

“Simple” Steps to a Fantastic Band

Roland Sandoval, 2016-17 TBA Secretary

Spring in our band halls is such a great time of year. In our middle school band halls, we start to see real progress and accomplishment with the beginners. Our middle school concert bands are establishing routines and rehearsal techniques to establish a foundation to last for years of their musical life. Our high school band halls are also busy places. There are flags spinning for Winter Guard, chamber ensembles for solo & ensemble, sectionals, jazz, and inspiring full band rehearsals. Through it all, Texas band directors teach this art form at the highest levels in the nation.

Those standards have been established by generations of educators that mentored and guided the next young generation of Texas Bandmasters. They taught us several key concepts: persistence, insistence, musicianship, structure, routine, and most importantly—to teach the instrument.

They taught us to have a system in place that teaches every fundamental then simply apply those fantastic fundamentals and system to create wonderful music. Simple, yes? In my first years of teaching I had a Phi Beta Mu Texas Hall of Fame director teach me something simple. The conversation went something like this: Just insist everything fundamentally is in place and correct. In an ideal world, this is easy, it is a NEVER-ENDING BATTLE. Just do the following things and you will have a band that is fantastic: **Get all the right notes, in the right places, with the correct style, at the proper dynamic level, with a characteristic sound/tone, perfectly in tune and at the correct tempo.** Easy...ok...challenge is on.

(continued on next page)



“Simple” Steps to a Fantastic Band

As a music educator, I think every day how to achieve those “simple” steps to a fantastic band. I encourage you to try several strategies to reach those steps this spring. **The first is to make the student to teacher ratio as small as possible.** That means true team teaching. Break down the band into sections during class as often as you can with your associates. It may mean putting paper work to after school hours but so worth it. Of course, if you find yourself as the lone music educator in your town it may mean a few extra hours to isolate smaller groups before and after school. Have a plan for all. There are so many great ways to break down: woodwind/brass/percussion, highs/mids/lowes, melody/accompany harmony/bass line, all 1st parts/2nd parts/3rd parts, and so on.

The next strategy is simply to create a realistic timeline and goal set. Another master teacher taught me to **be specific, make your goals achievable, establish a realistic timeline, make your band’s goals measurable and be responsible and accountable to someone so you commit to achieving your band program’s goals.** So, the key is to plan as a team and strive week by week, day by day to achieve what you set out to accomplish to make your young musicians superior performers every day.

Strategy three would simply be to have a system in place for your program’s fundamentals. **Have a plan and approach to posture, breathing, general warm ups, articulations, dynamics, intonation, and rehearsal structure.** When we see a world class athlete perform we often forget that to prepare for a game they did 500

free throws, 500 back hands, 500 putts, 500 laps, and so on. There are no short cuts. They make it look easy but behind the scenes there are fundamentals and hard work. As we teach our young musicians we must stress that same concept. That goes back to what the Texas Bandmaster legends have taught us...persistence and insistence. It may mean I must say EVERY DAY: **sit on the edge of your chair, both feet flat on the floor, bring the instrument to you, grow three inches taller, stay still and check your hand position.** Then I’ll say it again 10 more times every class period. You can’t get tired of making your students great at what they do.

That’s where this amazing organization stands out. The Texas Bandmasters Association will be celebrating 70 years this summer. In those 70 years, the standard that Texas bands established often has come from the clinics, demonstrations, and sharing information from program to program and colleague to colleague. Some of my most rewarding educational experiences have been just talking shop with my peers at TMEA and TBA conventions. Events like these are where we find the tricks of the trade and ideas to make our students successful and mature young musicians. Have a plan. Try a strategy. These ideas that we learn from attending our convention help us create our own programs and make us all unique, musical, and artistic.

It such a tremendous honor serving on the TBA Board of Directors and I look forward to seeing you at TBA 2017. Finish strong and have a musical spring!

**Just insist everything
fundamentally is in
place and correct.
That goes back to what
the Texas Bandmaster
legends have taught us...
persistence and
insistence.**

**TBA 2017 Convention/Clinic
San Antonio, Texas • July 20-22**

Register and secure your housing now!

www.texasbandmasters.org