

The Power of Small: Achieving Big Results in Your Small School Band Program

“It is the combination of students feeling a sense of belonging, knowing they are valued personally and as an important part of the organization, the joy of making music, and the positive experiences provided by a caring and competent band director that create an atmosphere where students are successful. And that translates into creating a program where everyone can’t wait to get to rehearsal every day!”

Robert Sheldon

- ❖ What makes small school band programs more challenging than larger schools?
 - Less staffing
 - You are the teacher of all things! Seek advice, help, mentors, etc.
 - Being the only director is daunting and can be exhausting
 - ◆ Make time for yourself!
 - ◆ Have a mentor you can call at any time
 - Less funding
 - This makes many things challenging, especially marching band. Get creative!
 - Props
 - Build these with your students or band parents.
 - Enlist your woodshop/fabrication programs or art departments
 - Student teachers
 - Invite former students to help “tech” with the marching band
 - Consider a band fee
 - This will help offset costs of student meals, uniform cleanings, music, drill, props, etc.
 - Fundraising
 - Give students an opportunity to raise money for themselves and the program. Some will really surprise you!

- Scheduling
 - Work with administrators to create the best schedule possible for student success. This takes time and trust!
 - Avoid scheduling on top of athletic periods
 - Avoid scheduling beginner classes on top of advanced classes
 - Schedule younger students earlier in the day if possible
 - Having large band classes is helpful to your administrators
- No private lesson programs
 - Schedule 10 minute weekly lessons with your students!
 - Students can hide in the ensemble easily, but you will be surprised when you hear them individually. Sometimes it seems the sum of our parts is greater than the individual pieces. Keep track of student progress easily this way!
 - Weekly “pullouts” and small group class rotations
 - This is where the details are taught
 - Remember that if it cannot be taught “between the bells”, it probably will not happen.
- Fewer resources in general
 - Beg, borrow, but don’t steal!
 - We borrowed equipment to get to The Midwest Clinic!
 - Educators are always willing to lend a helpful hand!
- Smaller student body for recruiting
 - Be open to allowing new students to join after beginning band
 - Create methods for student retention, but let the ones go that are not committed.
 - Increasing student retention means understanding what brings your students back year after year.
 - Host social events for your students
 - Eat lunch with them
 - Allow them access to you outside of rehearsal
 - Learn who they are as people
 - ◆ I always my approach my students with more grace when I know them outside of the rehearsal room

- Students are spread thin by being involved in all that is offered
 - This is a good thing! Encourage them to be a part, and make it easy on them to do multiple activities. They deserve your support!
 - Even high school aged students need and deserve time to figure out what they love
 - The more pressured a student feels, the less likely they are to find the joy in the activity

- More students work jobs to contribute to the household
 - Do not take advantage of their time, and understand that band is #1 to us but not to every one of our students. Be respectful of their time and commitment.
 - They will never love the activity more than we love the activity and we must never lose sight of that fact.

- ❖ Responsibilities of the small school director
 - Director, student advocate, private lesson teacher, SECRETARY, travel planner, therapist, fundraiser, instrument repair person, etc.
 - You wear many hats, and it can be exhausting! Never be afraid to reach out for help.
 - Make time for your family and yourself
 - It is also rewarding in so many ways to see the fruits of your labor.
 - Small school band can be so satisfying!
 - ◆ The success is there because YOU built it!
 - ◆ If something is “broken”, YOU will know how to fix it.
 - ◆ Instruction can be vertically aligned completely from bottom to top because you have control of everything happening.

- ❖ What are some of the solutions for these challenges?
 - Develop a strong booster program and rely heavily on them
 - These booster groups are our #1 ally! Let them help you!
 - Build trust with your adults, and let them know how much you love and care about their students’ success.

- Delegate, delegate, delegate! Parents want to help!
- Use the staff you have at all times
 - Break out groups, sectionals, private lessons, etc. If there are two, three, or even four directors available in a class period, all should be actively engaged in teaching!
- You become your own private lesson teacher
 - This is the absolute best time to develop a positive rapport with a student and find common ground. Show them you care about them, and they will work for you because they want to!
- Recruit, recruit, recruit!!!
 - Recruiting for your program is a year long commitment!
 - Perform at your younger campuses regularly
 - Play a Christmas concert for them!
 - Bring the drumline to play at their lunch time
 - Send small ensembles to perform as students arrive to school
 - Test every new student for an instrument! You will gain more!
 - You can test only the students that sign up for band, or you can test all students. We gain many more than anticipated each year because they gave it a try!
 - ◆ Kids are often afraid that they just will not be able to make a sound
 - Stop by the elementary music room once a month and introduce a new instrument. Let them even try it!
 - When we started building our program, we introduced a new instrument each six weeks. We demonstrated the physics of the instrument, we played popular songs, and we let them ask questions about it. Information is power!
- Support your students' involvement in all activities and advocate for them
 - Let them see your face at their games, recitals, plays, and other activities. They will love you for it, and they are always there for you!
 - Never make them feel guilty for being involved in many activities!

- Your students' lives do not revolve around band
 - If rehearsal ends at 5, let them out at 5! Do not take advantage of their time, and even release them early on occasion. This will benefit you in the long run!

- ❖ Get creative and find more help!
 - Involve former band members that are a part of the faculty/staff
 - Students love learning that their teachers play an instrument!
 - Include these people in performances! Feature them at a concert! Have them play with the students at a pep rally!
 - Student leaders can be a tremendous asset - it is their program!
 - Help them create ownership in their program by giving them responsibilities and allow them to set some standards
 - Encourage them to host social events with one another
 - Encourage them to host sectionals, private lessons, etc.
 - The more ownership they have, the stronger the culture of ownership will become

- ❖ Make friends...not enemies
 - Band is not the most important program on campus. Let me finish...
 - It is our job to believe that our program is most important, but it is our administrators job to believe that all programs deserve equal consideration
 - Build positive relationships with your colleagues, and remember that our program can and should serve the community
 - It is healthy to draw boundaries and place your students' needs first
 - Choose your battles carefully
 - Not every situation is worth a fight
 - People are not always trying to take advantage of us
 - ◆ Sometimes we just have to educate others about what our students should and should not be expected to do
 - Support other programs and help develop unity within the school

- ◆ Remember that expectations should be reciprocated
 - If you want people to show up for you, show up for them
 - Support the teams, support each other
 - A strong partnership between school programs can improve campus morale for the better
- ❖ Be the best you can be every day for your students!
 - Everything is dependent upon you! The success of your program starts and ends with you.
 - Believe in every student, and give them all a fair chance to contribute what they are capable of contributing.
 - Every student can contribute! They might not be the best player of their instrument, but they might be the best fundraiser or loading crew member. Give them a chance to show you what they are capable of doing!
 - Set high and firm expectations, but be compassionate and empathetic at the same time. Not every situation is cut and dry.
 - Ask questions before making assumptions
 - Provide a quality experience for every student no matter what! At the end of the day, the most important thing is the impact you leave on the student.
 - A program is a direct reflection of its directors. Be the best you can be for them and yourself. The achievements will take care of themselves when the culture is healthy and thriving.

True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.

- Nikos Kazantzakis

❖ Bridge City High School Wind Ensemble performs

➤ The Directorate - John Phillip Sousa

Not dedicated to band directors, as the title might imply, this march was written in appreciation of an honor bestowed upon Sousa by the Board of Directors of the 1893 St. Louis Exposition. The Sousa Band had been in existence for less than a year at that time but had created such a sensation at the exposition that the directorate held a special ceremony in his honor during the final week. In the brief ceremony, the governor of Missouri presented “The March King” with an elaborate medal of gold, rubies, and diamonds. To add the finishing touch, the Sousa Band struck up “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.”

➤ The Little Sparrow - Julie Giroux

Commissioned by the Plymouth Whitemarsh Band Boosters, Inc.,
for the Plymouth Whitemarsh High School Concert Band, Tonia
Asel Kaufman, Conductor

Watching birds is one of my favorite pastimes. I have many bird feeders and watch them every day. The sparrows are my favorites. No flashy plumage, nor spectacular songs, but still my favorites. I wonder where they sleep at night. They seem so frail yet they thrive and endure the worst of weather. No matter how much noise is around me, it feels like I am watching them in complete silence. Their presence is calming and so beautifully beautiful. While I was composing this work, I was reminded of this poem. And now, this poem reminds me of this music.

Only A Little Sparrow (Author unknown)

I’m only a little sparrow, A bird of low degree;

My life is of little value, But Jesus cares for me.

I just fold my wings at nightfall, Wherever I happen to be;
For He is always watching, And no harm can happen to me.

I am only a little sparrow, A bird of low degree;

At Night I peacefully Slumber, Because Jesus cares for me.

➤ Hispalis - Juan A. Perez

"Hispalis" is inspired by the city of Seville, situated in the southwest of Spain. In this piece, composer Juan Pérez takes you for a walk through this magnificent city: La Giralda, its river "río Guadalquivir", its dreamy streets, the Plaza de España and its traditions. The work is divided into 4 parts: the introduction, where the Andalusian style and the Sevillanas stand out; second, where the great festivities are depicted; a third one that represents the passion of the Semana Santa (Holy Week), and the last one, where the styles of several of its most emblematic neighborhoods and places, such as the Alameda or the Santa Cruz neighborhood, are captured.

➤ Fantasy on American Sailing Songs - Clare Grundman

Fantasy on American Sailing Songs was dedicated to the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association. This lively and robust medley of sailing songs includes *Hornet and Peacock*, *Lowlands: What Shall We Do With a Drunken Sailor?* and *Rio Grande*. Each song is clearly stated then effectively developed with appealing melodic and harmonic treatment.