



**The “Nuts and Bolts” of Teaching Band, Part 4:
Are Your Eighth Graders Ready for
High School Band?**

CLINICIANS:

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Are your 8th graders ready for High School?

The “Nuts and Bolts” of Teaching Band

Texas Bandmaster’s Association Convention 2016

Side note: If you would have asked me this question 3 years ago, I would have had completely different answers for you.

Three Personal Rules:

- I don’t want kids quitting band because of me.
- I don’t want kids falling out of love with music because of me.
- I don’t want kids to be hindered in the future because of something I neglected to teach them in middle school.

Remember that any high expectations you have for your 8th graders all start with your beginners.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Are you creating your future stars in the 6th grade?
- Are you teaching students with the end goal in mind?
- Are you consistent with the “small details” that will eventually make the “big differences”?
- Are you putting the same investment into your Non-Varsity students?
- Are you making your students think? No, really....are you?
- Do the students feel challenged? Overwhelmed? Underwhelmed? Whelmed?
- Do your kids like you?
- Is the juice worth the squeeze?
- Are you sending kids to high school? It is our job! (Mallow and Merrill)

Accountability

- Attendance/Punctuality (gets them ready for marching band)
- Instrument Maintenance (home horns as well)
- Binders and Supplies (check them for a grade)
- Rehearsal Etiquette
 - Does not mean merely being compliant.
 - Are they Contributing? Engaged? Caged?
 - Are they prepared? Did you give them something to prepare?

- Find ways to get them to think.
 - Ask individuals in the ensemble questions...and not always the ones with their hands raised.
 - Make the students give meaningful answers that are both reactive and proactive.
- Individual Assessments (video recorded assignments and individual listenings)
- Isolation Group pass offs work great as well and save time
 - High WW, Low WW, High Brass, Low Brass (4 total)
- Isolation Group performances in class (Assign 6 mini bands)
- Counting out **LOUD**

Internal Pulse (this was a HUGE problem of mine)

- Put the tempo fluctuations on them (99% of the time it is because they are guessing and unsure of rhythms).
- Do daily drill with and without the metronome.
- Start your pieces and walk off the podium.

Articulation

- Strive for perfection (especially all releases)
- Vary speeds (slow or fast)
- Brass and flutes need to know understand how the process of double-tonguing works.
 - Introduce in sectionals
 - Practice saying it on syllables (Da-Ga or Tu-Ku)
 - When you feel comfortable with their understanding of this concept you can work daily during 16th notes of articulation exercise.

Progress chart:

DDDDDDDDDD DDDDDDDDDD DDDDDDDDDD GGGGGGGGGG

DDDDDDDDDD DGDGDGDGD DDDDDDDDDD GDGDGDGDG

Tempo: 104 108 112 116 120 124 128 132 140 148 156

Style

- All encompassing (breathing, sound quality, articulation, releases)
- Demonstrate or have another staff member demonstrate (echo back)
- The goal is that your students are able to play the correct style markings at first glance.

Vibrato

- Introduce in 6th grade for flutes, oboe, bassoon, saxophones in class.
 - Work on every day during daily drill for refinement.
- Introduce in 7th grade to trumpets and euphoniums in sectionals for future solo opportunities
- Practice different meters for further development in sectionals for 7th and 8th graders (Q=60 Exercise)

Technique

This is just a continuation of the groundwork you laid in the 6th and 7th grade (details, details, details)

- Hand position is never overlooked. We can see it and for the most part THEY can see it.
- Power Scales
 - Scale is played three times
 - 1x half note-quarter note rhythm
 - 2x quarter note-eighth note rhythm
 - 3x eighth note-sixteenth note rhythm
 - Quarter Note = 72 is a good starting point
 - Understand the limitations for trombone and tuba going in.
- Thirds, Arpeggios, and Clarke Studies (Blue Book)

Varsity Brass should be playing multiple two octave scales (not just region requirements)

NV Brass goal should be to play at least one two octave scale.

12 Major Scales should be the goal for everyone by the end of their 8th grade year. Tempo and octaves will differentiate by band ability.

Book 2 and 3 Method Books (Again, count out loud in class)

Other

Solo Contest (everyone learns and performs a solo regardless)

Ensemble Contest (director coached but also put more on students to lead)

Meaningful memorization exercise (Andy Sealy)

Work to create a culture where everyone views each other as inspiration and not competition.

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

THE “NUTS AND BOLTS” OF TEACHING BAND ARE YOUR EIGHTH GRADERS READY FOR HIGH SCHOOL BAND?

MUSICAL AWARENESS

BALANCE

A well-prepared student understands and demonstrates person-to-person balance to create section sound. Student does not play too strong or too weak. Student listens for the group.

A very well prepared student understands and demonstrates balancing the musical components of a selection; for example melody and accompaniment

An extremely well prepared student understands and demonstrates balancing section to section to create a variety of tutti sounds and colors. They are in the habit of marking music regarding balance; for example “fit into clarinets” or “listen for trumpets”. They understand that dynamic markings are not absolute and are subject to their role in the entire ensemble.

INTONATION

A well-prepared student understands how to adjust their instrument length correctly and can demonstrate matching pitch by the elimination of waves/beats and long tones.

A very well prepared student knows the tuning problem notes on their instrument and how to adjust for correct tuning. They are able to play melodies in tune with themselves and other players.

An extremely well prepared student understands that a note may tune differently according to the other notes around it. They are able to play chords in tune. They take responsibility for their intonation.

UNIFORMITY OF ARTICULATION AND STYLE

A well-prepared student is aware of their tongue placement and motion for both the start and end of a note. Their articulation is intentional.

A very well prepared student understands and demonstrates matching articulation/style note to note.

An extremely well prepared student matches articulation/style person-to-person and section-to-section.

RHYTHMIC ACCURACY AND PRECISION

A well-prepared student can stay with metronome both alone and with others. They own and practice with a metronome.

A very well prepared student demonstrates correct subdivision of the pulse.

An extremely well prepared student understands and demonstrates the role of listening, watching, subdivision and pulse in performing with precision.

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

VERTICAL CULTURE, STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY, UPWARD RECRUITING AND RETENTION

REAGAN BRUMLEY – HIGHLAND PARK ISD

- Non-negotiables for high school directors- keep teaching the instrument, keep building on what was set up at the middle school. Too often, we as high school directors fall into the trap of teaching band, rather than the instruments, the musicians, and the people. Carefully observe the care the directors at your feeder middle schools take with fundamental teaching, and do your best to continue adding layers to those skills through each child's senior year. Don't let a day go by that you don't address posture, breathing, embouchure, hand position, etc.
- It is helpful for middle school directors to know the rehearsal expectations of the high school you feed. This is not to say that you need to morph your teaching into the style of the high school staff, but it is good for the students to know what will be expected of them at the high school. What does the beginning of each high school class look like? What are the high school directors' expectations regarding behavior during rehearsal? Do the students in the high school warm up on their own before daily drill begins?

In my opinion, all fluent musicians should know the proper way to warm-up individually and responsibly. It also is far more likely that ensemble tone production and pitch will be a pleasant experience if the students have warmed up prior to ensemble drill. I would challenge middle school varsity directors to teach this skill to their students and hold them accountable for doing so responsibly.

- Middle school and high school students need help organizing their practice and must be held accountable for doing so, but the approach should probably be different. What's the difference between a practice record and a practice planning guide?

- What are the individual player development goals of the high school - do they teach All-Region etudes in sectional setting? Do they use a prescribed pass-off system or grading rubric? Do they require solos and ensembles, or one or the other? Which of these ideas could be converted to middle school-appropriate objectives? Advanced, responsible high school students can help coach these activities at the middle school.

- Bring in the very best players from the high school to play their solo or a region etude for your band classes and perhaps even for the beginner classes.

- Typically, most recruiting done to entice band students to continue in high school has a “top down” approach. The high school band hosts middle school band night at a football game, they might invite the middle school bands to a side-by-side clinic, etc. I believe that as music educators, we should all want nothing more than to see our students continue in band. I would encourage middle school directors to do “upward” recruiting.

I firmly believe that most experienced high school directors, when asked what they value in a middle school program, would state getting students to sign up for high school band as their first priority by far. Find informal opportunities to get the kids to high school events; concerts, games, etc. What are the high school bands playing? Hype those pieces in addition to your own music. Hearing Rolling Thunder might get an otherwise disinterested trombonist excited about their instrument. Facilitate having middle school kids help with props at marching contests. Send talented players who might be “on the fence” about doing high school band to watch the top high school band rehearse; it is easy to get students excused for this type of field trip. Play videos of the high school marching band before or after school when the kids congregate in the band hall; explain what is happening in the show. If you’ve identified students who really seem unsure about continuing in band in high school, work with the HS staff to have them contacted by an older student on their instrument. This is a GREAT tool!

- Start talking about what universities want. Specifically, long-term dedication to a particular activity/art, students with real leadership experience and the ability to multi-task. Also, super communication skills; use “living program notes.” Without disparaging other groups, help them see that band accomplishes more of these items at one time than any other choice at their disposal. Help them see that being great at something is far superior to “dipping your toes in the water” of many different activities. Do this by getting out in front of fears and misinformation.

We call it Band 101, but it could be done in other ways. This must be done at the 6-7 transition in addition to the 8-9. This is an opportunity to talk about graduation plans, showcase alumni who’ve gone on to prestigious universities and cite band as one of the reasons, have current band parents talk about their child’s experience from their perspective, why they need to stay in band continuously vs. taking a foreign language or health in middle school. Have an articulate high school student talk with the parents about balancing band, classes, and other electives. If we aren’t proactive, the misinformation wins.

- Do everything possible on your end to help the middle school students not just know the high school staff, but feel comfortable, and yes, even like them. Many 8th graders still sign up for the teacher more than they sign up for the activity. How do you do this? If the high school staff hasn’t already prioritized having a regular presence at the middle school, sit down with the head director and let them know how much you would value their presence and what kinds of things you would ask them to do. Avoid putting a high school staff member in the position of having to be the “bad cop” at the middle school; they’ll get to do plenty of that once the kids get to their campus! Conversely, middle school directors who help at the high school shouldn’t have to be the “heavy.”
- Does the high school you feed have a jazz band? If so, why not have one at the middle school as well? It doesn’t have to be a competitive group. Kids inherently love the activity as there is built in “cool factor.” Parents love jazz band because they understand it, PRINCIPALS love jazz band because they understand it. This is an easy, low-stress opportunity for a side-by-side concert with the high school. It is pure, true sight-reading. Playing a grade 4 for contest with your middle school bands doesn’t guarantee that the students will be literate musicians when the process is complete, but regularly practicing reading in various styles might. What could it hurt?

- If your facilities allow, have sectionals in an ensemble room rather than the band hall. Why: the band hall must be established from the first day of a child's band career as "home base." For this to happen, they have to know that they can come there anytime possible to practice, see their directors, and see their friends. If a sectional is happening in that room, accomplishing those goals can be difficult.

- Is it possible for you to ever attend the top high school band rehearsals? What is to be gained by doing this? Namely, a better ability to formulate and implement a true vertical curriculum. To build a sensible curriculum, one might be served well by starting with thinking about what a student at the end of the 12th grade in the top high school band should be able to do on their instrument, then work backwards grade by grade to ascertain what building blocks are necessary to bring that to fruition.

Another benefit of attending the top high school rehearsal is the investment in the total program you'll be making. As a middle school director, you started these students' musical journey, so if you have a chance to be part of their becoming lifelong musicians, why not take it?

ALL-REGION PASS-OFF CRITERIA

ETUDE PERFORMANCE LEVELS

2016 - 2017

- 0-9:** An attempt was made to play the etude. Tone quality may be poor and many of the notes are wrong due to lack of preparation. The student may not have performed the entire assigned excerpt.
- 10-20:** There is a superficial level of preparation. Wrong notes and rhythms cause distractions and little or no attention to articulation or dynamics is evident. Characteristic tone quality may or may not be present. The student's instrument may not be in working condition.
- 21-40:** There is evidence of a focused effort at preparing the excerpt and the instrument is in good playing condition. The key signature is generally being observed, though some errors in the key signature may still occur. Tone quality is developing, but may need improvement. Tempos are constant, but may be significantly slower than indicated. An understanding of the rhythms is evident, though errors may be frequent. There may be dynamic contrast to some degree. Frequent or occasional stops prevent meaningful musical communication.
- 41-60:** *Note errors are almost non-existent. Occasional stops do not occur at this level.* Rhythms are performed correctly, but may be uneven at times. Articulation is generally correct. Dynamic contrast is present to some degree. Tone quality is appropriate for the age/experience of the performer. Phrasing (breathing) has been addressed but may not be refined. ***Tempos may be below those indicated in order to facilitate accurate performance.*** The performer is beginning to display expressive qualities which elevate the piece beyond mere notes and rhythms.
- 61-75:** Virtually all notes, rhythms, articulations, dynamics, tempos, and phrasing are correct and performed confidently. Breathing supports the phrase and is natural. Errors, if they occur, are handled with poise. The performer demonstrates qualities worthy of membership in the All-Region Band.
- 76-88:** The performer plays the etude in its entirety and executes all of the technical demands of the piece. Inconsistencies in articulation and tone quality in extreme ranges may be present, but are rare. Moments of musical expression are frequent as all elements of a well-prepared performance are in place. The performance would be worthy of "Outstanding Soloist recognition at solo and ensemble contest.
- 89-100:** There are no distractions to the listener and the performance of the piece is nearly flawless. Articulation and tone quality are clear. The performance is expressive and artistic. Any question regarding the musicality of the performance is reduced to a matter of personal taste. The performance distinguishes the musician potentially among the best in the region.

ALL-REGION ETUDES

STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING NOTES & RHYTHMS

1. Divide the etude into 3rds based on the number of lines of music. If the etude is particularly long, you could divide it into 4ths.
2. Focus on only one third at a time. In other words, don't jump around as you're learning the notes and rhythms of a piece. Stay on the first 3rd for however long it takes you to play the notes and rhythms in context, even if under tempo.
3. Scan the first 3rd. See if there are rhythms you don't understand, notes that are past your current range or for which you don't know the fingering, or wide intervals. Wide interval= pair of notes that cause you to change registers. Also see if there is an extended passage of technique.
4. If you found a rhythm you don't understand, set your metronome to a tempo well below what is suggested on the music. See what kind of note gets the beat. (i.e., quarter=1 count, eighth=1 count, etc.) See if the kind of note that gets the beat exists in that measure; your metronome is clicking that note. Now, think about what one subdivision smaller would sound like (twice as fast as the metronome), now the next smallest subdivision (twice as fast as the last one) until you know how long to hold each kind of note in that measure. (hint - 1 subdivision smaller than a quarter note is an eighth note. One subdivision smaller than an eighth is a sixteenth, then thirty-second, etc.)
5. Once you've done the steps for number 4, try and clap or tap the rhythm in question, then play it on one note, perhaps Concert F or Bb. Once you feel comfortable dealing with the rhythm on one note, you can play the rhythm with the written notes.

6. If you found a note that is past your current range (higher or lower than you can play), you must devise a strategy. For **woodwinds** other than flute, use your fingering chart to determine how the note is fingered, then attempt to play it using correct embouchure and air fundamentals; don't strain or over-blow. For **brass and flute**, understand that it may take several days up to several weeks for you to play that note, and that's OK. You can still play the rest of the measure and everything around it. In the meantime, work on the scale that takes you to that note and use the information about embouchure and air provided by your directors and private teacher to work towards it until you can produce that note. The Cichowicz Air Flow Studies also work well for this. Doing lip slurs for brass or harmonics for flute also help increase your range and flexibility.
7. If you find a wide interval, play just that group of two notes out of rhythm as a long tone. Do this until you learn what the interval sounds like and until you can move between the two notes easily, then put it into rhythm.
8. If you found a passage of extended technique - break it into groups of 5, 4, 3, or 2 notes, then play each group slowly until you understand, then the next group, then combine those two groups. Do this process until you can put the measure together, then move on to the next measure and repeat the process. **Woodwinds** - before you start learning technical passages, see what fingering you should be using for each pattern. In other words, make sure you are alternating between left and right fingerings, or "flipping", rather than "sliding." (i.e., don't play left B then left C, alternate left to right.)
9. Once you have gone through these procedures, you are ready to attempt the whole third at a tempo much slower than marked on your music.
10. Once you feel comfortable playing through the first third under tempo, you should go to the next third and use the same process as you did for the first third. This is also a good time to review the first third and begin to gradually add tempo.