

Creating a Culture of Excellence in Your 2nd and 3rd Bands

The Midwest Clinic
December 21, 2017

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The strength and depth of a program that has multiple bands depends on the vitality of its 2nd and 3rd ensembles. Every student deserves a great band experience, no matter what band they are in. Band should be just as fun, educational, and important for students in the 2nd and 3rd bands as it is for those in the top ensemble.

Three goals:

1. Every student has a positive experience in band.
2. Every student gets to experience success and the thrill of accomplishment in band.
3. Every student contributes positively to the direction of the entire band program.

I. The band placement process

- A. Publish the specifics of the band placement process that you use so that students and parents understand how students are placed into ensembles.
- B. How should seniority factor into the decision? Every case is different.
 1. Challenges of having older students in a 2nd or 3rd band: they may feel embarrassed by their placement and act out, becoming disruptive or apathetic; can be a negative influence on younger, more eager students
 2. But when you reward a student simply for seniority who obviously hasn't done the work, what message are you sending about the importance of work ethic?
 3. Use older students in your 2nd or 3rd band as models and leaders.
- C. Don't base band placement on discipline/behavior issues. Having all the disruptive students in one band does not set that band up for success and makes it difficult to create a culture of excellence.
- D. What do you do with more advanced/misplaced students in the 2nd or 3rd band?
 1. Leadership opportunities
 2. Greater musical challenges
 3. Feature them!

II. Making the most of your head director's help

- A. Have him/her observe your rehearsal EARLY! Ask, "What are you hearing that in two months I'm going to be sorry I didn't fix?"
- B. Have him/her rehearse your band while you observe.
- C. Use him/her as a constant source of advice and feedback.
- D. Sometimes you must be an advocate for your band. You work with those students every day. It is one of your jobs to make sure that the decisions that are made in the band program benefit the 2nd and 3rd bands as well as the 1st band.

III. Similarities to the 1st band

- A. Students in lower bands can easily perceive if they are being looked down on or treated as unimportant. You can combat this by treating all bands similarly as often as possible.
- B. Common fundamentals/warm-ups for all bands
- C. Play music with some connection to the 1st band
 - 1. A mass band performance for a concert
 - 2. An easier arrangement of a piece the 1st band has played
 - 3. One movement from a piece the 1st band has played
- D. The same expectations for all bands (although the specific material and the process to achieve the expectations will be very different)
 - 1. Pass-offs, objectives, region music
 - 2. Sectionals
 - 3. Rehearsals outside of school
 - 4. Clinics—bring in clinicians who are comfortable and excited about working with your level of student and repertoire
- E. The goal: be just as polished and prepared as the 1st band, simply on less challenging repertoire

IV. Differences from the 1st band

- A. More communication with parents is needed
- B. More sightreading practice. Practice sightreading skills every single day and in sectionals.
- C. It will take much more work to hold the students accountable—pass-offs, objective sheets, recordings. But it is worth the extra work!
- D. More controlled rehearsals

V. Classroom management

- A. "Don't smile until Christmas."
- B. "Pick your battles" vs. having a model in your head of how you want your rehearsal to look
- C. Use the words "professional" and "professionalism" more than "behavior."
- D. Teach performance etiquette—both on stage and as audience members

VI. Fundamentals

- A. Make them enjoyable!
 1. How many different ways can you practice the same skill?
 2. Interactive
 3. Competitions
 4. Don't be afraid to sing!
 5. Be creative! Brainstorm as many ideas as you can think of to creatively work on fundamental skills.
- B. Balanced approach to fundamentals! Students joined band to play real music!

VII. Selecting repertoire

- A. Advantages of more challenging repertoire
 1. Prepares the students to move to higher bands in the future
 2. Students enjoy the challenge.
 3. Students will practice more outside of school.
- B. Advantages of more easily-attainable repertoire
 1. More time to work on musicality right from the beginning
 2. More time to dedicate to fundamental work
 3. More time to monitor fundamentals as you prepare the repertoire
 4. The opportunity to prepare music at a really high level of achievement, which transfers to region music, solos, and future years in higher bands
 5. The opportunity to perform a higher quantity of pieces
- C. Choose music for festivals with which you know you can be ready early enough to leave time to build consistency.
- D. Choose quality music
 1. Does it sound like every other grade 1 or 2 piece?
 2. Do you like it?
 3. Does it provide opportunities for exposure? (Expose carefully)
 4. Some excellent arrangements of great music by great composers are now available.

VIII. Motivating your students

- A. Attribution theory
 1. A student's belief about the causes of his/her successes and failures
 2. Help students develop healthy attributions to factors they can control: effort (how much they practice) and strategy (how they practice)
- B. Encouragement
 1. Students in 2nd or 3rd bands sometimes lack confidence.
 2. Look for the best in them, and talk to them about the potential you see within them.

- C. Find a way to connect every student to band and a way for every student to contribute.
 - 1. Behind the scenes service opportunities
 - 2. Music theory/critical thinking skills in rehearsal
- D. Share your standards, hopes, and dreams for the year with your band
- E. Create a sense of team pride
 - 1. Service projects
 - 2. Celebrate people (birthdays, musical and non-musical accomplishments, demonstrations of character)
 - 3. Celebrate your successes

IX. Building for the future

- A. Talk to your students about the future and the roles they will play in the band in the coming years.
- B. Tell stories of past students who have been in the 2nd and 3rd bands and went on to experience great success.
- C. One of your most important jobs is to prepare these students to move to a higher band. Help them to discover what it will take for them to get there.
- D. Talk to each individual student and help them set goals for the following year. Create a plan to get there.

Don't just bide your time waiting until you are conducting a better band! The students in your 2nd and 3rd bands need you to create a culture of excellence for them today. If you can do this, you will have an enormous positive impact on these students and on the entire band program.