



# **Building a Successful Program in the Small School**

**CLINICIANS:**

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## **Texas Bandmasters Association 2016 Convention/Clinic**

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HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

# **Texas Bandmasters Association**

## **Building a Successful Program in the Small School**

**July 21, 2016 – 1:30 pm**

### **New Diana High School Band**

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There are certain things that every band program must have in place in order to be successful. You will find no substitute for solid fundamental teaching and playing. However, teaching in a small school does present a unique set of challenges that must be approached correctly in order to ensure that our students still receive the best educational experience possible. In this packet you will find both general and specific recommendations for getting the most out of your small school musical ensembles.

### **Setting Realistically High Standards**

- Too often, small school band directors will make excuses as to why their students “can’t” perform at a high level. We may never play Maslanka’s “4th Symphony” or Respighi’s “The Pines of Rome”, but we can still expect our students to display.....
  - Proper posture
  - Proper hand position
  - Good fundamental tone quality
  - Proficiency in a uniform counting system throughout all grade levels
  - Knowledge of note names and fingerings (do not allow students to write in fingerings)
  - Understanding of musical vocabulary
- Checking for correct fundamentals can easily be overlooked when there are only one or two people on staff. However, you must force yourself to teach proper fundamentals starting with your beginners, and then correct problems that arise the moment that you see them. This approach will ensure a higher ceiling of achievement.
- Require accountability through music pass off assignments that are graded. Utilize individual pass off times to reinforce playing fundamentals. Constantly reiterate individual emphasis on group goals.
- Your students don’t have to play puny and “small” just because they attend a small school. Have your students listen to professional recordings and emulate the sounds that they hear.
- Don’t use inexperience as a crutch. To quote Mark Twain, “All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.” Often times, we can make up for the experience that we do not have by working hard and believing in ourselves.

### **Pedagogical Considerations**

- If your school will allow it, split your beginner classes into like instruments. The beginner year is the most important year of band. It is next to impossible for many students to recover from a poor start on their instrument. The more you can make your instruction “instrument specific” the better off you will be.
- Learn to play the instruments that you teach well enough to make a middle school all-region honor band.
- When there is no private lesson staff, brass players must become woodwind and percussion specialists and vice-versa. No one else will teach your students alternate fingerings, natural tuning tendencies, equipment needs, etc. The key to growing top level players is private instruction.

- Invite successful teachers that you trust to watch you teach and offer suggestions for improvement. We should learn to teach the same way that we hopefully learned to play an instrument: constant and quality feedback.
- Find a way to pay guest clinicians to come to your band hall. Most professional players have experience teaching students at every level and are more than happy to spend a day in your band hall. Sometimes, they will even help you for very little pay; all you have to do is ask.
- Listen to good music played by the top collegiate and professional ensembles. We must keep our ears cleaned out if we want to have high ensemble expectations in our own rehearsals and performances.

### **Program Management**

- Band directors wear many hats and can easily get bogged down in their clerical duties. However, band directors should try to do only the things that only band directors can do. Delegate everything else. Train assistant directors, student leaders, and parent volunteers to copy music, arrange chairs, stuff envelopes, update the band Facebook page, etc. Set your expectations, monitor progress, and stay out of the way as much as possible.
- While the small school band director is required to be a secretary, counselor, disciplinarian, and an administrator, the most important job will always be teaching. Make sure that you do not consistently neglect your students to do paper work.
- Organizational Tips
  - Keep a file for every event that takes place throughout the school year. This file should contain copies of informational letters, schedules, logistical plans, and points for improvement for the next time that event will take place.
  - Create folders and folders within folders on your computer to make it easier to find and update documents from year to year. Label documents clearly and concisely.
  - Try to touch every piece of paper that comes across your desk only one time. Dealing with papers the first time you see them will prevent your work space from getting disorganized and will prevent you from missing deadlines.
- Communication Tips
  - Use tools such as mass emails, a band Facebook page, a band website, and text message chains to communicate with your students and parents. Update regularly!
  - Important items such as performance calendars and trip information should still go home by regular mail in addition to emails and Facebook.
  - Publicize your group. Send in pictures and captions to local newspapers that describe recent achievements. Invite local newspaper and television reporters to interview your students when an event or achievement calls for it.

## **Philosophical Approach**

Like all professions, philosophical approaches vary greatly in the music education business. Some programs are primarily focused on winning contests while others simply go through the motions. How do we avoid these extremes? What does success look like? Consider these questions.

- What are the students *really* learning? Do they love playing great music? Do they feel bad about themselves if they don't "win" the big one?
- Do you enjoy going to work? If not, what can you do to fix that? Have you given up?
- Do you focus only on the destination or do you take time to enjoy the journey? Do your students enjoy the journey?
- Are you sensitive to those students that "do it all?" Do you come unhinged before you hear the whole story about a conflict with a scheduled rehearsal or performance? Do you look for positive solutions and ways to find positive compromises or do you fly off the handle about every little thing?

The answers to these thought provoking questions will not be the same for every person. If you find yourself not knowing the answer to one of these questions or hundreds more, it is time to pick up the phone or send an email. The minute that we think we have it all figured out is the minute that we should find a different career! Pick the brains of those that you admire and trust!!! Never forget the important jobs such as teaching students to love music, to respect themselves as a person, to respect others, and to grow up and advocate for our art.

## **New Diana High School Eagle Band – Program at a Glance**

### Student Numbers

- Band Membership - Seniors (14), Juniors (18), Sophomores (15), Freshman (10), 8<sup>th</sup> Grade (24), 7<sup>th</sup> Grade (36), 6<sup>th</sup> (49) – 164 total
- High School Student Body – 277
- Middle School Student Body – 246

### Class Schedule Set Up

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Flute
  - Clarinet and Saxophone combined
  - Trumpet and French Horn combined
  - Trombone, Baritone, and Tuba combined
  - Percussion

- Students aren't transferred to double reed instruments or low woodwinds until around eighth grade. Following this timeline enables a director to obtain a good sense of a student's work ethic and loyalty to the program.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Band
  - All instruments meet during one class period.
- High School Band
  - Grades 8-12.
    - All students meet at one time. We are able to do this easily because the high school and middle school are at the same campus.

#### High School Rehearsal Schedule (*6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade meet almost exclusively during their regular class period*)

- 7:35-8:45 a.m. Monday through Friday during marching season. 7:55-8:45 a.m. during concert season.
- Evening rehearsals are Monday from 7:00-9:00 p.m. through marching contest and as needed to prepare for concert and sight reading contest.
- Sectionals are held before and after school as needed during concert season.
- Music pass off assignments are performed before or after school throughout the school year.

#### Method Books

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade – Essential Elements (Hal-Leonard Corporation)
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade and High School Band – Foundations for Superior Performance (Kjos Music Company)
- All Grade Levels – Supplemental materials as needed designed by directors to meet the needs of the class.

#### Music Selections

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade – Beginning level only. Students will learn three or four full band works during the sixth grade year.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade – Texas UIL Prescribed Music List (PML) Grade 1 (or comparable pieces that are not on the list for non-UIL concerts)
- High School Band – Texas PML Grade 3, 4, and 5. We usually perform one grade 3 and one grade 4 along with a grade 3 or 4 march for UIL contest and then we sometimes play a grade 5 at the spring concert.

Teaching band at the highest level is a lifelong pursuit. Never stop self-assessing to see where you can improve. There are definitely limitations that come with teaching in a small school. However, we should only accept the actual limitations that exist. Things like the number of students in a school district, the size of a budget, the age and quality of rehearsal facilities, and the number of activities students are involved in will always cause it to feel like a small school. All other limitations such as playing ability, student "buy in" to the program, and musical achievement are self-imposed. We must never "settle" for a mediocre product just because we teach in a small school.

# Building a Successful Program in the Small School

## Mineola High School Band

Chris Brannan

Director of Bands- Mineola ISD

### Mineola ISD Band –Program at a Glance

#### Student Numbers

- Band Membership – Seniors (21), Juniors (18), Sophomores (20), Freshman (21), 8<sup>th</sup> grade (62), 7<sup>th</sup> grade (67), 6<sup>th</sup> grade (100)
- High School Student Body – 450
- Middle School Student Body - 335

#### Class Schedule Set Up

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - Class 1- Percussion/Flute
  - Class 2- Trumpet/Clarinet
  - Class 3- Saxophone/Horn
  - Class 4- Trombone/Baritone/Tuba
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Band (Concert Band) - 67 students
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Band (Symphonic Band)- 62 students (select 7<sup>th</sup> graders)
- High School Band  
Grades 9-12 (all students meet 1<sup>st</sup> period)

#### High School Band Rehearsal Schedule

- 7:30-8:45 Monday through Friday during marching season. 7:45-8:45 during concert season.
- Evening rehearsals are Monday from 6:30-9:00 through marching contest and again 3 or 4 times in the spring before concert contest.
- Sectionals are held before or after school as needed.

- Music is passed off to squad leaders during marching season and for a director in concert season. Squad leaders pass off earlier than the other band members.

#### Method Books

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade -Accent on Achievement (but switch every couple years)
- 7-12 Grade –Foundations for a Superior Performance and supplement as needed

#### Music Selections

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade-2 concerts with 3 selections and section features for each concert. Attend spring festival at Sound Post Music Festivals.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Concert Band- Attend pre-UIL contest, UIL Contest, and Sound Post Music Festival
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Symphonic Band-Attend pre-UIL contest, UIL Contest, Sound Post Music Festival
- High School Band- Perform grade 3 level music for UIL but striving to work up to grade 4 in the future.

#### Objective Sheets

- Used with the middle school and high school bands.
- Teaches responsibility.
- Students have an urgency to pass off their objectives.
- Gives you plenty of grades!

#### The Small School Marching Program

Teach marching fundamentals every day!

- You have to work the fundamentals to get a show made up of marching fundamentals to look good.
- Work the fundamentals you actually use like forward march, backward march, slides, etc.
- Use the track to teach glide step, carriage, and principles of guiding. Play whole note scales during summer band on the track and have students evaluate their individual sounds.

Pick a great show!

- Does the show do the following? Make the students better players and push them musically? Does the show entertain the crowd and the judges? Is the show something the students, school and your community can buy into?



Use all of your time!

- Have procedures in place, and teach your students those procedures.
- Have efficient and productive rehearsals. Don't waste your time or your students' time. Keep it moving!
- Shut up! Don't overload the students with information. Sometimes saying nothing is all you have to say.

Teach from the tower!

- Work the details even early on in the season. Demand that your students demonstrate proper marching fundamentals every day. Don't forget to teach the music. Use the concert band approach on the field.
- Consider making a drill/music book to help you teach the show better. The book will save you a lot of time in the end.
- "Set to Set" or "Continuous" followed by four clicks and go!

Get out there and see some bands!

- Go watch some other directors in your area. This is where you can pick up new ideas and bring them home to your group.
- Ask questions and invite quality directors to watch your group and your rehearsals. Have them critique your rehearsals. Are you maximizing your time? Are the students engaged and practicing with a purpose? Do your rehearsals make everyone involved feel productive and leave your students with a positive attitude?
- Be open to criticism. Put on your big boy pants!

### **Daily Rehearsal Procedures**

Our routine

- Stretch block (2-3 minutes) DM takes attendance, student leader leads stretches, front ensembles sets up and I make announcements for the day.
- Marching Fundamentals in same block (5-10) minutes. No set routine for fundamentals and commands given by director. This allows me to change it up daily and work certain areas of marching that need more attention. I also use the met and change tempos working slow and fast marching tempos from the show. Directors and student leaders step out as needed to help monitor progress. Break into sections as needed to allow leaders more time with their sections and state goals for the rehearsal. Front ensemble rehearses during block time.
- Full band warm up in opening set, big hit set, or a set that you will begin on that day. (5 minutes) These "hold" sets are great places to work your sound while playing your warm up and rehearsing your music. Try using a box drill during your warm up.

- Rehearse music in stand still set. (10 minutes) Students march drill in place while focusing on the music.
- Start rehearsal on your show! (45 minutes) Rehearse till the last second and then give any last reminders and a positive comment or two as the students leave the field.

#### Evening Rehearsals-Learning Drill

- We use coordinate drill charts and every student is responsible for their finding their drill spots. This helps my students be more committed because they don't want to be the last person standing. Sit when you find spot and finger through that sets music.
- Flip folders are required at every practice all season. Daily grades are given at random, simply by having the students raise their flip folder above their head. Folders are on a string and around each student's neck. This includes battery and front ensemble. Students can memorize music, use folder as a reference for learning their sets, and I can rehearse any measure like we are in the band hall.
- Learning drill- in this order...find new set, check it, sit down on your spot, study music for that set, stand up together, no talking, directors adjust and check from tower, students mark spot with chalk, step it back on their own, march it sizzling and then march it playing.....one more time.....one more time.....one more time!

#### **Student Leadership is a must!**

- Have a leadership group and use them.
- Student leaders can run a rehearsal in your absence.
- Let them be involved and meet with them often.
- Give them the information and let them teach it.
- Let them hold their sections accountable.
- Our warm up time before a marching contest is 85% student led.

## **Philosophical Approach**

- “Rome wasn’t built in a day” so give your students time to get it!! Let them have the time to get better.
- Be a professional in every way. Be a positive role model on campus and in the community. Make your students proud that you are the director.
- Teach your students to be respectful of other organizations at your school or other schools. We have to be the adult and teach our students something bigger than a halftime show.
- Make the decision. It doesn’t matter how your band looks as long as EVERYONE does it the same way. Let your students know that discipline is important and having the ability to “perfect” a job will help them “get” the job later in life.
- Teach discipline through rigor and structure. Have a plan everyday and procedures in place for every minute of your rehearsal. The students will appreciate this and you will be able to teach without spending all your time being a disciplinarian.
- Let your technology help you make your band better. Don’t let it make you a less of a director. Greet your students at the door and talk to them. Put the phone down and get out of your office and enjoy your students. They want to know that you care about something besides band, like them.

## **Final Thoughts**

- Pick your battles and only try to change the things you can’t live with....Adapt your teaching style if needed.
- Plan your work and work your plan! Be organized and let your students see your ability to plan and prepare for great rehearsals every day of the year.
- There are no secrets to success, just treat your students with dignity and respect. All kids want to be successful and that is no different in a small school. Give them that opportunity!
- Inspire great attitudes in your students! They are contagious!
- Create a family atmosphere! Let them have some fun and plan time to do things outside of band.

And finally.....remember kids don’t really care how much you know, but how much you care.