

Hello *FIRST* Robotics Team,

Thank you for contacting Team Aperture 3142 for assistance in garnering varsity status for your team. There are a few things that were instrumental in our own attempt and success in receiving varsity status, and that are important for you to consider as you approach school officials and request this designation for your team.

In order to achieve varsity status as a team, we went through an intense, dedicated process that included a lot of work. Surprisingly, we were able to achieve varsity designation in a relatively short period of time and have included our story within this document. Please understand that it is never too late to begin the process and that success will come when all of the pieces are in place.

At the end of our first season in 2010 our Coach announced that he had a dream of creating a varsity robotics team at Newton High School. Many of our students felt attaining varsity would help them garner respect amongst their peers, and aid in their efforts for placement in higher education. They decided as a team to make it their goal, and joined to "Make It Happen", our Coach's favorite catch phrase.

The steps we took are outlined below, as well as an explanation of the actions we took. We hope this will help you in your journey to attain a varsity letter status for your robotics team:

1. Start documentation of the process and your progress
2. Research and interview local teams with regard to their status
3. Create support materials, such as:
  - Varsity guidelines
  - Team handbook
  - Sponsor and partnership lists
  - Manufacturers and supplier lists
  - Budgetary and finance information
  - Photo documentation where appropriate
4. Approach your School Administration
  - Contact your principal first
  - Get in touch with the Board of Education, and attend their meetings
  - Be mindful of vocabulary—keep other perspectives in mind
5. Include your community, sponsors, students, and parents for their support
  - Personal letters regarding varsity status
  - Personal letters regarding the value of STEM education
6. Send thank you letters consistently
7. Once status is received, order emblems for letter jackets

One of the first things that we did, and will be helpful to you, was to create a book to document the process and progress—which can be shown to those outside the team. With pictures and documentation of research, emails or any exchanges between your team and supporters, sponsors, community, and the school administration, you will be able to show what you have done to obtain your letter. Therefore, your team demonstrates serious intent and dedication to the team goal.

The most important step we took was making our desire for this status known by talking to our school administration. It is always important to let others know what you want and convince them that your goals are worthy of their efforts so that they will be willing to help you attain them.

Within days of Kick-off 2011, our second season, members of our team stopped by our principal's office to thank him for allowing us to have *FIRST* Robotics at Newton and were glad that he had spoken to our Coach regarding the possibility of becoming a varsity team. Our main marketing mentor stopped by his office a day or so later to further indicate how wonderful it would be to receive this recognition and she listed all of the benefits that such a designation would provide to the students and the school. As she had a daughter currently on the team attending the high school and a prospective student and team member in her family, she was invested in the idea and personally indicated her support.

Though our principal was entertaining the idea, we also knew that he was reluctant to take the steps necessary to make it happen, as there were no other schools in our area who granted varsity status to non-athletic related teams. Instead of debating why we deserved varsity, we let him know that we were thankful that he was

interested in partnering with us to have our school be seen as cutting-edge, even though we are situated in a rural location. The next day, Team 3142 followed up with a letter thanking him for meeting with us on such short notice. Our Marketing and Awards Leader hand delivered the letter, which added a personal and meaningful touch to our request. Administrators need to know that it is the students who desire and are driving the change, not their parents.

We were sure to include student members of Aperture at Board of Education meetings so as to put a 'face' on our team and enlist their aid in the process, and, when possible, add their voices to our own. By speaking to the school principal and the Board of Education, our desires were spread to important members of our school—members who would be instrumental in creating change. Our next step was to involve our community in our goal.

Over the next few weeks, Team 3142 reached out to our community, sponsors, and, most importantly, students and their parents to request letters of support. Also, we asked that they send their thoughts to our Principal and the Board of Education. Letters came in reminding our administration of how STEM is changing our culture at an ever increasing rate. If we are to prepare our students for the current job market and higher education, we need to find ways to make STEM classes and programs in our school appealing. Many of our supporters wrote personal stories of how education in the sciences had changed their own lives. With community support, it became harder to ignore a team clearly making the effort to be recognized for doing something so valuable—not only for themselves, but for the community at large.

Our local competitor, Pope John High School - Team 1302, was also taking steps to be recognized as a varsity team, and helped force the issue in our community. St Joe's - Team 1626 in Metuchen, bestowed varsity on their students in 2006, setting a precedent in New Jersey which, again, made it easier to defend our case and remove some of the risk in implementing this change.

Team 3142 was also very cautious from the start with the use of vocabulary, particularly regarding the words "sport" and "club". It came to our attention, while speaking with a member of the Board of Education, that sport was not interpreted by everyone in the same way—in their eyes, just because a robotics team competed did not make them a sport. We knew this to be true with the athletic director of our school in particular, as he holds a very specific definition of that term. Getting varsity status for a club is more difficult than for a team. Therefore, everyone on our team knew that, whenever discussing varsity status or our team in general, we were to refrain from using either of the two words in conversation or in writing. We were to be known as a team, not a club, as we compete and fulfill the other aspects of that terminology.

We also ceased from associating ourselves in any way with the term "athletic." This was done for the same reason—it was critical that we be on friendly terms with our Athletic Director and not appear to be overstepping our place. We chose to call ourselves an "intellectual team" to help justify varsity status with our administration and our student body. You should know that we have discovered that the school prefers the term "academic." Though, by definition, we are not considered by some as academic, it is how our school views us and how we now define ourselves. Sometimes, it is the little things that can sway a vote to one's benefit, so please be mindful of them, as well as any that you may discover on your own.

Our Principal, understanding the potential of this endeavor, reached out to a colleague and friend in California regarding the varsity issue and was assured that, out West, varsity status for non-athletic teams was very common. In fact, there is documentation that other teams who have obtained letters have an increased level of quality in the work produced. There were also an increased number of students who were inspired to attain the reward of a varsity letter. Being reassured by other school administrators helped sway our Principal.

We were officially recognized by our Board of Education as a varsity team in the second week of May—one week after our local competitive team received varsity status. Immediately, we began development of a robotic emblem for the back of our letter jacket. This process was particularly long and involved, and it is one that we would like to save you the trouble of managing. Choosing and creating the image was important for us, as it needed to convey robotics rather than engineering.

After contacting manufacturers and finding one that could portray the image we had created, our emblem was produced and was available to be used on our jackets for the 2011-2012 season.

We would be happy to refer you to our manufacturer when you are ready, as they have been instructed to share our emblem with any *FIRST* team who requests it. Being offered varsity status will be an amazing achievement

for your team; seeing varsity jackets on your team members would really get your school talking about the value of STEM education and put your academic team on par with the athletic teams of your school.

Shortly after we received this honor, MORT - Team 11, another local team, requested aid from us in this endeavor. In December of 2011 they also received varsity status from their school and recognize themselves as a "club." Therefore, being called a "team" is not critical, but we advise that, when helping to start new teams, you counsel them to consider how they wish to be viewed in the future in relation to their goals. MORT has also been around for many years, and is highly successful and has enormous sponsorship support—something that Aperture did not have at the time of our request.

Look to your assets and play them to your benefit. If you are a serious team with a fantastic track record, we would be very surprised if your administration would not be willing to honor your team.

Also check out the Bedford Express - Team 1023 website. They have some tips and a great video that might be helpful. Our team made personal contact with them when we decided that we wished to become a varsity team, and they were able to counsel us in the process that they used to secure their status. They did have the advantage of having a new principal that was highly receptive. It is our understanding that they asked one of their English teachers to help craft a letter of intent with one of their team members. Our team had the amazing good fortune to meet Team 1023 in St. Louis at the International Championship in 2012, as they were sitting behind us at the closing ceremonies. They were thrilled to learn how they were able to help us and introduced us to their female team member who wrote that initial letter to their administration.

Do not hesitate to reach out to our team regarding letters of support, as we would be happy to send them. Also, provide the contact information below to your principal so that he/she may reach out to ours should he/she have questions:

Mr. James Tasker, Principal (973) 383-7573

Our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. G. Kennedy Greene, is an amazing, true forward thinker and a supporter of ours. He speaks at the end of our Chairman's Video on [YouTube](#).

As always, thank you letters are important and should be written by the students and adults to all that aid in your cause. Letting your athletic director know that you, an academic team, are happy to have a friend in athletics is not a bad idea either. The more supporters you can gather from a variety of disciplines, the easier it will be to convince your administration that this designation should have been awarded long ago and their support will help to speed the process along.

We are currently revising and updating our team handbook, which was instrumental in convincing our administration that we are fully committed to providing a world class STEM program. If you would like a copy of it, please let us know, and we would be happy to provide it as soon as it is complete.

We wish you much success in your endeavor. It has been a pleasure speaking with you during the competitions, and should you need anything, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours in robotics,

Tess Bugay - Team Captain  
Hanna Balatero - Marketing Team

Team Aperture 3142  
Newton *FIRST* Varsity Robotics

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