

It's Not *Just* Middle School Band!

Buying In to a Culture of Excellence From Day One

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As band directors, we understand the importance of creating an environment where the most artistic musical moment can be created. Many have attended clinics on this very topic. However, the success of a band program cannot be dependent on the work of the band director alone. A director can only take their program so far if their students and parents don't share the same mindset! This clinic not only focuses on how to build a culture of excellence in your band room, but also will give strategies and techniques to get students and parents to buy into this culture as well.

The First Person to Buy In is You

The foundation for any successful program is a clear understanding of why directors, students, and parents are participating in the activity. This starts with YOU! Whether this is to make students better people, provide a sense of belonging for students, achieve superior ratings at contests, or have fun an hour each day, a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish is key.

- Be able to articulate your “why” to students, parents, and administrators. A mission or vision statement can help. Here are a few examples:
 - The Owasso Band program's commitment is to help children develop life skills through the art of music. Among these skills are discipline, citizenship, responsibility, and leadership. We also hope to create a love and understanding of music through performance, preferably top-notch performance, which we will last a lifetime.
 - The Creekside Park Junior High Band's purpose is to create a music-making community among students, parents and teachers. Students are given the tools and encouragement necessary for individual and group success. Members utilize determination, pride, discipline, and passion for music to achieve limitless goals. Our top priority is excellence of product and process.
- Establish your definition of excellence.
 - Discuss with your Fine Arts Coordinator about professional development opportunities to go out and observe other band programs around you.
 - Visit the websites of reputable band programs and observe their schedules, documents, events, etc. to spark inspiration.

- All-Region events and meetings can be a time of collaboration rather than just a logistical meeting.
- You can't expect to copy everything a great program does and find success. You have to experiment and ultimately find what works for you, understanding that some things might not be the right fit for your teaching style or program's situation.

Getting The Students To Buy In

Most students have no preconceived notions about band when they sign up for it. It is our responsibility to show them that band is more than just another elective. If they have no preconceived notions, you can set the bar as high as you want it.

- Explain to them in sixth grade that they are entering into the 'band family' they will have for the next seven years. This creates an instant ownership in the program and a sense of belonging that is different from any other elective they could take.
- This is an opportunity to educate students about "what great musicians do." Great musicians have amazing posture. Great musicians seek opportunities to make themselves better. Great musicians are professional in their interactions with others.
- Details are important. When students understand the importance of small details, it will allow you to be more detailed in rehearsals later.
 - The band room is a special place. It should be different from any other classroom they go to all day long.
 - Establish expectations early and be consistent. A few examples include:
 - Chairs and stands are in place before the students enter the room. (Not a student responsibility)
 - Procedure for entering and exiting the room.
 - Don't walk in between chairs and stands.
 - Instruments need to be taken home each day.
 - Procedure for warming up on their own (or not).
 - Regular pencil and equipment checks.
 - Organization of the contents of their band binder.
- Students appreciate expectations and will buy in to a band director who has bought into them.
 - Kids thrive when there is structure and they appreciate being held to a higher standard, especially when you can show them at the end of the process that it was all worth it.
 - There is a popular fear that students will quit band or feel inadequate if they are given too many corrections in rehearsal. However, when students understand that you care, it's okay to tell them when something isn't good. They value your feedback when they see your investment in them personally. When they understand the magnitude of the 'greater good' and the 'team aspect', they'll understand that specific detailed corrections are necessary and are not personal.

Getting The Parents To Buy In

- You never get a second chance at a first impression.
 - Ideas for organizing your instrument selection nights.
 - Meeting with every family at the beginning of the year will pay off dividends.
- Meet with parents as a group every year.
 - This can be a constant reminder of the vision of the program and gives directors a chance to tell where the program is and where it is going.
 - Reinforce policies and procedures.
- Communication with parents and students is paramount.
 - Sunday Morning Emails
 - The Two Week Rule
 - Email response time
 - Help videos
 - Send praise emails
- Parents are the biggest promoters of our program to the community.
 - Testimonials from previous band families can be used in recruitment materials.
 - Create a Band Brochure.
 - Provide healthy opportunities for parents to feel they have a voice in the program.

Creating the Culture

- All-Region Band
 - Great way to build a practice culture in your band room.
 - Increased individual musicianship will improve the performance of your large ensemble.
 - To increase student involvement and investment, you must also be invested and involved.
- Sectionals
 - When the culture is established, parents will buy in to the importance of them and help make transportation possible.
 - Make it worthwhile. Have a plan for what you want to accomplish so students see the benefit of their extra time outside of rehearsal.
 - Make it enjoyable. This is an opportunity to build relationships in a smaller group and have more personal interactions with students. Make sectionals something they never want to miss.
- Solo and Ensemble
 - This builds on the culture of individual musicianship.
 - Student-led ensembles create ownership in their musicianship and the program.
 - Directors must be invested and involved. Don't put it all on the kid or the private teachers to prepare for it.
- Private Lessons

- Very important, but also not the ‘magic pill’ to program success.
- Private lesson teachers must be bought into your vision of the program.
- Private teachers should be visible and well known among your students.
- Data drive instruction - showing parents the statistics of student involvement can aid in recruitment of private lessons.
- Private lessons are for everyone.

Teaching Your Version of Excellence

- The Fun is in the Process
 - All of the energy in the classroom needs to be focused on music making. When your energy is focused on the artistry, your classroom transforms to a place of creating rather than drilling.
 - Energy is taken away when students are not focused, don’t know how to participate, or are a disruption.
 - We must establish a professional atmosphere and procedures that allow EVERYone to focus on music making.
- Creating an environment that promotes music making.
 - Creating consistent routines will help alleviate anxiety among students.
 - Create rules and procedures that you will be able to monitor and correct. If you create something that is not monitored, the students will see it as insignificant or optional.
 - Constant communication of your expectations is vital for success.
- Developing a desire for improvement.
 - It’s a group effort.
 - Playing by yourself isn’t scary.
 - Don’t be afraid to say something isn’t good.
 - We are serious about what we do.
 - Healthy competition is important.
- Literature Selection
 - Find the balance between challenging and attainable.
 - If you love it, they will love it.
 - Rewrites might be needed and that is okay.
 - Kids can love pieces other than “Star Wars”.

Holding Everyone Accountable

- Hear students daily.
 - This won’t be ‘scary’ if it is part of the culture.
 - Always follow through. If you tell students you are going to hear them play something, make sure you hear them the next day.
 - This is also an excellent time for praise.

- Weekly Assignments
 - Students have the opportunity to turn in their very best work by recording their assignment several times throughout the week.
 - Have a regular day to assign the work and a regular due date each week.
 - Treat it like a mini private lesson. Give solutions, not just critique.
 - Mote App on Google Chrome is a great way to give verbal feedback while listening to students' work.
 - Hold yourself just as accountable - grade them in a timely manner.
 - This provides a quality check of your teaching. You will hear many things you do not hear in rehearsal.
- Record your band regularly
 - You will always hate this process if you do it right.
 - "I don't need to record... I know what to fix."
 - Share your recordings with people you respect.
- Ask for help
 - Everyone needs a mentor. Don't avoid help out of fear of appearing unintelligent.
 - Your friends are not always the best clinicians.
 - It is good for your students to see you learning and improving as well.
 - Good teachers *want* help, and great teachers *want to* help.

Placing the Final Piece of the Puzzle

- Provide students with an 'unforgettable musical experience'.
 - Find a special place to perform.
 - The process is just as important as the product.
 - Kids, parents, and *you* should feel accomplished after the performance is done.
 - Leave everyone asking: what's next?!?!
- Seeing your students be successful fills you up. In a time when so many people are quitting the profession, we need something to cling to. You get out of it what you put into it. Achieving a truly musical moment is addicting and it makes you want to do it again, and do it even better.

"I will teach with the enthusiasm of my first year of teaching... I will be as interested in details as if it were the day before contest... I will remember that every student has the right to expect an exciting and interesting experience in my class... I will teach with love and compassion as if I knew that this was the final day that God would allow me to teach."

-Fred McDonald, "This Day"