

Passing the Torch: Strategies For Mentoring Student Teachers

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I hope your Spring Semester has been a successful one. In thinking of topics for this article, I was reminded by someone that I and my long-time colleague, Bruce Beach, have had the honor and privilege to work with many student teachers over our 20 years here at Franklin H.S. I have so many fond memories of my student teaching experience and was blessed to have been with such great teachers: Steve Musser, Bill Centera, Royce Coatney, Sherry Miller, and David Cote.

Many of you have had or will have the opportunity to work with student teachers. I want to discuss some important ideas and strategies that will hopefully help you in your mentorship of future music educators. Just a thought before we begin—the time a student teacher spends with you will have a lifetime of influence on their teaching career and the future of music education in Texas.

Here are some thoughts and suggestions:

Know Your Role as a Supervising Teacher

- This is an INCREDIBLE opportunity to share ideas and can be an awesome chance for you to learn a few things too!

- Remember that you will need to set aside some time to sit down with your student teacher and discuss things from the day's rehearsals and events. That one on one time will be GREATLY APPRECIATED by your student teacher.

- Your student teacher is wanting to have a great educational experience, so it's probably not a good idea to

have them constantly copying music, organizing the music library, going on a Starbuck's run, or just sitting idly by and doing nothing.

Getting Started

- On the first few days, help your student teacher get acclimated to the campus. Introduce them to the principal and front office staff, head custodian, campus security, and the other Fine Arts teachers in your area.

- Make sure to get them any required items they might need such as a campus ID/badge, parking sticker, Teacher Handbook, and any necessary online access.

- Make them aware of school district dress code for teachers. Remind them to dress appropriately.

- Check to see if they need to sign in daily or perhaps some other type of procedure that your campus/district might have in place for student teachers.

- Many universities will ask the supervising teachers to maintain an online assessment and attendance record. This might require a bit of time for you to set up and remember to do the required assessments on a timely basis.

- For the first week, maybe two, let the student teacher observe your rehearsals. This will allow them to get to know your daily routines and to take notes on what they are hearing and seeing. It is very important to have a debrief at the end of the day to go over their observations and to answer any of their questions. Encourage them to write down questions as they think of them during the day.

Rehearsal Strategies

- Eventually, your student teacher will need the opportunity to run a full rehearsal. To

help prepare for this, take it one step at a time. You could start by having them work with individuals or small groups on specific things that you indicate. Make sure to follow up with the student teacher afterwards.

- To prepare for the student teacher's first few full ensemble rehearsals, schedule time for you both to sit down together and develop the lesson plan. Since this is the first rehearsal, it might be a good idea to ease them into it. Maybe start by having them go through the warm-up/daily drill, and then progress into adding one or more pieces of music. Keep things simple and not complicated at first. This will help the student teacher develop confidence and overcome the anxiety of those first few times standing in front of students. It is a good idea to let the students know ahead of time that the student teacher will be doing part of the rehearsal. I would recommend giving very detailed rehearsal plans at first to help guide them. Again, debriefing with the student teacher afterwards will be very important.

- If possible, allow multiple rehearsal opportunities throughout the semester: individual, small group, sectionals, guard rehearsal, mariachi rehearsal, Sight Reading process, jazz



band, or any other ensemble rehearsals you might have at your school. Avoid having them work with only their specific instrument.

- Be present and observant during their rehearsals. It is perfectly OK to “chime in” occasionally to supplement the teaching but try to avoid taking the entire rehearsal over. The Student teacher needs to have the podium time.

Debriefing and Providing Feedback

- As I have mentioned before, debriefing and providing feedback is critical for the student teacher’s growth. Sooner is better when giving this feedback. If possible, do this the same day the student teacher rehearses or works with students.

- You are the primary supervising teacher, but if you have multiple directors on your staff, please feel free and allow them to give feedback to the student teacher as well.

- “Praise in public/criticize in private”. Compliment the student teacher in front of the students and staff. When you are in the office away from others, especially students, then you can deal with areas where there needs to be growth.

- Use the P-S-P method when giving feedback. This stands for POSITIVE-SUGGESTION-POSITIVE. Look for the good first, then offer suggestions for improvement, followed by positive reinforcement when you see improvement.

- Video a rehearsal and watch it together. Pausing and commenting when necessary. Recordings never lie!!

Other Important Considerations

- Encourage the student teacher to attend UIL and other contest/festivals. If it is a pre-UIL contest, they might be allowed to go sit in the Sight Reading room and observe. This is an awesome learning opportunity. They do need to go with you and your band to contest and experience that from a director’s point of view.

- Have them attend Booster meetings. Spend some time talking with them about the importance of Booster clubs and parent support. If your Booster club has a set of By Laws, give them a copy and go over that with them.

- Discuss band finances. Depending on your situation, this might be only through your school, or only through your Booster club, or a combination of both. This is an area that is usually not discussed enough in our university classes. Go over budgeting, staffing, inventory, supply, or any other financial related items.

- Point out teaching resources: websites, apps, music publishing companies, music industry partners, music teaching associations (TBA, TMEA, TMAA, etc.).

- As a supervising teacher, you might also need some additional guidance. Always feel free to reach out to your mentors and other teachers that have had experience working with student teachers.

- I have always given our student teachers a flash drive with sample files from my many years of teaching. This would include handbooks, lesson plans, schedules, calendars, itineraries, leadership applications, student recommendation letters, or any other important files that could provide a template for their future use.

Following Through-Be A Continuing Resource for Your Student Teacher

- Provide recommendation letters.
- Help with employment applications.
- Introduce them to all the Music Supervisors in your area.
- Encourage them to call or email you whenever they have a question or just want to bounce some ideas off you.
- Make sure YOU reach out to them once they have finished Student Teaching with you just to check in to see how they are doing.

In closing, I hope this article is helpful to you as a supervising teacher or perhaps you are reading this and about to become a student teacher yourself. We are so fortunate to have such a strong history of incredible band directors in Texas. Helping prepare and mentor student teachers is your opportunity to continue the growth of music education and pass the torch to the next generation. I look forward to seeing you this summer at the convention!!