

Keeping Everyone Eligible— Failure is Not an Option!

Monica Ruiz-Mills

Since our convention this past July, most of us have completed successful summer band programs, assimilated to our workloads, placed all of the beginners on the appropriate instruments, and have taught at least two movements of our competitive show. Just when life is getting into the “groove” you realize your world is about to turn upside down when your best musician is about to become ineligible! So, what do you do when this happens? I usually scream, then come up with a plan.

Over the past nine years we have been able to maintain a minimum of 99-100% eligibility by being proactive, informing our students, parents, faculty, and staff of our expectations for the band program. Our mantra is quite simple, “Failure is not an Option.” The reason for the majority of students not passing is due to incomplete assignments or simply not turning them in to the appropriate teacher. Yes, there may be factors which contribute to their low academic performance such as work, family issues, relationships, and absences. However, it is our responsibility to ensure the success of all of our students. Here is our process, beginning the second week of the school year and maintained throughout the year.

First, make sure your students have been promoted and meet the

UIL requirement for credits earned in order to be eligible at the beginning of the school year. This information can be found on the UIL web site, and/or from your designated record keeper on your campus (usually an assistant principal.) The rule to determine eligibility states all schools must check grades at the end of the first six weeks, whether you are on a 6, 9, or 12 week grading cycle. After the first six weeks, grades are then checked at the end of the grading cycle or the evaluation (progress report) period. Remember, there is a 7-day grace period before a student becomes ineligible or regains eligibility at the end of the school day.

Example:

6 Weeks Ends	Lose or Regain Eligibility	3 Week Evaluation*	Regain Eligibility*
9/24	10/1	10/15	10/22
10/1	10/8	10/22	10/29
10/8	10/15	10/29	11/5
10/15	10/22	11/5	11/12

The dates provided in this example are just examples of eligibility dates and should be used as a guide only. Actual school calendars may vary from this information.

Be aware, if a student passes the report card the student is eligible for the entire grading period. Teachers sometimes think a progress report can make a student ineligible, when in actuality the progress report is used to regain eligibility.

The Process

Send a mass e-mail to the faculty with a list of band members letting them know you can act as a resource to help them achieve success with your band members. We stress that we will be monitoring grades, providing tutoring before school and after band practice, and we will be making a parent contact if the student is at risk of becoming ineligible. **Communication with teachers and parents is essential in maintaining student success.**

We review grades at least two times a week, making Wednesday grade check day. This allows time to speak with all parties (student, teacher, parent) and it allows students an opportunity to retrieve assignments and meet with teachers. If your district has grading software (for example, *Gradespeed*) print out the progress report for the endangered class and conference with the student asking pertinent questions:

Are you aware you are not passing?

Why do you have missing assignments?

Do you understand the material?

Listen to the responses and restate them but most importantly, check for understanding of the academic material. Ask the student to let you see the assignments when complete.

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Once the student in need of assistance has been identified, determine for which subject, then devise a plan. Our plan includes tutoring: peer tutoring/buddy system, academic tutoring, and additional tutoring from possible mentors such as student interns on your campus. We also collect all of the assignments and turn them in to the appropriate teacher. This helps us monitor the work by making sure the student completes the assignment. Once our tutoring schedule has been determined, we make the teacher contact, letting them know of our plan for the student. This is done by e-mail first, but we will also speak with the teacher in person and check on the student in their academic class.

Example of a teacher e-mail:

Mr. Washington,

I have been monitoring grades and noticed John Adams is not passing Government. Please let me know how I may assist you with John so he may be successful in your class. The sixth week progress report determines eligibility and I will be contacting his parents to make them aware of the situation. If there is anything I can do to assist you, please let me know. I will be more than willing to allow him his band time to meet with you to complete any missing assignments. Thank you for your time.

*Musically,
Band Diva*

After we have initiated the contact with the teacher, we begin communicating with the parent. We always begin with a positive about their child before informing them of the grade. We then explain our plan to help their child become academically successful. In some instances we will make a home or employment visit if we are unable to reach a parent via telephone. It is our

philosophy to inform the parent that we value their child and we are willing to assist them with other areas besides band.

Once the strategies have been set in place to assist the student, the process includes continually monitoring the grades of all students. We set up our grading program to send us an e-mail alert if an academic grade drops below a 72. We manually check grades of students for whom we do not receive an alert. Even our top 10% students have their grades checked; and we continue conversations with students, parents, and teachers.

Finally, students need to understand that ultimately they will be held accountable for their grades. We are simply holding the student to the expectation that he/she must strive to maintain academic success.

In our situation we do not have the luxury of placing an alternate in their marching spot; we must utilize every individual. We stress their importance in the band program and how they are a viable contributor to the program. When a student understands their role in the program, most will try to pass to the best of their ability. We must put it in terms, or in a scenario, the student will understand. We need to take the situation and make it about them, letting them know they are valued.

Building relationships with the student, parent, and teacher is as important as the musical concepts we teach, working together as a whole will help the student acquire the skills needed to be successful not only in school or band but in life. Passing classes and maintaining eligibility is a life lesson.

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