances or competitions outside of the school arena).

**Westhill Marching Band** – The Westhill Marching Band has been in existence for over 20 years. This program is a fall based program. The band endures a weeklong band camp at the start of school, holds regular afterschool and weekend practices outdoors, and attends 10 competitions held at high schools within the state of Connecticut, culminating at the USBands Finals Competition in November. In addition, the Westhill Marching Band participates in Stamford parades (e.g. Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day, and Stamford Balloon Parade) and plays for football games if not away at a competition (e.g. Homecoming). The Westhill Marching Band played for Governor Malloy’s inauguration as he was a Westhill alum and has played at the kick-off for the Stamford Diabetes Walk in 2012 and 2013 (a CT student spokesperson was a former band alum).

The 2013 marching band consisted of 55 members, but past years saw the band at between 75 and 100 students strong. The band consists of a drum line, musical instruments (brass, woodwind), a pit ensemble (vibraphones, marimbas, gong, special effects, etc.) and a color guard. Each year, the music chosen for competition surrounds a theme; marching formations, and guard costumes are tailored for the show. In 2011, the marching band participated in the final at MetLife stadium and came in first in their class. In 2012, the marching band participated in finals at the Naval Academy stadium in Annapolis and came in 9th in their class (moved down in class due to reduced size). This past fall, the marching band performed in finals at USBands headquarters in Allentown, PA and came in 8th in their class.

**Winter Indoor Percussion Ensemble** – The Westhill Indoor Percussion Ensemble has been in existence for 8 years (since spring of 2006). This program is a winter based program (November into April). The ensemble holds regular afterschool and weekend practices indoors, and attends 10 competitions held at high schools within the tri-state region, culminating at the WGI World Championships held every April in Dayton, Ohio. In addition, the percussion ensemble hosts competitions at Westhill, Music on the Hill, and invites the public to view the competition. The ensemble also performs in school events such as the PTO Fashion Show.

The 2014 percussion ensemble currently consists of 22 students, but past years had been at about between 24-30 students. The ensemble consists of a battery (drums, cymbals) and a pit ensemble (vibraphones, marimbas, electric guitars, gong, special effects, etc.). Each year, the music chosen for competition surrounds a theme and movements and costumes for the entire ensemble are tailored for that show. One main difference between the Marching Band and the Percussion Ensemble is that the percussion ensemble is much more theatrical in nature (vs. the more standard look and sound of the marching band) and can incorporate more props and visual aids (e.g. floor mat). In 2011, the Westhill Indoor Percussion Ensemble came in 8th , in the world, for their class.

**Populations Served by our Agency:**

The mix of kids in the programs above is broad and reflects the diversity of Stamford. The band is a mosaic of Hispanic (21%), African-American (13%), Caucasian (44%) and Asian (22%) kids. We generally have an even number of boys than girls in the program, or if there is a split, not by much (55% boys to 45% girl split). Like Stamford, Westhill supports the range of socio-economic status, however, it is not possible to ‘assume’ that a student coming from North Stamford, these days, will be ‘more likely’ to be able to pay vs. a student from our downtown Stamford area. Some of our member families have recently experienced downsizing in their organizations, and it is becoming much harder for all families to contribute to the program.

As recently as 3 years ago, there were fewer than five students who were in “financial hardship” situations (families that could not afford to pay any fees/expenses). This year, we had 12 hardship cases for the marching band (22%), and 6 for the percussion ensemble (27%). We have many more families who can make the registration fees and travel expenses, but the money is coming in a delayed manner, making it difficult to make payments (e.g. salary, costumes, etc.).

As you can see from the program descriptions above, Westhill has a strong music program, which allows our students to participate in a competitive setting, but not traditional athletics (which many of our students express is not their interest). There have been many studies which show that participation in extracurricular activities will help improve the academic achievement.

 “Teenagers and young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES) who have a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do low-SES youth who have less arts involvement. They earn better grades and demonstrate higher rates of college enrollment and attainment.” (The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies, National Endowment for the Arts, Research # 55, May 2012).

However, the varied musical sections of the marching band/percussion ensemble and the added complexity of creating marching/visual performance formations require specialized staff to be utilized (e.g. different drumming coaches vs. musical coaches, vs. guard coaches). In addition, transporting the students and instruments to competitions requires regular use of buses and trucks

The Westhill Band Parents Association is facing difficulties due to the economic downtown and slow recovery. However, our fixed costs in securing specialized instructors, instruments, transportation (both buses and trucks for the instruments/equipment), tailored costumes, etc. have not gone down, but as our population drops in size and ability to pay, we are finding it harder to raise the funds to continue at our current levels of excellence.

**PROGRAM**

**Application**: The Westhill Band Parents Association (WHSBPA) is applying to the First County Bank for a grant specifically for our Winter Indoor Percussion Ensemble. Although the current program is about to end (championships in Dayton, Ohio will be held April 10-12), this particular program has more financial difficulty than the marching band. The percussion ensemble is historically smaller than the marching band (due to more intense schedule and the student’s financial ability to travel to Dayton, Ohio). It is thought that these are the main barriers why more students from the marching band do not sign-up for the percussion ensemble (fixed costs as high as marching band, but half the students, thus higher cost/student for this dynamic program). In addition, many more incoming high school students and families are familiar with what the marching band entails (sees from college games) vs. the percussion ensemble.

Currently, the program consists of 22 students, 6 of which we consider to be hardship cases. The demographic breakdown of these hardship students is as follows, 5 students (83%) Hispanic and 1 student (17%) Caucasian, however, we have several other cases where parents are deferring payment (post-tax refund, when they find a job), so while we do expect to receive some money from these families, it becomes difficult to outlay money in advance (e.g. bus and hotels for Dayton).

In addition, with such a large percentage of students in hardship, it is very difficult for the current families or the WHSBPA to ‘cover’ the costs of those who cannot pay. In the past, when economic times were better, this seems to have been the case, but no longer. Informal conversations with our Stamford High School (our friends and local competitors) have experienced the same.

**Goals and Objectives:** As stated in our goals above, we would like to be able to fund the programs irrespective of a student’s ability to pay. Our objective is that the WHSBPA has the ability to fund these programs in a manner which would allow the association to focus on the operational tasks in running the music programs (e.g. chaperoning trips, creating costumes and sets), thus allowing the students to focus on the music and the program. As we incorporate more fundraising activities, this detracts from the students’ ability to concentrate on the music program and we cannot sacrifice additional time from academics. In addition, too many fundraisers saturate Westhill (other organizations are also competing for funds), making the school community and parents indifferent to anyone’s efforts.

**Expected Outcomes:** Our students are very appreciative of the opportunity afforded to them by these programs. In addition to participating in the program, they understand the need and reasons why fundraising and fees being paid on time is important. Despite the rigorous schedule, the students step up in terms of time management and responsibilities of being in the program in addition to their academic requirements. Our students are generally on time and present for practice. Last spring, every one of our graduating students was accepted to a 2 or 4 year college and many expressed participating in a music program at college as an extracurricular activity and to meet a new set of friends in addition to embarking on a new educational journey. We expect to engage at-risk students at this level with our programs.

**Collaboration with other agencies, organizations:** None at this time. Due to the non-commercial policies set by the Parent Teacher Council of Stamford, we cannot approach a company to make a donation for a truck and advertise their corporation on the truck.

**Other current, prospective funding sources:** At this time, the WHSBPA is seeking out corporation and foundation grants to supplement our current contributions by families and fundraising, however, we are only beginning this explore this avenue.

**Staff Positions:**

**Music Program –** The following personnel make the music selection for the upcoming program, determine the look and feel of the show, and instruct the students in implementing this show to competition standards. Generally, there are 10 instructors (including the Program Director) for each program year.

* Program Director: Currently held by Michael Wyatt, Director of Instrumental Studies at Westhill High School. The program director hires (generally consists of the following but could vary year to year based on the program):
* Drumming Instructors (Snare, Bass, Tenor)
* Instrument Instructors (Woodwind, Lower Bass, Upper Bass)
* Pit Instructors (Vibraphone, marimba)
* Cymbal Instructors
* Color Guard Instructors
* Visual Tech (assists with dance/visual moves)

**Westhill Band Parents Association Board** – The WHSBPA board creates and implements the framework which allows the Marching Band and the Percussion Ensemble to work. This includes setting up the fundraising calendar, registration of students (including health and release forms), distribution of uniforms, ensuring that students and instruments can get to and from competitions (rent truck, obtain chaperones, provide snacks/drinks). The board creates the budget, in conjunction with the Program Director, and works towards this budget, ensuring that we collect registration fees and other revenue to make financial obligations. Currently, the board consists of:

* Two Co-Presidents (in charge of operations, volunteer management, communication)
* Two Co-Vice Presidents (in charge of fundraising)
* Treasurer – prepares budget, financial statements, pays obligations, collect fees/revenue
* Secretary (was in place for Marching Band, but left when son had other obligations and did not join for Winter Percussion)

 Please see attached Board of Directors List for detail.

**Westhill Band Parents Association** - Any parent/guardian of a student in an instrumental music program at Westhill High School is a member. Parents/guardians are utilized as chaperones, truck drivers, assist with moving the instruments onto and off competition floors (competitions may be timed) and loading and unloading the truck. The parents/guardians help when we host competitions at Westhill High School (concessions, ensemble greeting, spectator ticket sales, traffic management, food/drink donations, publicity, pictures, moving ensembles through the school, etc.), during these competitions, we have ‘all hands on deck’ and almost every current family (percussion, band) and some alum help out in some way.

**AGENCY TRENDS, CHALLENGES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**Agency Trends:**

* Funding for music in the public schools remains low and we are not sure if request increases will be met. (Stamford injects music in schools budget, Stamford Advocate, Rob Varnon, January 26, 2014).
* Funding for music/arts remains a lower priority for many due to economy. (Stamford mayoral candidates debate the arts, Stamford Advocate, Kate King, October 18, 2013).
* However, participation in extracurricular activities reduces the educational gap (previously referred to The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies, National Endowment for the Arts, Research # 55, May 2012)
* WHSBPA is seeing an increase in the number of ‘hardship’ students within the band, and the ‘non-hardship’ population is also experiencing difficulties in making ends meeting in this current economic environment.

**Challenges:** Our challenge is to maintain our current programs, at their current high standards, for subsequent years.

**Accomplishments:** In addition to the marching band and percussion accolades mentioned in the description of the agency programs, we have experienced the following:

* There are two students in the Westhill program whose family was homeless a few years ago. The mother, who at times has held three jobs, says that without band, her kids would very likely have been in trouble or on the streets.  Her son is heading to college next year to continue music studies.  Her daughter is a thriving sophomore. In one generation, this family will have gone from homelessness to having a child in college.
* One of our students was so shy when he first participated in band that he held his head down and couldn't bring himself to speak.  His mother, who speaks broken English, also explained that she could not afford to pay all the fees (among other issues, she has an autistic son).  That student has since blossomed. He is much more outgoing, has established friendships, has volunteered to learn new instruments and fundraises enthusiastically to help pay for his fees.
* Three years ago, a band student who gained leadership and discipline skills in the program became the first person in his family to attend college. He is now a junior at Harvard. We believe that approximately one quarter of band kids are the first in their families to go to college.

The annual budget for the Westhill Instrumental Programs is approximately $55k. This is already at the bare-bones level is actually inadequate in many ways. We are at a competitive disadvantage with respect to quality of equipment and support and while we have achieved very much with very little, it is increasingly difficult to maintain this level of activity.

While fundraising takes place all year, candy and bake sales or donation jars simply do not generate the results needed. It is hard to catch up to thousands of dollars of shortfall with transactions of a dollar or two. To the degree that the Westhill Band Parents Association could receive an additional $5,000 to $10,000 would ensure that the Indoor Percussion Ensemble would be able to go to Dayton next spring and that the 2014 school year gets off to a solid start.