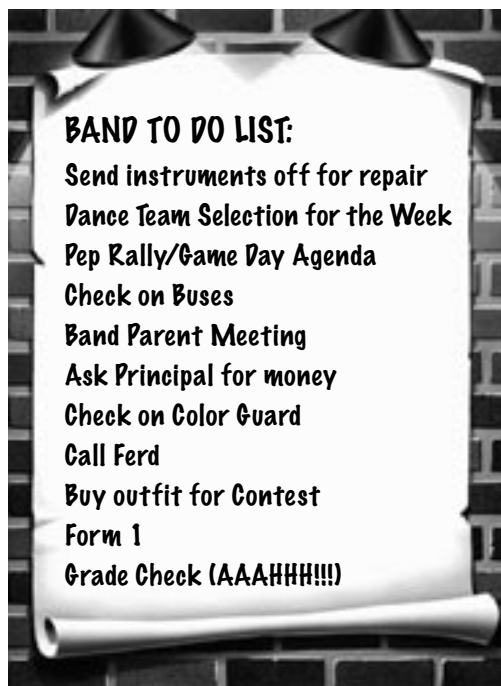


Is Grade Check at The Bottom of Your List? Wrong!!

Monica Ruiz



Just when you think you have accomplished everything on your “to do list” it is time to check grades to determine eligibility. Fortunately, our district has Grade Speed where we can access student academic grades by simply clicking on an icon but if you’re like me and suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder when it comes to band, this becomes a biweekly ritual.

Here in the Robert E. Lee High School Band Program we have 145 band members and march 140 in the fall, not leaving much room for ineligible.

During concert season, we have a true wind ensemble with one person per part—again—not much room to spare an individual. Everyone says, “You have no control over your band student’s grades.” That’s not true!!! I like to be in control of everything, be proactive, and have a back up plan. This is how we have maintained 99%-100% eligibility the last three years in our program.

First, a mass email with a band roster is sent to all faculty. In this email we ask teachers to make us aware if our students are having difficulty academically, behaviorally, or both. Some teachers will respond some will not; either way, the game plan has been set into motion.

Second, we begin a grade check the 2nd week of school. Being on a 9 week grading period, progress reports come out on the 3rd and 6th week. Due to schedule changes the grades may not be truly accurate but we begin getting an idea of which students may be having difficulty. Grade check slips are collected by section leaders

and turned into the directors for student daily grades. A parent contact is made for:

- a.) Students who have not turned in their grade check.
- b.) Students who may be in jeopardy of not passing a class.

Third, we begin contacting teachers via email about individual band students, checking student grades online and cross-referencing with the grade check. We ask for information regarding incomplete assignments, low test scores, and the academic tutoring schedule. Each at-risk student is then placed with a band peer tutor for tutoring during band class once a week, and for after school tutoring (4:00 - 6:00 pm.)

During marching season the time is 6:15 - 8:00 pm. Another parent contact is made making them aware of what has been set in place. We also provide parents with information on how to register online to check grades through the parent portal. For those parents who do not have access to a computer we allow them to register through one of the director’s computers.

Fourth, (this is where my OCD begins) a bi-weekly online grade check is done. This takes

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approximately two hours each time. We check every student, follow up with emails regarding his or her progress, and have more parent contact if necessary.

All of these steps are repeated until—you would hope—all assignments are complete, tests are passed, and you have 100% eligibility. At some point the student becomes ultimately responsible for their work but every student in the program knows how demanding and persistent I can become when it comes to grades. In many cases, it is not that the student actually wants to pass their class; it's more that they are desperately trying to get the crazy band director off their back.

Communication between directors, parents, teachers, and students is instrumental in helping each student pass. Is this time consuming? YES! Is it worth it? YES! To see the look of accomplishment on 145 faces makes enduring the infamous grade checks more tolerable and, hopefully students will think twice before not turning in an assignment.

Monica M. Ruiz has her Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Music from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She has been teaching for 17 years and is currently in her 5th year as Director of Bands at Robert E. Lee High School, Northeast ISD, San Antonio. Monica is Region 12 Representative for the Texas Bandmasters Association and Region 12 Vice President for the Texas Music Educators Association.

Sitting in my band hall office, as I often did, several years ago, a very determined student made it known to all present, that someday she would be sitting at my desk as the band director of the Robert E. Lee High School Band in San Antonio, Texas. Well, it didn't take her long to accomplish her goal. I do feel fortunate to have no longer been the director at Lee when she came knocking. I am just as proud of the Robert E. Lee Band today as I was back in the 80's and 90's. I'm thankful the band is in great hands and under the wonderful direction of present Band Director, Miss Monica Ruiz.

Yours truly,

*Alfred Esquivel
Membership Manager
Texas Bandmasters Association*