



Developing a Successful Band Program in Title I Schools

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Texas Bandmasters Association Clinic presented by Scott McAdow

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Introduction –

A great band program requires a critical balance of certain concepts and ingredients – truly a **recipe**. Be willing to think outside of the box for the components and ingredients for this recipe. All parts, or concepts, are necessary to create a great band program. There also must be a **balance** or **equality** of these ingredients. Many band directors lose sight of this – thus not keeping track of the big picture.

Successful Band Recipe Ingredients:

- **Middle School level - Personal Relationships must be developed between the student and the band director**
 1. **Attend school events** your students are involved in, such as athletics.
 2. **Be a part of the school** – volunteer to help with various school events.
 3. **Know your students** – show you are interested in who they are as people.
 4. **Greet your students** at the door daily and welcome them to class.
 5. From Richard Floyd: ***Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!***
 6. Be a **good listener**.

- **Senior High School level – Develop Personal Relationships between students – specifically older (leadership) and younger students.**
 1. Will be a great and **effective recruiting tool**.
 2. Create a **buddy system** between Freshmen and older leadership.

- **Personal Relationships must be developed between the school administration and the band director.**
 1. If you are lucky, you may have the rare administrator who visits your classroom on a regular basis (other than formal observations).
 2. This is rare! It is your job as band director to **cultivate the personal relationship between you and the school administration**.
 3. As a starter, and to not detract from their already heavy work load, **find times convenient for them** to briefly chat that will not add time to their schedule. Example: while they are on lunch or hall duty.
 4. Be sure and specifically **invite your principal to your concerts** - an organized and well attended concert will instantly win administrative friends.
 5. **Invite administrators to observe specific classes**. For example, show off a smooth running beginner class where the kids are achieving great things! This will be particularly effective if that class includes students who are problems everywhere but band!

- **Personal Relationships must be developed between the band parents and the band director.**
 1. **Create opportunities to meet your band parents.**
 2. These opportunities **start with the beginner drives**. If possible, hire others for the instrument placement – then you can meet all potential band parents.
 3. Be sure you treat all band parents the same – with **respect**.
 4. **Prevent problems** by practicing good communication skills.
 5. **Be consistent** with student discipline and calendar (no last minute changes).
 6. Use the rule that if a parent makes any kind of contact with you – that email or call must be returned by you within 24 hours. **Same day contact is best.**
 7. **Solve serious parent concerns** either with a phone call or a personal conference – emails can be impersonal and leave the wrong impression.
 8. When you talk to parents about their band student, **always find something positive to say about their child!** No matter what the student offense is, that student is that parent's child, so try to find a way to acknowledge that there are good things about that student. Usually, this creates an atmosphere of openness, and the parent very likely will have a more receptive and open mind toward helping correct whatever the behavior issues are with their child.

- **Selling it – you must make the band program seem important to students, parents, administration, and the community – it truly is your job to toot your own horn. At a Title I campus, this is extremely important; as the parents are making a great financial sacrifice to provide their child with a quality instrument to play.**
 1. **Showcase the band successes** – whether it be all region band, solo contest, or a full band achievement.
 2. **Display your awards** around the school, at concerts, and at beginner drives.
 3. **Make concert programs attractive**, easy to read, and a showcase of student achievement.
 4. **Concerts:**
 - a. Remember the old show business motto – **leave them wanting more!**
 - b. **Be well organized and efficient** so that setup changes are fast and minimal.
 - c. Our average concert length with four bands is an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes.
 - d. Be sure and have **concert comments organized and planned** – I type out a script. Do everything possible to have a large audience at your concerts:
 5. High school: create, as needed, awards to fit the recognition your students have earned – such as most improved, spirit, leadership, etc.

- **Quality musical instruction**
 1. You can have hundreds of students enrolled in band, but the band program will not continue and grow over the course of time unless the band students are receiving quality instruction.
 2. **Teaching every child in your program to play well must be a top priority.**

3. Therefore, with limited funds, weigh the value of a handful of students receiving private lesson scholarships versus, for the same amount of money, **regular group instruction from area master teachers.**
 4. If you have a younger, more inexperienced staff, then utilize a retired master teacher or high quality private teacher to **teach your staff** as well as your students.
 5. Particularly, since private lessons either do not exist or are possible only for a very limited number of students, **you and your staff must be capable of truly teaching kids how to play their instruments.** This applies both to middle school and high school.
 6. At the middle school level, it is a much better use of time to set your students up to play correctly, than to re-teach later in the year. Also, when kids are setup to play correctly, then playing is easier. Thus the student will feel more successful. **Successful students stay in band!**
 7. At the high school level, the rule of success and retention apply as well; thus you need to be proficient when correcting bad playing habits. This is a very frequent scenario with move in students. **You are totally responsible for the continuing musical development of your students.**
 8. **When you are the head director at either middle or high school levels, it is your absolute responsibility to oversee the successful instruction of the fundamentals of playing.**
- **Program music that challenges yet satisfies**
 1. **Music programming has a great impact on the band program!**
 2. Regardless of the grade or skill level you teach, remember that the music you teach your students should **challenge** your students.
 3. **Program music that the kids will like and enjoy.**
 - **Quality musical instruments – Grants, donations, trimming rental package down**
 1. Even with limited resources, a **major priority must be placing your students on reliable musical instruments that are in good working order!**
 2. You must do everything possible to convince your parents to **not purchase instruments from the internet.**
 3. **Seek out grants** through corporations, area churches, and your school district.
 4. **Appeal to your school's faculty.**
 5. **Buy instruments from former students** who no longer play.
 6. **Modify** music store rental packages – remove some accessories if needed.
 7. Stress to parents the **advantages of renting-buying through a reputable music store.** Then the instrument will be in good working order and more convenient to repair.
 8. Emphasize to parents that used instruments not acquired through a reputable music store need to be brought to school for the **director to evaluate.**

- **Recruit and maintain band membership effectively**
 1. 5th grade night – advertise it!
 2. Play something brief and flashy. Have an attractive but **short handout**.
 3. **Keep talking to a minimum**. What you do say needs to bring home how cool it is to be in band.
 4. If allowed, create a **recruiting video**.
 5. At the beginner drive, take a picture of the new band student with his selected instrument. Take a **poster** to each feeder elementary school with the incoming beginner pictures, and have an individual picture in an envelope for each student. This helps keep kids from changing mind over summer!

- **Communication – Effective communication is a very important ingredient when developing a band program in a Title I setting.**

A. With parents

1. **Keep written communication short!**
2. **Keep written communication simple!** Realistically, many of the parents in a Title I setting, due to limited education opportunities, very likely do not have the skills to understand a lengthy and complex document.
3. Respect your band parents - **print letters home in a variety of languages**.
4. Require both a printed name and signature from both students and parents on important letters home. Keep track of whether or not students return the signature portion of the letter and follow-up getting these turned in.
5. For example, **send a letter home inviting parents to concerts**. The letter should include positive information encouraging attendance at the concert.
6. Print these letters home on a variety of colored paper.
7. Make **verbal** contact as positive as possible!

B. With administration – particularly in a Title I setting, administrative support is critical.

1. Keep in mind that the administrative people who can most likely help you the most probably act in that role for every major organization on campus.
2. Your **communication** needs to be **carefully planned**.
3. **Written** communication should be
 - a. **Succinct** and to the point
 - b. **Grammatically correct!**
 - c. **Organized and easy to read**
 - d. **Positive in nature**
 - e. Include **justification that is real** – can be backed up!
 - f. Clearly state the **benefits for the students** and to the entire school.
 - g. If at all possible, justifications need to be **fact based**. Real data speaks!
4. **Verbal or Oral** communication
 - a. Know what will put the administrator you are talking with in a receptive frame of mind.
 - b. For most administrators, appointments are preferred.

- c. Certain times of the school year, your administrator may be overwhelmed and you should avoid making an appointment. Example - the first and last couple of weeks of school, Staar testing, etc.
- d. **Plan** what you are going to say – it is acceptable to take written notes!
- e. Know about **how long you plan to talk**, so that when you make the appointment you can request a specific amount of time.
- f. Do **not** meet with an administrator when you are extremely upset and emotional. You are likely to say something you will eventually regret.
- g. Start such a meeting by **thanking** the administrator for her support.

C. With students – it is crucial for your program to have success!

1. This is a **critical area** requiring attention, especially in a Title I setting.
 2. So many Title I students live in a less than ideal home situation.
 3. Therefore, you must **gain their trust** – not necessarily an easy task!
 4. Please keep in mind that **it is not the Title I child’s fault** that he or she has limited financial resources. This applies to behavior issues as well!
 5. It is so crucial that you remember that **“You Can’t Fool Kids!”** Specifically, always be honest. **Do not patronize** your students!
 6. Always **show students respect**, even when they are rude to you.
 7. As you **teach your students to love playing** and help them feel successful as a young musician, if guided carefully, these students will gradually learn to show you respect.
 8. Keep in mind that most beginning band students, especially Title I, joined band for a reason other than becoming a fine young musician – such as this is what my friends did, art class was full, etc.
 9. Work diligently to **know every child in your program** – the students will love and appreciate your doing this!
 10. Particularly at the beginning of the school year – make it your goal to **build rapport with your students**.
 11. Plan and mentally search for appropriate times to socialize and **get to know your students**.
- **Trips can have a big impact on Title One band students of all grade levels!**
 1. Make trips more **affordable** by using payment plans.
 2. Trips can **positively** expose students to things they have never seen before.
 3. Have a **required for parent / student trip meeting for overnight** trips.
 4. Even if only your top performing band makes the out of town trip, this can still be a great motivator for the entire band program.
 - **Class Management (Discipline)**
 1. In Title One situations you must be willing to **“think outside of the box”**.
 2. **Expectations can and should be high**.
 3. Be prepared to **modify class routine** and organization based upon the makeup and personality of the individual class.
 4. **Good classroom management leads to successful band students.**
Successful band students stay in band – thus retention will be excellent!