

The Beginning Band Process: Getting The Right Kids On The Right Instrument

Texas Bandmaster's Association Convention: July 2011

Brent Cannon, Lindale Junior High

This clinic will deal with:

1. Some recruiting ideas—but not many since other clinics are doing that during this convention.
2. Types of information to collect from and about students.
3. How to store and organize that information.
4. Organized approach to testing students.

Quick Recruiting Thoughts:

1. Some places do not have to do much recruiting while others do.
2. Concerts for younger students using music they know and can sing to.
3. The younger the players, the better--so let your beginners play for the grade directly beneath them several times if possible.
4. Director visibility and likeability with the younger grades.
5. Either Junior High or beginners playing in the hallways at Christmas.
6. Beginner Band day trip.
7. Either JH or HS Auxiliary Units perform for younger grades.
8. Good idea to also talk about grades and conduct as well.

In his book, "**Effective Performance of Band Music,**"

W. Francis McBeth said: Pitch is a direct result of balance. So to achieve good pitch, good balance is the vehicle. If the conductor cannot describe to his band his concept of balance and how to achieve it, then he is leaving to pure chance the sound of the ensemble. He then begins his "**Pyramid of Sound**" description

I would add this thought: Balance is easier to achieve with good instrumentation and capable players on every instrument in sufficient quantities.

Historical Instrumentation:

Standard band instrumentation has been very fluid over the past 150 years as you might expect. Numerous things have influenced it in the past, the present and certainly will in the future. Instruments that were once very common are no longer used and probably not even manufactured

Historical Instrumentation

"A History of the Wind Band" by Stephen L. Rhode

| Instrument | Gilmore 1878 | Sousa 1892 | Illinois 1938 | NSB Contest 1927 |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|---------------|------------------|
| Piccolo/Flute | 2 | | 10 | 4 |
| Flute | 2 | 2 | | 2 |
| Oboe | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| English Horn | | | 2 | 1 |
| Baritone Oboe | | | 1 | |
| Heckelphone | | | 1 | |
| Sarrusophone | | | 1 | |
| Ab Clarinet | 1 | | | |
| Eb Clarinet | 3 | 2 | | 2 |
| Bb Clarinet | 16 | 14 | 24 | 24 |
| Alto/Bass | ? | 2 | 10 | 3 |
| Contrabass Clar | | | 3 | |
| Basset Horn | | | 1 | |
| Bassoon | 6 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Contra Bassoon | 4 | | 1 | |
| Alto Sax/Saxes | 1 | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| Tenor Sax | 1 | | | 1 |
| Bari Sax | 1 | | | 1 |
| Bass Saxophone | 1 | | | 1 |
| Eb Cornet | 1 | | | |
| Cornet | 4 | 4 | 7 | 2 |
| Trumpet | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Flugelhorn | 2 | | 2 | 2 |
| Alto Flugelhorn | | | 1 | |
| Horn | 4 | 4 | 10 | 4 |
| Trombone | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Bass Trombone | | | 2 | |
| Alto Horn | 2 | | | |
| Tenor Horn | 2 | | | |
| Euphonium | 2 | 2 | 3 | |
| Baritone | | | 2 | 2 |
| Eb Tuba | | | 1 | 2 |
| Dbl Bb Tuba | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| Dbl Eb Tuba | | | 1 | |
| String Bass | | | 2 | |
| Harp | | | 1 | |
| Marimba | | | 2 | |
| Percussion | | 3 | 5 | ? |
| Timpani | | | | ? |

Questions You And/Or Your Staff Must Decide:

1. Is balanced instrumentation important?
2. What is your philosophy of balanced instrumentation?
3. Is spreading out the “good kids” important?
4. Are you willing to be honest with students/parents about their choices, preferences and what you think?
5. Is somebody willing to say “No” to students/parents about certain instruments?
6. Will you have administrative support when you say “No?”
7. Are you willing to let a student drop out of band if they do not get to play what they want to play?

Lindale Band Target Instrumentation:

It is best to have a “**Lead Dog**” that all testers communicate with throughout the process. This person does not necessarily do all of the testing, but everything is funneled through them in order to help keep things on track.

Here Is Our Basic Timeline:

1. Coordinate all dates with principals in the summer or beginning of the school year. Christmas Concerts for all grade levels played by various grade levels.
2. February 1: letter home and mass phone message to 5th grade parents about 6th grade concert and the instrument selection process. **See letter attached in this handout.**
3. Concert is usually the week after TMEA. **See Concert Agenda attached in this handout.**
4. Within a few days we begin administering the Selmer Music Guidance Survey.
5. The above is done before elective choice sheets are sent home.
6. March: collection and input of data, certain instruments might be tested
7. End of April/First of May: majority of instrument testing is done.
8. End of May: letters sent home/posted on web site with instrument assignments. **See attached letter.**

Using the Selmer Survey:

1. Recommend you do it in reasonably sized groups. We do 50-75 students during their PE class in an auditorium.
2. Place instruments out for them to see and write the instrument names on the board.
3. Obtain any personal information that you determine will help you later on in the process.
4. There are some other music surveys available to use.

Front of the Selmer Survey Card:

1. First and Last Name as it appears on your report card.
2. Some way to find them later on in the process. We have them put down their PE period and their homeroom teacher.
3. We have them list their top four choices in order. Percussion and Double Reeds are not an option yet at this point.
4. When they have made their top choices, we then have them write down Percussion and/or Double Reeds at the top of the card if they are interested in these.

Back of the Selmer Survey Card: This section takes about 20 minutes to complete.

1. Section A is two pitches played with the second being higher, the same or lower.
2. Section B is two chords with the second being the same or different.
3. Section C is two melodies with the second being the same or different.
4. Section D is two rhythms with the second being the same or different.

After The Survey Is Finished:

1. Grade them—applied music students are quite capable of doing this.
2. Get a list of all students from the PEIMS coordinator, counselor, etc. I have them email it to me so I can copy/paste into Excel. I get the student's name, ID# and their homeroom teacher.
3. Obtain their most recent report card. I do this after the 4th Six-Weeks. I then eyeball the grades, not including PE/General Music, to get an average. I use a numbering system to identify them academically in Excel.

1=95+ 2=90-95 3=85-90 4=80-85 5=75-80 6=70-75 7=fails some 8=fails lots

I do combine numbers if needed. **4,7** would mean they might make mostly B's, but might fail something periodically. A **4,8** would mean they make B's, but almost always fail something.

I also include a column for comments, which is where conduct, teacher comments, etc. would go. I do send a list of all students to their teachers to ask for this information. **See attached letter.**

More Stuff!

1. I try to input the grades, conduct and other comments while the Selmer Survey cards are being graded.
2. As Selmer cards are graded I get somebody to help me input their PE period, interest in Percussion and/or Double Reeds, their instrument choices in order and their total Selmer score.
3. When available, I get a list of students that actually signed up for Beginner Band and indicate that in my Excel document with a "Y." Do not delete those who did not sign up for band because some of them will eventually decide to be in band.
4. I show the list of those who did sign up for band to the principal and the PE coach for any insight that might be helpful.

Our Excel Spreadsheet:

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Student ID#
4. Homeroom Teacher
5. PE Period—to locate them easier when we begin testing
6. Assignment—when finally decided
7. Academic Grades per our scoring system—1,2,3,4,5,6,7.
8. Comments—conduct, etc.
9. Drums?—interested in playing percussion
10. Double Reed?—interested?
11. Band?—signed up for band "Y" or "N"
12. Verify?—"Y" after checking at end
13. First Choice
14. Second Choice
15. Third Choice
16. Fourth Choice
17. Selmer Score

The Basic Instruments:

1. **Flute:** No teardrop or double-jointed fingers. Even teeth that will align in the front. Straight lips with some cushion to bottom lip. Diamond shaped aperture and fairly long fingers are best.
2. **Clarinet:** Avoid protruding top teeth or sharp, jagged bottom teeth. Avoid a thin bottom lip. Long fingers with good pads on the tips are advantageous.
3. **Saxophone:** Basically the same as clarinet, but can have uneven teeth. Large hands are advantageous.
4. **Trumpet:** Even teeth with a pointed chin. Medium to thin lips with the top lip having good color. The three fingers of the right hand need to work well.
5. **Horn:** Even teeth with thin lips. Good sense of pitch.
6. **Low Brass:** Even teeth are not as critical. Large chin and big chest cavity. Medium to full lips. Good distance from nose to top lip. Look for long -waisted students. Arm length is important for trombone players. Long teeth are fine if the lips cover them. Beware of flat chested students.
7. **Percussion:** Good score on rhythm chest. Good coordination. Piano background is helpful.

Instrument Selection Chart:

Teeth: 1=Even; 2=Uneven

Chin: 3=Large, round or square; 4=Pointed or sharp

Lips: 5=Full or large; 6=Medium; 7=Thin

| | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| 1,3,5: | Trombone, Baritone, Tuba | 2,3,5: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Bassoon |
| 1,3,6: | Trumpet, Trombone, Baritone | 2,3,6: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Oboe |
| 1,3,7: | Trumpet, French Horn, Flute | 2,3,7: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Oboe |
| 1,4,5: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Flute | 2,4,5: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Bassoon |
| 1,4,6: | Clarinet, Flute | 2,4,6: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Oboe, Bassoon |
| 1,4,7: | Trumpet, French Horn, Flute | 2,4,7: | Clarinet, Saxophone, Oboe |

Instrument Personalities: Yes, instruments do tend to attract certain personalities. This is not 100% nor has it been scientifically proven. However, most of you understand this statement.

The following comes from the Kimbrough Band in Mesquite ISD:

1. Flute: Good students with self-assured personalities, "over-achievers," and are comfortable with competition.
2. Oboe/Bassoon: Tend to be reliable, generally independent and creative students who enjoy working with puzzles and with their hands. Usually straight "A" students.
3. Clarinet: Enjoy working in big groups.
4. Saxophone: Student should enjoy competition as this instrument is very popular.
5. Trumpet: Generally self-assured, confident, showy temperament.
6. French Horn: Determined, bright with good ear for small changes in pitch.

7. Trombone: Determined, bright with good ear for small changes in pitch.
8. Baritone/Tuba: Good sense of rhythm, responsible, good-natured
9. Percussion: Comfortable with intense competition, keen sense of rhythm with excellent hand/eye coordination. A/B student with good organizational skills.

Now It Really Begins!!

1. We only test students that actually signed up for band.
2. We start with percussion, flutes and saxes since those are the instruments that we tend to limit the numbers and also tend to be the most popular.
3. Students are selected to be tested by a combination of student preference, academic grades, conduct and Selmer score before they are actually tested by a band director.
4. If one of these students qualifies on more than one of these instruments, we let them choose which one they want to play.
5. Once done with these instruments, it might be a good idea to let all those who were tested know whether they were selected or not.
6. Most likely, all of these students are probably academically ranked as a 1,2,3, or 4.

Some Things We Do: Woodwinds

1. Flute—Sharon Bird: Reasonably straight teeth, medium to thin lips. I always check lips for cupid's bow or v on top. Sometimes this straightens out as they form embouchure or may move slightly to side. They should be able to produce two to four pitches on the head joint within a few minutes. I try to keep students with a B average or above.
2. Clarinet—Casey Johnson: Do they have an overbite, underbite? Can they make the embouchure and keep their cheeks from puffing? Can they feel a difference in their chin being flat or not? Can they keep a sustained, correct sound on the mouthpiece?
3. Saxophone—Sharon Bird: checked on teeth and lip structure. Making sure they can put mouthpiece in mouth without rolling lips in. Top teeth on mouthpiece and just a thin pillow of lip on bottom teeth. I also check the size of their hands to be sure they are capable of reaching around the body of an alto sax. Of course I try to find out if the cost is feasible for the family. Asking a few questions about family helps such as how long have you lived here, where do you live, who do you live with, what do they do for a living, etc?

Some Things We Do: Brass


1. Trumpet—Ben Davis: I ask them to buzz on a mouthpiece with very little coaching from me. Just the basic information that they need to know. I believe that a student should be able to buzz a second-line G with little effort in order to be a trumpet player. If they cannot do that, we move to a bigger mouthpiece. I also ask them to match pitch singing with me.
2. Horn—Sue Scott: Hum pitch and see how well they match. Flat chin and piano background is helpful. Do they have a natural down angle with the mouthpiece and is 2/3 top lip a comfortable fit? Blank looks are not good.
3. Low Brass—Brent Cannon: I ask them to buzz without too much explanation. I like for them to be able to buzz at least an F for trombone and baritone. A low buzz is good for tuba, but many will not be able to do this very well. Since we use ¾ size tubas with our beginners, size is not as much of an issue. Beware of students with a pointed facial structure for tuba.


Percussion Specifics:

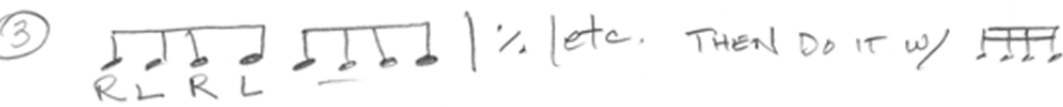

1. From **Ben Davis**: Our percussionists are selected for testing based on a combination of their Selmer Music Test scores, academic grades, conduct, and Percussion Aptitude Test.
2. I do run the metronome (not too loudly) during the entire test. We play these exercises on the knee.
3. Lines 1,3,4, and 6 are done **together** with the student. I demonstrate what we will do, and then the student joins me. I stress the importance of playing exactly with me. I will ask them questions as we are playing some of the simple exercises (Lines 1 and 3)...i.e.. "How old are you?" "Have you lived in Lindale all of your life?"
4. Lines 2, 5, and 7 are a 'call and response' exercise. I will instruct the student that I will play the rhythm for him/her and they are to repeat exactly what they hear (play it back to me).
5. I give each student a score on each line ranging from 0-10 points.


PERCUSSION APTITUDE TEST


$\text{♩} = 106$ FOR EACH LINE

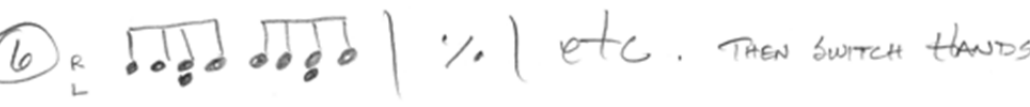
① C  (etc.)


②  ||

③  (etc.) THEN DO IT w/ 

④  (etc.)

⑤  ||

⑥  (etc.) THEN SWITCH HANDS

⑦  (etc.)

⑧ SING - MATCH PITCH

Some Final Thoughts:

1. During this process, I constantly sort and see where we are with regards to instrumentation on the 1-4's and our target numbers. If needed, we do go back and do a bit of recruiting for specific instruments. After that, we move on to the 5's and then finish with the 6-8's.
2. I advise using caution/discretion when assigning students with either academic or conduct concerns to a school instrument. If they always fail, they are taking up a school instrument and not contributing. Bad conduct tends to show itself with careless handling or abuse of the instrument and/or going to alternative education. The tax payers of your district have entrusted you with their investment in the band.
3. If numbers on French horn, baritone or tuba are a bit low don't get too worried as there tends to be good students who you can move over when they cannot obtain an instrument on their original assignment.
4. When all assignments are made, I have a quick meeting with each student to make sure they have visited with their parents and to verify their assignment. If there is a question, I address it as the situation warrants.

The Finish Line!

- 1) When all is finally finished, we send a letter home with their assignment, information about the horn drive the next school year, used instruments, etc. We actually give it to them through their homeroom teacher. This letter, along with a complete list of names and assignments is posted on the school website. **Attached at end.**
- 2) We also provide a list of Preferred Instruments and Acceptable Instruments. **Attached at end of handout.**
- 3) Anytime you send out a letter you need to be mindful of any local, small music stores in your community and include them in any way that you can if at all possible.
- 4) If you feel like it is necessary and would be beneficial, you might have an optional parent meeting for any that might have questions. We have done this, but no longer do since we do not feel like it has been overly helpful.
- 5) Even though you provide information to students and parents about your process, you still need to expect that some will act like they have never heard any of this before and wish they had known!

If you would like a copy of this Power Point or need a copy of the handout please contact me after convention and I will get it to you. It will also be available on the TBA website after convention.

brentcannon@yahoo.com

cannonbc@lind.sprnet.org

Thank you to: Texas Bandmaster's Association

Lindale Band Staff

Former Co-workers

Chris Brown, Mesquite ISD