

Texas Bandmasters Association

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Avoid the Breakdowns

John Morrison, 2016-17 TBA Vice President



In my personal experiences, breakdowns tend to revolve around one common theme, communication. I have certainly come to realize that the high pitch sound resonating from the laundry machine is a call for help. How about the grinding sounds coming as a result of braking for a stop in my vehicle to remind me that service is beyond due. It's no different in our schools, communication is a key component to the well-oiled band hall.

When the laundry machine begins squealing, the clear message has to be that an internal part is not functioning at maximum efficiency. My lack of response could prove to be very costly. Responding to the signal immediately could potentially save me financially in the long run. The same could be said for the signals from my brakes in my vehicle. Quickly addressing the concern can generally result in minor expense for routine maintenance, however allowing the issue to persist can be very costly. I have some past experience here that make me an expert on this. I'd like to explore some components of your school system and the signals to watch out for to avoid breakdowns.

Band halls where staff members don't routinely collaborate, or plan lessons together, all too often are in disrepair due to a lack of communication. These programs where staff members are not operating with the same vision and end in mind generally send messages that there are gaps in their system. So, what are the signals that are emitting to alert the staff, school and community that a breakdown is imminent? I can think of conversations with directors that will remark, "I don't know what is expected of me, my director just tells me as I'm walking into class what I'm doing that day with his/her students, without any warning

or clear objective".

The obvious signal to the students is that you lack the confidence to teach that particular lesson today, because you

yourself are forced to cram the lesson and possibly guess to the desired end result while the kids wait for you to begin immediate instruction. Do your students all a favor, and expect that you should routinely plan as professional educators within your band hall, for the benefit of all stakeholders. As a side, the new state accountability system, *T-TESS*, does have a component built in to measure the lesson planning skills of a teacher. Having clearly defined plans/lessons and meeting agendas from routine planning sessions should be fantastic evidence for administrators to meet the criteria needed for you to excel in that newly measured dimension!

I have seen relationships with campus colleagues go sour, because of a lack of collegial conversation. I'm not suggesting that we all must be best friends, however, out of professional courtesy, adults should engage in meaningful conversation to achieve a mutually desired outcome. The conclusion of these conversations, we should hope, results in *what is ultimately right for all of our students*. The hardest group to sometimes work with are the arts partners in our own schools. I truly believe that the root of most discontent with other staff in a school setting is teachers who are all defining success in their specific arts activities like choir, orchestra, dance and theatre with a single goal of becoming the single bright shining

Avoid the Breakdowns

beacon for the campus. I have been motivated recently by the example of one of our campuses in my district where the motto “We Are One” has been taken to a completely new level. This very diverse middle class community is thriving because of the cooperation and belief by all staff members of this simple message, not only between the arts groups, but across all other campus programs. Consistent performances and appearances at the state and national level with multiple programs and organizations from this school create an environment where the students and staff equally flourish. The common theme is an enthusiastic and relentless building principal who clearly embraces the opportunity to share her vision, and embraces the privilege to serve her community through consistent planning and monitoring of academic, athletic, and artistic programming instruction.

Speaking of community, your band parents pick up on your signals, as well. Oftentimes the community knows when there are regularly sent last minute emails and

Reminder texts that are due to a lack of planning on your part. Constantly changing schedules due to a lack of facilities planning, or coordination between staff, send a clear signals that there is something in your program that needs attention. Band parents can be some of the best advocates for our public schools. Parents already struggling to meet the regular demands of a somewhat normal band routine, lose all confidence in the band director and program in general, when time after time there are last minute changes in scheduling. Campus and district **administrators also easily lose confidence in you** and your program when time after time they have to come to your rescue because of your deficiencies.

As you have likely heard before, **a failure to plan, is a plan to fail**, so let’s make sure that you and your program are ready to succeed! You, your students, your colleagues, and your community all deserve the best YOU.