



High School Theatre
Support and Funding Level-Up
ACTION SHEET

from



Level up support and funding for your school theatre in 8 ACTION steps!

ARE YOU IN SUBSTANTIAL NEED OF INCREASED SUPPORT AND FUNDING FOR YOUR SCHOOL THEATRE?

DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ALONE IN YOUR STRUGGLES TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE YOUR SCHOOL THEATRE ?

ARE YOU OVERWHELMED WITH THE TIME, ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONALITY NEEDED TO SUPPORT EVENTS ?

IS THE LEVEL OF SAFETY AND EDUCATION NEEDED IN YOUR SCHOOL THEATRE NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY?

Congratulations

you are about take the best **8 ACTION** steps towards
leveling up support and funding for your school theatre!

Does your admin *really* know what goes on behind the scenes in your theatre?

Well, how could they? In their personal lives they go to restaurants, hotels, shops, doctor's offices, even hospitals. In their younger years they may have had a job in one of these facilities. They've cooked in their own kitchen and work in the school office environment. For the most part, they know how these facilities function, as enough of the "behind the scenes" operations are evident and common knowledge. However, when they go to see a play, ballet, concert, opera or other performance, what has been going on, and what is going on, behind the scenes is not evident at all. All they see is the magic of the performance from the front side of the curtain. If they don't have a practical working knowledge of theatres, when they've never worked on the back side of the curtain, it's nearly impossible for them to have any understanding of the context of theatre operations.

What is the best way to level up support and funding? It's to make your admin aware of the situation. But how? As you know, the best way to learn theatre is to do theatre. I'm a big advocate for giving your admin (school or district-level) a cameo in a school production. They have to go to rehearsals, live through tech week, collaborate with tech students and acting students, and so on and so on – you know the drill. But, as that's not always possible (maybe they don't have time, maybe they get stage fright).

So, what's the next best thing to do? Administrators need proof. The best way to do that is to provide empirical substantiation, research, provide models. And I'm going to help you do just that.

Let's get started....

Here's **8 ACTIONS** you can take that will support you in leveling up the support and funding from your admin

There's one ACTION item per page, and they're numbered, but you can do them in any order, or just pick and choose the ACTIONS that make the most sense for your situation.

But, wait, one more thing before you start...

there's a reason that I capitalize "ACTIONS".

You can't just read these.

You have to **TAKE ACTION** and do them.

When you are planning out your **ACTIONS**, keep in mind:

The *ABCs* of the **TMT**

Be in Action

be proactive, do all of the activities – no one will do this but you

Be Bold

stand up for your expertise, don't be afraid to be a little audacious

Be Consistent

the squeaky wheel gets the grease, don't give up, it will take more than one try

TIP: Don't email anything to your admin. Hand them a paper copy. An email will get moved down, down, down an inbox. A paper copy will clutter up a desk, but never completely be out of sight.

ACTION 1

SURVEY YOUR STAFFING

Your job here is to help your admin better understand your situation. For this one you'll need to do a bit of research to present to your admin. Your goal is to help admin make aware of something they probably haven't really considered before – just how many people it takes to run a theatre. Highly qualified management and technicians are needed in order to set up the operating systems, create a safety program, maximize student learning, and determine building performance and academic outcomes. This is no different from any other area of the school, yet the theatre department is often the poor cousin.

You can come up with your own methods, but here's one example to get you started. Research the following:

- ✓ How many coaches/assistant coaches does your track and field team have? How many students are on your track and field team? How much are the coaches paid? What is the total amount of hours they work during the season?*

- ✓ How many support staff (designers, technicians, directors) does your musical have? How many students are in the musical? How much are the support staff paid? What is the total amount of hours they work during the production (season)?*

YOUR ACTION

Research, research, research.

Once you have all of your facts make a spreadsheet, a graph, or bullet points.

Schedule a time to talk with your admin about this, and present your findings.

ACTION 2

ACE YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

This is about revealing and validating the level of administration needed to run your theatre. Contrary to popular belief, events don't just turn up at 6:30 and put on a show at 7:00.

It's likely that your district or school has a generic form that users (outside and other teachers) have to fill out in order to rent a facility in the district. It's not likely that that form provides you with the information needed to provide technical support for the event coming into your theatre. All sorts of systems need to be put into place before the curtain opens. This is something that needs expertise – and time (which you don't have).

YOUR ACTION

Create a detailed Theatre Rental Form (separate from the district facility rental form).

(For what information to include on your form check out the Administrative Systems chapter of High School Theatre Operations.)

Schedule a time to talk with your admin about this - presenting an Event Rental Form to your admin will help them comprehend the extent of the administrative responsibilities of a Theatre Manager.

ACTION 3

FLAUNT YOUR FINANCIALS

Keeping track of theatre expenses is a great – empirical - way to help the admin understand the differentiation between the theatre facility operations budget (the Theatre Manager’s jurisdiction) and the Drama department budget (the Drama Teacher’s jurisdiction) and the building budget (the administration’s jurisdiction).

I’m a big advocate for compartmentalizing all spending, as a way to help admin understand that we can’t just run a one-person show, which funding coming out of the musical’s budget to support the dance recital that’s rented the space.

For instance, all events use stage lighting, so all lamps came out of the theatre facility budget. The replacement lamps for any fixture that would be in a classroom – such as overhead lights for instance, in our case they’re called “house lights” – should come from the school’s building budget. Or, if the Drama department wants a specific gel for their production then that comes out of their department’s production budget. Purchasing gels commonly used in the rep plot, which everyone uses, then those gels came out of the theatre facility budget.

YOUR ACTION

Create a Theatre Operations budget (this is separate from your department’s budget) and present it to your admin.

If you are managing your theatre (as well as wearing the hat of a teacher) ask for a separate annual operating budget that you have control of.

(For what information to include in your budget check out the Operating Budget section of the Financials chapter of High School Theatre Operations.)

ACTION 4

EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT EVENT SUPPORT

The Theatre Manager's raison d'etre is the success of each event that comes into their high school theatre, be it a school event, district event or outside event.

But, a Theatre Manager can't do this if they know nothing about the incoming event. Too often event organizers (from teachers to professionals) think Theatre Managers can read minds, and that technicians (and/or student crew) don't need their own rehearsals. For this reason it's imperative that the Theatre Manager obtain as much information as possible about each event before it comes into the theatre (particularly those that won't be holding a tech rehearsal before their performance), and creates an environment whereby the technical aspects of each event can be optimized.

Completing this ACTION will help you uncover tools to use for your own event support.

YOUR ACTION

Arrange a visit a local high school theatre to interview the person in charge of theatre operations (it may be the TM, a technician, the Drama teacher, an administrator, etc. - preferably one in a different district, if possible).

Ask questions such as:

- ✓ Who is in charge of the school's theatre?
- ✓ What staff support do you have, if any?
- ✓ How many events do you have in your theatre each school-year? What sort of events?
- ✓ What sort of paperwork/forms/documents are required for events to fill out?
- ✓ How is the success of the events supported?

Present your findings to your admin, emphasizing what is the standard in your area (if it's beneficial for you to point that out, of course).

ACTION 5

REVIVING UP RISK MANAGEMENT

I call Risk Management “Macro Safety”. It’s the overarching policies and procedures that are in place to keep everyone safe.

Laws and codes addressing safety in school theatres seem to be a nebulous thing, and compliance with them tenuous. For instance, there are OSHA rules that pertain to how far away one should stay from an open orchestra pit (6 feet), but the O in OSHA is for “Occupational”, which means that OSHA rules only apply to employees (those who have the ‘occupation’), and not to students or volunteers. There are building codes that pertain to schools, but school theatres sometimes seem to be vaguely glossed over. In addition, at least in the state of Washington, the State Risk Management Pool only recognizes the scene shop as a safety hazard in the theatre, and does not address the fly system, the catwalks, etc. In Washington State’s “2002 Safety Guide for Career and Technical Education” I searched the document for the words: theatre, counterweight and hoist. Nothing came up for theatre or counterweight, and only non-theatre applications came up for hoist. In fact, I was informed by two districts there that it was unnecessary to have a separate Liability Waiver for tech theatre students because they are covered under district safety policies, even though nowhere in the district’s safety policies could I find the words “counterweight system” or “catwalks”.

YOUR ACTION

Search your state’s Department of Labor and Industries websites, your state’s Administrative Codes, and/or other of your state’s safety agencies. Look for at least two codes or laws that pertain to high school theatre safety in your state. Do you think your school is in compliance with these codes or laws? If yes, what policies and procedures are in place? If not, why do you think this is, and what would you like to see done about it? Consult with the Risk Management Department in your school district – find out what codes and laws they apply to the theatre.

ACTION 6

TAKING A STAND FOR SAFETY

I call Safety “Micro Safety”. It’s the policies and procedures that apply to each individual.

It is imperative that school theatres have operational policies and procedures in place that safeguard personal safety, protect property, and mitigate liability. It’s also imperative that students and outside users are supervised by highly qualified personnel – AKA: CTE teacher, TM, TD, Theatre Technicians. It is the job of the Theatre Manager to ensure that safety rules are in place and that they are adhered to. One way to do this is to post signs. Another way is to provide training. Yet another is to maintain records. In all cases documentation must be created, maintained and enforced. It is going to be up to you to educate your administration not only on the seriousness of the hazards in a theatre, but also how equipment needs to be maintained and preserved, and just how much supervision is needed to keep the students safe.

YOUR ACTION

Create a comprehensive Safety Poster for your theatre facility

You can be as creative as you’d like – remember you will be applying these actions to your own high school theatre, so create a poster you can actually use.

(For what information to include in your safety poster check out the Safety chapter in High School Theatre Operations.)

ACTION 7

BRANDING IS BENEFICIAL

Even school theatres need to develop a brand; an image to the community. It is a part of the Theatre Manager's job – even in a school – to find ways to make the community aware of the awesome talent waiting to be seen in your school's theatre. If your school rents out its theatre to outside users (a good way to bring in financial support for your performing arts programs - ideally) you also want community groups to know that your theatre is the place that they want to rent to showcase their productions. One way to get the word out is through a website (or "sub-website" of your school or district). What about social media – what are your school's policies? You not only need to get the word out to your community groups to make them want to rent out your theatre, but you also have to provide excellent service and hospitality to make them want to come back. Plus your rates have to be 'competitive' yet reasonable. It's important too that your community has an image of your school theatre as being a place to go to see, and to perform, quality performances in a place that is well managed.

YOUR ACTION

Create a homepage for your theatre's website (if you already have a theatre website, add your ideal improvements).

The purpose is to entice the community to come and see productions, compel community groups to rent out the space, so be helpful with what information you can provide to those coming to see a production and those coming to put on a production.

ACTION 8

adVOCATING FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

And now we come to the primary reason why a school theatre exists in the first place. To educate students. Although not all the students who work behind the scenes in your theatre will pursue careers in the entertainment industry – just like not all students in a math class will become mathematicians – the transferrable career skills and life skills they will gain will be invaluable. After all, technical theatre is a CTE subject. And, as I always say – Tech Theatre is STEM Behind the Scenes! Tech theatre education is a part of the Theatre Manager’s job, whether or not you are also a certificated teacher. You may not be directly involved – your technicians may be acting as mentors – but you need to help provide your students with the skills and knowledge they will need to be safe and competent in their jobs in your theatre and out in the world. You are not only providing them with practical hands-on skills, but with life skills too, such as teamwork, responsibility and problem solving.

YOUR ACTION

Choose one tech theatre student whom you’ve worked with in the past (use only their first name or a pseudonym) who has really benefited from being in tech theatre in high school. What was their specialty (lights, sound, sets, costumes, SM, etc)? What were the student’s natural characteristics that made them excel in tech theatre? How did they grow as a result of being in tech theatre? What were their leadership qualities as well as their teamwork qualities – how did they balance these. What did this student do after high school (if you know)? If this student didn’t pursue a career in tech theatre, how did what they learn in tech theatre prepare them for their career? If you haven’t worked with a vocational tech student in the past discuss in general how you see high school tech theatre will prepare students for the ‘real world’, either in a career in the entertainment business or in other related fields. Present your ‘student biography’ to your administration.

You CAN do this!

By taking these **ACTIONS** you can **be the catalyst**
to leveling up support and funding in your school theatre.

Be in Action

Be Bold

Be Consistent

Sounds daunting? Too overwhelming? Need more support? Want more background and ideas before putting these ideas into ACTION?

Sometimes you just can't do it alone, I get that!

If you:

- ✓ need more help and support,
- ✓ want to study these ACTION steps more in-depth,
- ✓ like to bounce ideas off other people who are in the same boat that you are,
- ✓ are interested in becoming more proactive about Risk Management and Operations in your school theatre....

Then:

For a more in-depth investigation into leveling up vocational education in your school theatre, check out the full tutorial ACTION SERIES
at <https://www.presett.org/tmттutorials.html>

Or dive in deeper and work with your peers from across the country to gain even more insight in the TMT Cohort course, on the TMT Cohort page at <https://www.presett.org/>

You've got this!