

## For New Comp Band Parents (and veterans who just love reading about band) Long Version of what you need to know

Okay, okay – so maybe you have started to ask yourself, “Exactly what did my kid sign up for, anyway?” – maybe you are blissfully ignorant, or maybe you already know, because this is not your first time around the block with Comp Band. In any case, welcome to the insanity!

There is much to learn – Comp Band is really unlike any other sport or activity, as it is truly a combination of both. It takes a solid team of students, parents and drill sergeants (oops, I mean directors), to create success for our award-winning Haverford High School Competition Marching Band.

So, what would be helpful to know? The following tidbits represent my cheeky Band Parent Words of Wisdom, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our Haverford School District staff. So, with that disclaimer out of the way, here goes...

First off, appearance matters. I mean, it REALLY matters. Part of our score during competitions is comprised of visual effect. So, uniforms need to be in tip-top condition. One of the reasons why we outfit our Comp Band kids with uniforms before the Football Band kids is so that our Comp Band kids get the best ones (some uniforms are looking a little tired, at this point). Jackets and trousers should be immediately hung after use, and kept clean and wrinkle-free. Allow the uniform to air-dry on a hanger before placing it in the garment bag – mold growing from sweat is just plain nasty (and permanently stains the uniform).

VPLs are a no-no (look this up on Wikipedia if this term is unfamiliar to you). Compression shorts or boxers address this issue, and create a clean line for the pants. Shoes must be polished, and clean. Our crew parents have been known to crawl around on hands and knees, with baby wipes, cleaning old mud off shoes during competition warm-ups: please save our crew parents (and students) from this embarrassment! Clean the shoes after every performance, before placing them in the box. Hair must be tidy, and neat. I learned the hard way about the hair. My son sported longer locks in his freshman year. I would

hear grumbling about it, but I had no idea why anyone would care how he wore his hair. Until our 4<sup>th</sup> competition, when I finally realized what the issue was – unknown to me, Bleacher Spectator Mom, our parent crew had to spend time putting bobby pins (bobby pins!!!!) all over his hair, to confine it to his hat. Ponytails are fine – they can just be tucked in.

I hope this does not shock you, but there is another reason to acquire black compression shorts, and a black Under Armor shirt – your music student will be changing into uniform, on the bus, on the way to competition, in a mixed gender situation. The upperclassmen are used to it, but this can be a little intimidating for freshmen. They will adjust quickly, no worries.

Make no mistake – Comp Band is hard. Rewarding, ultimately, but hard. Most kids struggle, at first. Highly talented musicians, who might be feeling a little smug about their musical prowess, can become very frustrated, when intricate marching drills are added to the musical performance. Relax. This skill takes time to develop, and it WILL fall into place. Best defense is a good offense – help your student work hard to practice the music ahead of time, so that he/she can concentrate on drill work and musicianship, instead of memorization. Make sure they get adequate sleep. Help them stay on top of their schoolwork schedule.

For freshman parents, it is normal for you to hear, repeatedly, how much your kid hates Comp Band. Until all the puzzle pieces fall into place, and our band starts to synchronize, they will, most likely, hate it. It feels awkward, it is not fun, and the expectations of the directors seem impossible. But then, magic happens. The a-ha moment, when everyone is on the same page, the hours and hours of work start to materialize, the sound and the drill work stop fighting each other – that, my friends, is why your kid does Comp Band. Those kids out there are a team, an amazing, musical and visual performing team, and they are awesome. Aw, I am getting teary-eyed, just thinking about it.

So, about Band Camp - it is typically a long, long hot day. Hydration is important. Comfortable shoes are important. Sunscreen is important. This is military camp, a la Comp Band style. Your teen will be absolutely exhausted. You may hear whining, moaning, groaning and complaining. This is normal – band-aid the blisters, and ignore the rest. The afternoon break should involve

hydration and napping, if possible. When he or she finally returns home, some time after 9 pm, sleep will most likely be the only thing on your teen's mind. Operating instructions: Feed, wash, send to bed. Repeat each evening of Band Camp.

As a new parent, I would recommend that you plan on spending your time up in the bleachers, for the first several Competition performances, watching your kid perform. Also, consider investing in some stadium chairs – aluminum bleachers can get really cold, and really uncomfortable, really quickly. Five Below carries some cheap ones for \$5 each, and they fold flat and floppy. Speaking of chilly – as a spectator, sitting still can get very cold, so prepare for the elements – layers are best.

Consider carpooling – some of our performance destinations are a fair distance away. It is nice to get to know other band families – we do end up spending a fair amount of time together, over the 4 years at HHS, so why not? Few parents watch the entire show – we usually know in advance what time our band is scheduled to perform, so we can arrive before the performance, and leave after. Be loud and proud, at the end of our Comp Band performance – rumor has it that judges can be swayed by an enthusiastic crowd. True die-hard fans will stay until the bitter end, when scores are announced, but these will all be posted on the Cavalcade of Bands website, [www.cavalcadeofbands.com](http://www.cavalcadeofbands.com)

Saturdays are long days, in the land of Comp Band. Practice may start as early as 9 am; there may be a little break, then afternoon practice, then load the trucks and buses, then off they go to compete, returning well after 11 pm, to Haverford High School. There is a 'dinner' break, usually somewhere around 4 – 4:30. Some kids pack their own stuff, and some parents bring food in, at that time – whatever works best. This is one circumstance where your teen will welcome you, possibly with open arms, even in front of friends. The exact feeding time will vary – watch the Important Information box on the [hhsmusic.org](http://hhsmusic.org) website for details.

What to send with your student for competitions: a sweatshirt or coat (it might be warm during the day, but fall nights get cold, quickly); money (\$5 - \$10; or make them talk to you at the competition to acquire money from you, on the spot!); complete set of casual clothing, including socks and skivvies;

spare black socks; water bottle/Gatorade; handwarmers (obtain at REI, or a ski shop); granola bar/snack; a little love note from you (awwww, how cute!). No doubt, they will have already seen to the packing of a cell phone, and an iPod – keep in mind that these are expensive trinkets to lose, and there really is no safe place to keep them.

To truly develop the full flavor of Comp Band, consider volunteering as Pit Crew for a performance or two over the season. It gains you free admission to the show. You will be with the kids, most likely pushing wheeled instruments or props, when they ‘take the field’ – a very exciting moment indeed. To be at ground level with them, to feel that energy, and the nerves and the desire to perform well, and be a part of all the effort that goes into those 10 minutes of performance - all I can say, is try it. Powerful stuff.

Feel free to ask any of us veteran Comp Band parents whatever lingering questions you may have. We are all band junkies, at this point, and are happy to talk at length about what band means to our kids, our non-existent dinner hour, our weekends, our lives... and why it is worth the effort.

Welcome aboard!