

Show Them You Know Them

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*Hear more from this group
at the TBA Convention/Clinic
on July 24 at 10:30 AM.*

Music is a remarkable avenue for students to explore and discover various cultures. As teachers, it is our responsibility to celebrate diversity in our band halls, provide equitable treatment and experiences for all students, and ensure that many cultures are represented. Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the band hall matters for so many reasons. All aspects of a program can encompass DEI from student relationships, to instructional staffing, repertoire selection, social media presence, and recruiting. As directors we must be committed to ensuring that each member of the band community has an equal opportunity to succeed and benefit from the resources available to the program. Below are several strategies to include DEI as an essential foundation of the band program.

Mission Statement. To begin, examining historical and personal practices with regard to DEI in our band programs can be uncomfortable, disheartening, or overwhelming. It is important to acknowledge that this work is challenging but that it is never too late to begin by approaching with authenticity, honesty, and acknowledgement. While confronting significant issues with implementing a robust DEI initiative into a band program, it starts with an honest evaluation of current practices and knowing where to begin once you've determined the areas in most need of equity enhancement. Designing a more inclusive mission statement should not be viewed as a fixed goal but rather an organic progression in a constant state of evolution. Recent research has shown that in order

for any DEI initiative to work, all stakeholders must be invested in the value system set forth. Otherwise any efforts result in a transactional, or data driven outcome (ex. I have 25% unspecified minority demographic students in the band, check mark ... we are diverse) rather than a more genuine transformational outcome with personal, relational dynamics, full engagement, center reflection and actual improvement.

Building Meaningful Relationships. The most essential aspect in any classroom is the development of meaningful relationships between teachers and students regardless of cultural differences. These cultural differences can include, but are certainly not limited to, race and ethnicity, sex and gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, and age difference. Teachers must foster an environment of trust and mutual respect. This includes making the band facility a space free from judgement based on cultural differences. Teachers must be aware of their own implicit biases and willing to address them as they apply to their students. A great deal of studies show that teachers of all cultural backgrounds inadvertently perceive students of color as being less capable and more aggressive than white students, and may apply rules inconsistently, which erodes trust and relationships. The most effective strategy to bridge this trust gap and build a relationship of mutual respect is simply to learn about students as individuals. Learn about their background and identity as well as what makes them unique. Discover the perspective from which

the student sees the world and their personal learning style. Invest the time to learn what each student values. It is incumbent on band directors to establish a tone of inclusion that emphasizes the value of all perspectives. Another strategy to build meaningful relationships is to ask, learn, and grow. Students often know more about the way contemporary culture is evolving than teachers do—allowing students to also teach what they know creates a mutually beneficial learning environment.

Student Leadership. Developing and expanding diversity in student leadership is a fundamental piece of a successful DEI initiative in the school band program. The director should support under-represented students demonstrating qualities appropriate for leadership. The organization should have leadership that is culturally reflective of the entire group. To achieve this goal the director must examine the demographics of the program and how that statistic correlates to the demographics of the leadership. One of the major questions often asked by directors is “How can we achieve diverse student leadership when the same students keep applying?” This is a common occurrence amongst band programs everywhere. To begin, diverse students should be encouraged to apply for leadership positions and their leadership skills and potential should be acknowledged to increase their inclusion. Directors should also model diversity in leadership through instructional staffing hires. These positions could include, but are not limited to, other directors, adjunct

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lesson teachers, clinicians in residence, guest speakers, etc. It's important for students to see their identity represented in the staff leadership of their program to make the connection that these positions are available for them to aspire to. Student leaders and new hires should never be told they have earned a position based, in part, on their demographic. To do so would be antithetical to building an equitable environment.

Repertoire Programming. Culturally diverse literature is another essential component to incorporating a legitimate DEI initiative into the school band program. Selection of repertoire by diverse voices that is culturally reflective of all the students in the band program serves the students by providing them with a wide-ranging musical palette rich with cultural significance. The examination of diverse cultures through repertoire has the potential to inspire greater appreciation, empathy, and understanding of other cultural groups by the students and the greater school community. This requires teachers to develop an awareness that their own exposure to musical repertoire likely skews heavily toward one narrow population of composers (due to their own exposure from ensemble participation, teacher training, and publisher/distributor advertisement). In 2020, the largest music distributor in the United States advertised just 61 band pieces by female composers out of 4,632 total

works on their "Concert & Festival" catalog. That amounts to 1.3 percent of the advertised repertoire available for purchase. Additionally, the 2019 state prescribed music list for high school band included 1.8 percent works by male composers of color, 2.8 percent works by white female composers, and no works by female composers of color.

Recruiting. The final major piece of a beneficial DEI initiative is recruiting a diverse group of students to participate in the band program. It's important for directors to recruit students from all cultures including race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religiosity, etc. The director should consider the systemic barriers that make it harder for certain populations to join and continue to participate in traditional music programs. All students deserve a sense of belonging and access to quality music education.

Final Thoughts. There are several major benefits to building a robust diversity, equity and inclusion initiative in your band program. The more ideas and perspectives a student is exposed to, the more their potential for creativity increases. Diversifying a music program will also engage new populations in the surrounding community more deeply. Finally, students and directors can gain an increased capacity for acceptance, respect, and concern for others by exploring various cultures through the art of music in the school band program.

Dr. Cliff Croomes serves as the Associate Director of Bands and the Director of the Longhorn Band at the University of Texas at Austin. He teaches courses in conducting and conducts the UT Symphony Band. Prior to his return to Austin he served as the Assistant Director of Bands at Louisiana State University and the Music Director, Principal Conductor of the Civic Orchestra of Baton Rouge, and Director of Bands at Georgetown High School. Earlier in his career Mr. Croomes taught in several Texas public schools. He also had the pleasure of serving on the faculty of the University of Texas Longhorn Music Camp from 2001-2014.

Dr. Kaitlin Bove is Assistant Professor of Music at Pierce College in Puyallup, Washington where she directs instrumental music ensembles in addition to instructing courses in music theory and music appreciation. Kaitlin is founder of the And We Were Heard initiative, a volunteer organization that matches under-represented composers of wind band and orchestral literature with ensembles, generating quality recordings of the music of diverse compositional voices. She is also co-founder of Girls Who Conduct, a mentorship program that supports gender parity on the conducting podium.

Dr. Kelvin Jones is the Assistant Director of Bands at Louisiana State University. His responsibilities include conducting the LSU Symphonic Band, teaching instrumental conducting courses, and leading the award-winning, 325-member Golden Band from Tigerland. As a conductor, Jones has conducted ensembles international and nationally, including Carnegie Hall and has received praise for on new music commissioning projects. A huge advocate and champion for diversity, inclusion, and equal rights, Jones serves as an ambassador for the university through his service and mentorship across various initiatives and contributions throughout campus and across the country.

Dr. Benjamin Lorenzo serves as Associate Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands at the University of Arkansas where he directs the 350-member Razorback Marching Band, conducts the Wind Symphony, teaches courses in conducting and music education. Prior to his appointment at Arkansas, he served as Assistant Director of Bands at Oklahoma State University and Texas Tech University. Dr. Lorenzo's creative and scholarly interests include the orchestration of works for several university marching bands, wind ensembles, and the Dallas Winds. In addition to work here, Dr. Lorenzo has conducted ensembles, worked with composers, and presented workshops in Costa Rica, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. He also served as a guest conductor and section coach with the World Youth Wind Orchestra Project in Austria and in 2018, he worked with several scholastic bands in Kuala Lumpur. Before beginning graduate study, he taught in the public schools of Florida and Texas.