



SYCAMORE ALUMNI &
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

Committee Chairs

- Karen Van Wagenen – Co –Chair
- Kate Pinckert – Co-Chair
- Jane Garfield
- Marvin Lucas
- Peter Teitelman

Our Research Objectives

- Identify other truly Public school alumni associations and assess how their alumni associations function.
- How do the successful ones become and remain successful?
- How do they/we measure success (website hits, financial contributions, financial stability or endowment growth rate, blog contributions, programs/events, active participants, membership, growth rate, membership retention, recent graduate enlistments, etc.)?
- What lessons can be learned from private school alumni associations and potentially applied to SAFA?

SAFA Background

- SAFA is a non-profit organization that started in 2006 as a collaborative effort between the Sycamore Administration, the Sycamore School Board, several alumni and a former teacher/administrator.
- The mission of SAFA is to further the Sycamore legacy and tradition, foster and promote lifelong emotional and intellectual connections to the district, reconnect alumni and support current students as they pursue excellence.
- Currently SAFA supports the:
 - Athletic Hall of Fame held each January
 - Distinguished Alumni ceremony
 - SAFA website to spread news of events to reconnect alumni & friends
 - Creation of various events such as “60 Years of Sycamore Football”

SAFA Background

- The association has started giving back to Sycamore by way of the Ya Gotta Believe and Rob Pursley Memorial scholarships.
- In 2013 SAFA announced the creation of The Sycamore Support Network (SSN) to support truly needy students.
- The governing board for SAFA consists of a 21 - member Board of Trustees.
 - Responsible for electing the Executive Board of Directors comprised of the following officers: President, Immediate Past President, Vice President & President Elect, Treasurer, and Secretary.
 - In addition there are three Ex-Officio officers comprised of the Superintendent of the Sycamore Schools or designee approved by the Sycamore Board of Education, and two members of the senior class of Sycamore High School, designated by the high school principal.

SAFA Opportunities

- To date the association has over 4,000 members.
- Overall awareness of SAFA, especially among younger alumni, is low.
- The association would like to increase membership and participation in SAFA activities/events.

Alumni Associations We Researched

- **Public High Schools**

- Withrow High School (OH)
- Beachwood High School (OH)
- Clayton High School (MO)
- Altoona, PA High School (PA)
- Wyoming High School(OH)
- Mariemont High School (OH)
- Mason High School (OH)
- Chagrin Falls High School (OH)
- Orange High School (OH)
- Brush High School (OH)

- **Private/Magnet Schools**

- Walnut Hills High School (OH)
- St. Xavier High School(OH)

Key Learning & Recommendations

Key Learning

Mission/Focus of the Alumni Association

- Most of the alumni associations we researched have a single focus on reconnecting alumni via:
 - Social media including websites, Facebook pages, etc.
 - Generating awareness & providing tools for planning reunions.
 - Enabling alumni to share memories, pictures and stories.
- Most of the schools have a fundraising organization that is separate from the alumni association
 - The alumni association only provides a link to fundraising.
 - It is not the mission of the alumni association to raise funds.

Recommendation

Mission/Focus of the Alumni Association

- Have SAFA single mindedly focus on reconnecting alumni.
- Consider eliminating ‘friends’ to enable a sharper focus on alumni and renaming the association “Sycamore Alumni Association”
- Establish a separate fundraising organization
 - Assemble a separate operating board
 - Create a link between the alumni association & fundraising organization to encourage alumni to contribute.

Key Learning

School District Oversight

- All of the alumni associations we researched have a direct link to a district administrator who provides oversight.
- The alumni association & fundraising organization often report into the same district administrator, but have separate operating boards.

Recommendation

School District Oversight

- Directly link SAFA and the Fundraising organization to the same district administrator to provide oversight.
- The district administrator could be:
 - The Superintendent
 - A School Board Member
 - Public Relations District Representative

Key Learning

Showcasing the History of the School

- Most of the alumni associations we researched celebrated and showcased their school history as a way to create a strong affection among current students and alumni.
 - Tell the story of the school's history on the alumni association website including historical pictures.
 - Showcase historical artifacts at the school.

Recommendation

Showcasing the History of the School

- Create the story of the history of Sycamore High School including pictures and the School Alma Mater.
 - Consider having one of the high school history classes or the Student Council research and create the story.
 - Post the story of the school's history on the SAFA website.
 - Also consider posting the story on a wall at the high school.
- Designate a display case at the high school to showcase historical school artifacts, yearbooks and historic pictures.

Key Learning

Create An Alumni Presence At The High School

- Many of the alumni associations we researched had an alumni association office at the school.
- Many schools also created opportunities for alumni to connect with students and be present at school events such as graduation, etc.

Recommendation

Create An Alumni Presence At The High School

- Consider having an alumni association office at the high school.
- Connect alumni with current students
 - 9th grade orientation
 - Connect students with alumni attending colleges of interest
 - Connect students with alumni in various careers (“Career Day”)
 - The 50 year class walk in the current graduating class at graduation
 - Students give alumni tours of the high school
 - Showcase and leverage teachers who are Sycamore alumni

Key Learning

Target Strong Affinity Groups

- Most of the alumni associations create events targeted at strong affinity groups such as sports teams and bands.

Recommendation

Target Strong Affinity Groups

- Create alumni events targeted against key groups that had a strong school affinity while attending Sycamore High School
 - Football, Soccer, Etc.
 - Marching Band
 - AP Art/Photography
 - Theater
 - National Honor Society

Key Learning

Start Creating School Affinity While They Are Young

- Most of the schools we researched start creating school spirit and affinity when they first enter the high school
 - High School orientation
 - Early involvement with Alumni events

Recommendation

Start Creating School Affinity While They Are Young

- At 9th grade orientation
 - Leverage teachers and older local residents who are Sycamore Alumni
 - Share and celebrate the history of Sycamore High School
 - Learn the school alma mater
- Senior Year
 - Offer free or low cost membership to SAFA
 - Collect contact information
 - Consider having each class contribute or participate in an alumni event or activity.

Next Steps

We will submit these recommendations to the BOE for follow up with SAFA.

Why do alumni participate?

- Degree of satisfaction with one's educational experience
- Positive psychological experience with the school
- Satisfaction with preparation for college
- Emotional attachment to the school
- Reunion year
- Class identity

Why do alumni participate?

- Having participated in extracurricular activities
- Having volunteered for the school while a student
- Having had a mentor
- Having participated in a varsity sport
- The school having significant success in sports, particularly football, secondarily basketball and others

Why do alumni participate?

- Scholastic achievement
- Quality of the institution
- Generational graduates (2nd, 3rd, ...)
- Close proximity
- Wealth of the alumnus
- Fiscal year
- Effort of the alumni association

Questions?

