



**Texas Bandmasters Association
Convention/Clinic July 20-22, 2023**

**From Beginning to End: The Middle
School Band Experience**

**CLINICIANS:
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2023 TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

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From Beginning to End: The Middle School Band Experience

Robert Herrings | *Henry Middle School*

Cindy Lansford | *Retired*

Taylor Williamson | *Wiley Middle School*

Overview

This clinic will cover topics including recruiting, culture, procedures, routines, and expectations. Clinicians will share their insight on effective practices used from recruitment to the final down beat of an overall middle school band experience.

Similarities and differences between Henry MS & Wiley MS:

- **SIMILARITIES:**
 - Kids LOVE band.
 - Lots of kids in band.
 - High expectations.
 - The prize is not the goal.
 - Does not back away from parent contact.
 - “Don’t judge our program by what you see on stage.”
 - Retention from grade to grade is very high.
 - Both directors came from very small 1A / 2A band programs.
 - Both are Baylor University graduates / trumpet players.
 - Both are total music NERDS.
 - Both have a shared appreciation for James Swearingen. #BlueRidgeSaga #SorryMama
- **DIFFERENCES:** (apart from the obvious...)
 - Parent relationships (enjoys the benefits of longevity at 1 school; personal connection with parents/families - generational differences).
 - One is a trained pianist. One is not.
 - One is technologically savvy. One is old school.
 - One band hall is messy. One band hall is clean.

THE BEGINNING:

1. Importance of Recruiting:

- a. **Two-fold - Students & Parents. Different reasons why they choose band...**
 - i. Students: do not choose band to perform great band music. They are drawn to director personalities, what their friends do, and social events.
 - ii. Parents: have to convince /educate them on the WHY behind what we do. You must convince them that their financial investment will impact their student's life in a possible manner.
- b. **Being present in your community in a positive way so that families WANT their child to be in your program. Your families are your BEST recruitment tool!**

2. Beginner Year Cultures / Deposits:

- a. It starts on Day One.
- b. If you are the topic at the dinner table for the first week of school, they've already drunk the kool-aid, and you have won the first battle.
- c. Celebrating ALL successes AND failures. The only way to get better is to make mistakes. Fail Forward. Understanding that while in the moment things might seem challenging, the end results are completely worth it. "Delayed gratification."
- d. Knowing the name of EVERY kid in beginner classes, whether they are in your individualized class or not, is monumental in building culture within your program.
- e. Setting up an environment in EVERY class where kids are supportive and encourage each other even when they fail. Shuffle your feet for even the SMALL things.
- f. The staff has to ALL be on board with creating the SAME culture within EVERY class.

THE MIDDLE:

1. Procedures / Routines / Expectations:

- a. **All expectations setup in the beginner year should be carried over and built upon for the advanced band classes. It should not feel like a different band hall in the 2nd year.**
- b. **Silent / Quiet / Monitored Entry**
 - i. Time Saver (48-50 minute class periods).
 - ii. Sets a focus mindset and establishes an environment for learning.
 - iii. Students are able to speak and converse before school and after school. The true conversations and relationship building occurs during the sectional time.
- c. **Cases / Backpacks / Laptop Computers**
 - i. Tape off a “backpack land” or zone in your band hall that ALL backpacks and student belongings are placed. Do not allow personal items at chairs. This includes CELL PHONES and LAPTOPS. We do allow water bottles at their chairs to eliminate the need to leave the classroom.
 - ii. Flutes / Oboe / Clarinet - Cases are allowed at chairs because they fit underneath. Everything else goes back in lockers with doors SHUT. Don't forget tuners, REED CASES, etc.
- d. **Start of Class Procedures:**
 - i. NO QUESTIONS.
 - ii. All directors are on board and present during transitions and the start of class. If an emergency arises, students need to ask the non-lead teacher for help.
 - iii. Agenda with daily plan, announcements, and practice assignment clearly visible at the front of the room. Anticipate everything the kids could ask. Announcements – When do these occur in your rehearsal? We recommend the beginning of class to allow double reeds and percussion additional time to set up equipment / reeds.
 - iv. Students are trained to look at the board and follow ALL instructions while entering class. Percussionists should instantly be setting up for the first piece.

e. End of Class Procedures:

- i. Percussion can begin packing up 2 minutes before the bell. They KNOW the time to begin and can do so without instruction.
- ii. You "SHOULD" give your students 1 minute at the end of class to pack up their instruments before the bell. This may not always happen in the Henry / Wiley band halls...

2. The Human Element

- a. Students need to see us as humans... with flaws, just like them.
- b. We expect our students to own (raise their hand) their mistakes in rehearsal. Directors should also admit and acknowledge when WE fail.
- c. Having APPROPRIATE relationships and conversations with students in order for them to see you as more than just the Director of Bands.
- d. Find your "Hook". The thing that you can talk about that is personal, relatable, and still appropriate to the students. Cindy = Dogs. Taylor = Food. Robert = Pom Poms & Cartwheels.

THE END:

1. 6 to 7 and 7 to 8 Retention:

- a. Make the band hall a second home and a place they can't even imagine leaving.
- b. Casting a vision of their future years in band helps to instill confidence and overall better retention through their 7 year journey.
- c. Individual conversations are a large part of retention. Students want to feel special and heard. 95% of the time students can be easily convinced that quitting band isn't the best choice for them just by TALKING to them privately and not in front of the class.

2. 8 to 9 Retention:

- a. Joint effort from both MS and HS staff members.
 - i. **Middle School Director Job:** Encourage, support, mentor, and guide ALL students to the next level.
 - ii. **High School Directors Job:** Be present/visible. Your presence alleviates fear, and creates loyalty. "It's harder to say no to someone you know."

3. "Listen - At the end of the day..."

- a. Create a band hall environment that is unlike anywhere else in your building.
- b. Your room should be a SAFE, judgment-free space for students to be themselves, make music, and grow together.
- c. Love on your kids. Laugh, cry, and celebrate with them throughout their journey. Let them know you care for them beyond the notes and rhythms on the page. We give you permission to be emotional with them when they leave your band hall and move on to the next step of the musical journey.

4. "I Mean..."

- a. The culture within your band program is a reflection of you. If you don't like it, change it.
- b. As Lynne Jackson says, "If you allow it, you promote it."



"I wish I had. I'm glad I did."



"Be kind to one another."