

Developing a Successful Band Program in Title I Schools

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Teaching band in a Title I school can be challenging—even overwhelming. However, not only is it possible for you to develop a successful program in a Title I setting—it can be most rewarding for all involved. A great band program requires a critical balance of certain concepts and ingredients—truly a recipe. When teaching band in a Title I setting, be willing to think outside of the box for the components and ingredients for this recipe. All parts, or concepts, are necessary to create a great band program. There also must be a balance or equality of these ingredients. Many band directors lose sight of this—thus not keeping track of the big picture. ***Never doubt that band will change the lives of your students for the better!***

Personal Relationships must be developed between the student and the band director. Attend school events your students are involved in, such as athletics. Be a part of the school. Volunteer to help with various school events. Know your students. Show you are interested in who they are as people. Greet your students at the door daily and welcome them to class. Have social events and participate in them! As I heard Richard Floyd state in a clinic, “*Kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!*” Be a good listener.

At the senior high school level, work to develop **Personal Relationships between students**—specifically older (leadership) and younger students.

This will be a great and effective recruiting tool. For example, create a buddy system between Freshmen students and older leadership.



Make it a priority to develop Personal Relationships with the band parents. Create opportunities to meet your band parents, starting with the beginner drives. Hire others for the instrument placement. Then you can personally meet and greet all potential band parents. To develop and maintain parent support, treat all band parents with respect and be consistent with student discipline and the calendar (no last minute changes).

Effective parent communication is a very important ingredient when developing a band program in a Title I setting. Prevent problems by practicing good communication skills. Use the rule that if a parent makes any kind of contact with you, that email or call must be returned by you within 24 hours. Same-day contact is best.

Solve serious parent concerns either with a phone call or

conference. Emails can be impersonal and leave the wrong impression. When talking to parents about their band student, always find something positive to say about their child! Regardless of the student offense, that student is his or her parent’s child! Create an atmosphere of openness, encouraging the parent to have a more receptive attitude toward helping correct whatever the behavior issues are with their child.

Keep written communication to parents short and simple! Often, many of the parents in a Title I setting, due to limited education opportunities, do not have the skills to understand a lengthy and complex document. Respect your band parents by printing letters that go home in a variety of languages. Require both the student and parent print their name and sign these. Then keep track of whether or not students return the signature portion of the letter. Follow-up getting these turned in. For example, send a letter home inviting parents to concerts. The letter should include positive information encouraging attendance at the concert and can be printed on colored paper. Make verbal contact as positive as possible!

You must sell your program! Make the band program seem important to students, parents, administration, and the community. It truly is your job to toot your own horn. At a Title I campus, this is extremely important



as the parents are making a great financial sacrifice to provide their child with a quality instrument to play. **Showcase both individual and full band successes and achievements.**

Display your awards around the school, at concerts, and at beginner drives. **Make concert programs attractive**, easy to read, and a showcase of student achievement.

Presenting **successful concerts** that are well prepared and have good attendance will make your students feel proud about their band membership. Remember the old show business motto—leave them wanting more! Be well-organized and efficient so that setup changes are fast and minimal. Our average concert length with four bands was an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes. Have concert comments organized and planned. Type out a script in a large font so that your typed comments are easily read during the concert.

Strive to have a large audience at your concerts. Send a concert invitation and information letter home with a required parent signature. Create, as needed, **awards** to fit the recognition your students have earned such as most improved, spirit, leadership, etc.

Be particular about uniform appearance!



Music programming has a great impact on the band program! Program music that both challenges and satisfies, and that the students and parents will like and

enjoy. Regardless of the grade or skill level you teach, remember that the music you teach your students should challenge them. When you program music the band students are excited about, they will urge friends and parents to attend! On our holiday concert we often presented *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. A favorite school teacher would be the narrator, and we invited the siblings and friends of our band students to

come to the stage. Band families love holiday tradition and it created an instant large concert attendance.

The band program, especially in a Title I setting, will grow and maintain a high percentage of members over the course of time only when the band students are receiving **quality musical instruction. Teaching every child in your program to play well must be a top priority.** Therefore, with limited funds, weigh the value of a handful of students receiving private lesson scholarships versus, for similar funding, **regular group instruction from area master teachers.** Utilize a master teacher or high quality private teacher to **teach your staff** as well as your students. Since private lessons either do not exist or are possible only for a very limited number of students, you and your staff must truly be capable of teaching kids how to play their instruments, both at the middle school and high school.

Make it a priority to start your beginners correctly, then there is no re-teaching the next year. When beginning band kids are setup to play correctly, learning to play is easier. Thus the student will feel more successful, and **successful students will stay in band!** At the high school level, the rule of success and retention applies as well;



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thus you need to be both diligent and proficient when correcting bad playing habits. This is a very frequent scenario with move in students.

The head director at both middle and high school levels has the absolute responsibility to oversee the successful instruction of the fundamentals of playing and then continuing musical development of your students.

Even with limited resources, a major priority must be placing your students on reliable, **quality musical instruments that are in good working order!** Do everything possible to convince your parents not to purchase instruments from the internet. Seek out grants through corporations, area churches, and your school district. Appeal to your school's faculty to donate old family instruments or to sponsor a band student, and buy instruments from former students who no longer play. Modify music store rental packages; remove some accessories if needed. Stress to parents the advantages of renting or buying through a reputable music store so the instrument will be in good working condition. Emphasize to parents that used instruments not acquired through a reputable music store need to be brought to school for the director to evaluate.

Particularly in a Title I setting, you must **Recruit and Maintain band membership effectively.** If you are unable to take your band to the elementary schools, have a 5th grade night and advertise it! Play something brief and flashy, and have an attractive but short handout. Make your presentation short and organized, emphasizing how cool it is to be in band. If allowed, create a recruiting video. At the beginner drive, take a picture of the new band student with his selected instrument. Then take a poster to each feeder elementary school with the incoming beginner pictures, and have an individual picture in an envelope for each student. This helps keep kids stay excited about band over the summer!

In a Title I setting, administrative support is critical, so **develop a Personal Relationship with the school administration.** You are fortunate if you work for the rare

administrator, like my Campbell Principal Laura Perry, who visits your classroom on a regular basis. It is your job as band director to cultivate the personal relationship between you and the school administration.

Carefully plan communication. Know what will put the administrator in a receptive frame of mind. Written communication should be succinct and to the point, grammatically correct, organized and easy to read, and positive in nature. **Include justification that is real and fact based; real data speaks!** Clearly state the benefits for both the students and the entire school.

For oral communication, **find times that are convenient for your administrator to briefly chat that will not add time to their schedule,** such as lunch or hall duty. However, appointments are preferred. Certain busy times of the school year (first and last couple of weeks of school, Staar testing, etc.) are overwhelming to administrators and you should avoid making appointments at these times. Plan what you are going to say; it is acceptable to take written notes! Estimate how long you plan to meet, so that when you make the appointment you can request a specific amount of time. Do not meet with an administrator when you are extremely upset and emotional, as you are likely to say something you will eventually regret. Start your meeting by thanking the administrator for her support.

Invite your principal to your concerts. An organized and well-attended concert will instantly win administrative friends. **Invite administrators to observe specific classes.** Show off that smooth running beginner class where the kids are achieving great things! This will be particularly effective if that class includes students who are problems everywhere but band!

It is crucial for your band program to have success! This is a critical area requiring attention, especially in a Title I setting. Because many Title I students live in a less than ideal home situation, **you must gain their trust**—not necessarily an easy task! Remember that it is not the Title I child's fault that he or she has limited financial resources. This applies to behavior issues as well! It is so very important that you remember that "You Can't Fool Kids!"

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Specifically, always be honest. Do not patronize your students! Always show students respect, even when they are rude to you.

As you teach your students to love playing, help them feel successful as young musicians. If guided carefully, these students will gradually learn to show you respect. Know that most beginning band students, especially Title I, joined band for a reason other than becoming a fine young musician. It's very likely they joined because their friends joined or the band trips sounded fun. **Work diligently to know every child in your program.** Students will love and appreciate your doing this! Particularly at the

beginning of the school year, make it your goal to build rapport with your students. Plan for appropriate times to socialize and get to know your students.

Trips can have a big impact on Title I band students of all grade levels! Make trips more affordable by using payment plans. Trips can positively expose students to things they have never seen before. Have a required parent/student trip meeting for overnight trips. Even if it is possible for only your top performing band to make the out of town trip, this can still be a great motivator for the entire band program.

Scott McAdow is a magna cum laude graduate of the University of North Texas, graduating with a double major in instrumental and choral music. He holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Houston. McAdow retired June 30, 2016. His 39 years as a Texas public school band director include experience in Spring, Klein, Birdville, and Cy-Fair Independent School Districts. McAdow currently supervises student teachers for the University of Houston, and is extremely active across Texas as a clinician, adjudicator, consultant and inservice. He also is the Chancel Choir Director for Advent Lutheran Church in Houston. Mr. McAdow's bands were TMEA Honor Band winners three times and finalists an additional three times. His bands performed at The Midwest Clinic twice and his marching bands were finalists at the UIL State Marching Band Contest on five occasions. A three-time TMEA Leadership and Achievement Award recipient, McAdow has presented convention clinics for TMEA and TBA. His Campbell Symphonic Band is the recipient of the Foundation for Music Education 2015 National Wind Band Honors Commended Winner Award. McAdow has conducted All Region Bands in eight different TMEA regions. Both of his children, Allison and Blake, performed in his Langham Creek High School Bands.