

Building Better Bands in Single Director Schools

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CC 214 AB

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10 EVERYDAY KEYS TO SUCCESS THAT FEW OF US EVER FOLLOW

1. MENTORS

Let's face it, none of us can do this job on our own. We all need **HELP!** Getting help can feel next to impossible when you are in a single director situation, possibly out in the middle of Nowhere, Texas. But there is plenty of help out there, and you shouldn't feel embarrassed to ask.

- a. **Your former band directors:** Contact the ones that taught you. They will be more than happy to share their experiences with you and give advice.
- b. **Retired band directors:** They can be few and far between, but they are out there and will LOVE being asked for advice or help teaching as needed.
- c. **Surrounding band directors:** Get in touch with other band directors around you. They will be very helpful and can serve as "free" clinicians right before contest!
- d. **TMEA Mentoring Network** TMEA does offer a mentoring program. If you are not sure where to turn for help, contact the representative in your region and they will set you up with a very experienced, knowledgeable band director in your region that will be more than willing to share advice and stop by to help you out as needed.

2. GET ORGANIZED

As you encounter the single director experience, you will find yourself being pulled in many directions at one time. You will have to make lesson plans and keep track of many different classes and age groups everyday! Many directors find themselves having to teach elementary music classes, beginning band, junior high band AND high school band. We all know how much planning goes into each class and how overwhelming it can be. Here's what's helped me to stay organized and "on top" of things.

- a. Make a "TO – DO" list, and constantly update it. Trust me... you will forget if you don't write it down!
- b. Do you have a filing cabinet?? USE IT!!
- c. Keep all inventories updated. Even include an instrument repair log.
- d. Keep your library in order.
- e. All jokes aside.... Keep your office clean!

I do not have time to waste on searching for anything. I never want to spend more than one minute looking as I do not have one minute to spare!

3. SET GOALS

Sounds better than writing lesson plans doesn't it? What do you want to accomplish today? Tomorrow? This week? This semester? This year? The next 5 years? Write your goals and keep them posted as a constant reminder of what you want. There are no "crazy" goals. It also helps to periodically involve your students on the goal setting process. Remember, this is never just YOUR band.

Now that you have set your goals, the true key to success is how you will accomplish those goals. And an entire book could be (and many have been) written on that very subject.

4. YOU NEED SUPPORT

a. STUDENTS

It is impossible to build a successful program without the support of your students. If they won't buy into your program, no one will! Base every decision you make on what will be best for your students. Ask yourself, "Will this give my students the music education they need?" "Will they enjoy this music and want to come back for more?" "Will this help **MOTIVATE** my students?" "Will this fulfill the goals I have set?"

b. ADMINISTRATION

Success also comes with the support of your administration. Be courteous and help them **UNDERSTAND** the importance of what you do. When a problem arises, don't just tell them the problem, but offer the solution. Stay in constant communication with your administration and let them know what's going on in your world. The more distant you are from them, the less they will know how you are doing and the more they will assume "everything is fine!"

c. PARENTS / COMMUNITY

Nothing is worse than a crowd that gets up at halftime for a burger, or performing for a nearly empty auditorium. Do the little things that your parents and community will enjoy and appreciate, and they will show you more support than you could imagine.

1. Play stand tunes that you know the crowd will enjoy.
2. Perform a concert with at least a song or two that you know the audience will recognize.
3. Involve parents on trips, setting up for concerts, fundraisers, etc.
4. Involve the community to participate with your band.
5. Do something that musically links the band to the community. (Mariachi, Polka, Jazz, etc.)
6. March in a parade
7. **ATTEND YOUR BAND BOOSTER'S MEETINGS!!**

However, if you win over the hearts of the students, you will not have any problem winning over the hearts of the parents and community.

5. EFFICIENCY IS EVERYTHING

Work smart, not hard. I think I've read that in several books and it is so true. Effective score study and lesson plans are key to being ready for every rehearsal and being ready for as many "surprises" as might jump at you. Never show up to a rehearsal unprepared or to "wing it." You don't have time to waste! Most of us have very limited time with our students with very little before/after school rehearsal. Make what little time you have with your students count. Remember, it's not how long you rehearse, it's what and how you rehearse.

6. NEVER PROCRASTINATE!

All jokes aside... Don't put something off for another day! Sure you could wait till the end of the six weeks to enter all those grades on the computer. But who wants to spend an entire Saturday morning doing something like that?? Paperwork will never magically go away and will only greatly increase as time goes by. Make it a point to set aside time everyday to stay current with all paperwork, grades, lesson plans, etc.

7. COMMUNICATE

Get out of the "band cave" every now and then, adjust your eyes to the unfamiliar sunlight, and **TALK TO SOMEONE!!** No, there is not much time to socialize when you're doing this job on your own, but you must communicate with others. Get to know the teachers on your campus. Sit down at least once a week with your administration. Contact parents as frequently as possible (many times this can be done in the local grocery store!). Contact other band directors. Just keep communicating with everyone. Let them know what's going on with you and the band program. **Avoid isolation!**

8. BE CREATIVE & FLEXIBLE

When you're in a small school, by yourself, you will be faced with limited resources, funds, and time. Wouldn't it be nice if we could schedule sectionals when we wanted to and not have to worry about athletic schedules? Wouldn't it be nice if we had the funds to purchase all the new instruments we need and send these kids on a nice trip? Wouldn't it be nice if we had private lesson teachers of every instrument able to stop by our band hall on a daily basis to help our students? **OF COURSE IT WOULD!**

Now back to reality... We have to share kids with so many other activities, so be flexible with what you ask of your students and when you expect them to do it. Be willing to work with coaches and other activity sponsors and you'll be surprised at how willing they will be to work with you. Be creative with fundraising and budget wisely. Do you really need a brand new marching baritone or could you save a little money and get a used one? Be prepared to be creative in all you do and be willing to be flexible, otherwise you'll just stress yourself out more than you need to!

9. THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO LEARN

I often miss that first year of teaching when I knew EVERYTHING!! I was practically invincible. I had all the right answers and I was going to teach this world a thing or two. Of course now I realize that I know NOTHING and have so much left to learn.

To be successful, you must keep an open mind, be willing to learn from others and try new ideas. Reading books and actually attending the clinics at TBA and TMEA will give you a much greater knowledge on what you are here for. Go watch another school's rehearsal. Call a fellow band director in your area that's been very successful and ask them how they do what they do. None of us will ever have all the answers, so we must continue to learn just as we expect our students to constantly continue to learn.

10. HAVE FUN!

It's very easy to get wrapped up in trying to build a successful program. It can be very stressful and demanding at times and take up many hours out of your day.

Don't forget why you're doing what you're doing. It's because you enjoy it and you have fun doing it. You have a passion for music and you want to share that with your students. That should be your primary goal with all the awards to fall a distant second or even further down the list of priorities! **HAVE FUN BEING A BAND DIRECTOR!**

Some bright points when you're then only director in town...

- You get to make all the decisions and monitor every aspect of the band program!
- You become a specialist on EVERY band instrument!
- You know every student and get to form special bonds over the years you will teach them.
- In many cases, you are the "music man" for the community!
- You will be more appreciated, respected and loved.

SHINER ISD BANDS

Beginners: All 6th grade students in Shiner Elementary are required to take band. The beginning band is separated into two heterogeneous classes of 15-20 students that meet for nearly 50 minutes daily.

Beginning students are instructed with the Essential Elements 2000 method book as well as supplements including scale and rhythm worksheets and full band concert music. Emphasis is placed on creating a high quality sound on each student's instrument. Students are taught basic music theory prior to beginning band to allow more time spent teaching the instrument. The beginning band performs two concerts annually.

Junior High: The Junior High Band consists of only 7th grade students and meets as a full band for 46 minutes daily. The average band size is 25-30 students.

Students are encouraged to audition for All-Region Band and Solo & Ensemble. The band performs for several pep rallies in the fall as well as three concerts throughout the year. The Junior High Band does not attend UIL Concert & Sightreading, but does take part in a festival at the end of the year.

High School: The High School Band consists of students in grades 8-12 and meets as a full band for 46 minutes daily. The average size of the band is around 70 members.

Summer Band begins on August 1 and runs for only two weeks allowing time for full band practice and sectionals each day. Once school starts, full band practice is set to meet either Monday or Tuesday nights (based on the volleyball schedule) from 7:00-8:30. Sectionals take place from 7:00-7:40 a.m.

Students are encouraged to do extra performance opportunities such as auditioning for All-Region Band, Solo & Ensemble, Polka Band or Jazz Band. Each of these are extra and must meet outside the regular school day.

Duties: As I do this job on my own, the administration does not expect any extra duties outside the band hall. However, I do take time to help others as much as possible, and I am required to drive the bus on all band trips. Currently I have been teaching grades 4 & 5 music and band for grades 6-12. I also sponsor the UIL Music Memory teams.

Fundraising: We are blessed with an incredibly hard working band booster organization that helps fund the band. Concession stands, a Christmas Raffle, and a dinner help maintain those funds. Also, our band does a BBQ every spring for 1,500 people which helps fund our spring trip and purchase a new instrument or two.

Contact Information

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