

The Value of Giving Your Heart to a Small Program

Evaluating your goals and prioritizing your program to support the life-lessons and musical values you believe are the MOST important to teach in a small school setting when resources are limited.

I. What Are Your Personal Goals?

- A. Family-Keeping Your Own Kids Out of Jail
- B. Spouse or Significant Other-Staying That Way
- C. Building a Band Program
- D. Superior Rating
- E. Trophies
- F. Making Finals at BOA
- G. Staying Excited About Teaching and Not Burning Out
- H. Winning a Small Show
- I. Becoming President of Your State Association or Other Politics
- J. Teaching the Love of Music

II. Non-Musical Values/Life-Lessons We Claim to Teach

- A. Responsibility
- B. Leadership
- C. Work Ethic
- D. Personal Relationships
- E. Memories
- F. Esprit De Corps
- G. Feeling of Success-Self Esteem
- H. Striving For Excellence

The above are the things I wanted my own sons to learn as they went through middle and high school, and they got that from band, but also from scouts and playing soccer. What do we have that volleyball does not? Music. Don't underestimate its power to make us better people.

III. Musical Values We Want to Teach-If You Could Teach One Musical Thing to Your Students in the Last Seconds of Your Life, What Would It Be?

- A. Love of Music
- B. Musicality
- C. Skills to Make Music
- D. Appreciation of Great Music
- E. Awareness of Many Styles and Genres of Music

IV. Which of These Goals and Values Can Be Taught with a Small Program?

A. Are there some of our non-musical values that cannot be taught in a smaller program? I doubt it. In fact, without lots of outside help which smaller programs may not be able to afford, students may have more leadership possibilities and responsibility in a small program than a larger one. Memories, Esprit de Corps, or personal relationships, are no different from one group to another if they are striving for excellence, developing a work ethic, and having success.

B. Musical goals? Obviously, larger programs with lots of resources, students and instructors may be able to have a higher degree of excellence than a small program with one director. Many students in our all-state bands come from large programs for that reason. The larger programs are often located closer to resources where students can hear concerts or take lessons. Larger programs should be able to challenge students a little more with higher-quality music and trips that expose students to professional level instructors or soloists. However, after looking carefully at our all-state audition results, percentage-wise compared to the size of the school, a student at a small program has a better chance of making all-state than one at a large school. Actually, that makes sense. As a director, we have more time per student at a smaller program than a director at a larger program. Also, many smaller schools have a larger percentage of students involved in the band program since there may be fewer options there for other quality musical programs. I firmly believe that musicality, musicianship and the love of music can be taught in a smaller band setting, if you make that your priority. In fact, we have heard many really fine bands from larger schools, even here at mid-west, that play everything correctly, but there is little if any attention given to musical expression. There is “no wind in the sail” although there is a great “rudder “ (Richard Floyd on balancing expression with correctness)

C. Personal goals: here’s the rub. This smaller program will probably face too many hurdles to play at a Midwest or maybe even a Music-for-All Festival because of the lack of funding, instrumentation, or ability. The chances of affording BOA are slim, unless you put all your resources in that bucket, and the chances of making finals very slim, although there are exceptions. Colleagues across the country will probably not know who you are. Not as many trophies on the wall although you may win some small shows or your class at a marching show and keep your admin happy. If you are smart and careful not to try to do everything yourself that the big programs do, you can keep your wife, your kids, your job, your sanity and after many years at the same school, eventually build a program and gain respect from your peers in the state, although it will take years.

V. Aligning Our Programs with Our Values and Goals

- A. Marching Band definitely teaches to the non-musical goals we listed above, no question. Probably competitive marching band does this better than any other high school activity if done in a way that does not sacrifice everything for winning.
- B. Although there is lots of time spent on teaching musical values as well in marching bands it is hard to claim teaching musicality and musicianship is a true focus when we rehearse over 100 hours for students who typically play their instrument only 3-4 minutes in a modern show. Although students are responsible for executing their part at very high levels, they cannot make too many musical decisions when they are moving, spaced very far apart, and have been drilled to know exactly how loud to play where, etc. There are skills needed to perform at high levels just as in other ensembles, but most of us probably agree musicality, exposure to really great music, and appreciation of lots of styles and genres are more easily taught in our concert bands.
- C. We also generally agree as music educators that concert band should be the focus of our program and our other ensembles and activities should take a back seat to our efforts in teaching music through our concert bands.
- D. Our musical challenges can be greater in concert band since we are sitting down and not having to execute difficult visuals or drill.

VI. What Are We Teaching? Is It What We Think Is Really Important?

- A. **LOOK AT YOUR CHECKBOOK.** Most budgets look like this:
 - a. Marching Band \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$
 - b. Concert Band \$\$\$
 - c. Jazz Band 0-\$
- B. Do your expenditures of resources-time and money- directly correlate with the values you want to teach? **Your checkbook is a stark reminder of what you really feel is important, as is your schedule.**

VII. How to Prioritize What You Do with Your Small Program to Align with the Values You Want to Teach

- A. There are limited resources.
- B. Competition marching can be an option if you make wise choices with music, simple drill and don't spend your entire budget on marching horns, electronics, drill, arrangements, copyrights
- C. The competitive marching band schedule can preclude athletes from participating in your program
- D. Using peer tutors is not an option, it is a necessity.
- E. OR, just have a great Friday night band which might make keeping your athletes in the band program a little easier.
- F. However, there is often pressure to compete with the most visual part of your program-marching band.

- G. Marching band can be a huge attractant to future students OR a huge deterrent. It is the most visual part of your program
- H. If you are starting with a really small program, maybe jazz ensemble is the way to quickly get a quality group together that can get out in the community and perform.
- I. Give your students more opportunities with the ensemble you are trying to build
- J. Small ensembles are another way to get students to improve their musicality and performance skills.
- K. The advantage of a smaller program is that you get more time with each student.
- L. Don't model your program after the big programs. Of course, borrow ways to grow your program from them that work for you, keeping in mind that small schools have different challenges and often different solutions

VIII. Bottom Line: Hard Choices

- A. Students in small programs deserve a quality band program, not one that is a stepping stone for young directors.
- B. Bloom where you are planted. Do whatever it takes. You will probably have to shovel a lot of "fertilizer", which will help you bloom even brighter.
- C. Be a music educator first and never forget the reason you are in music. Even as you are delivering fruit and selling mattresses.
- D. Stick to your guns and go after your musical goals for your students. Don't be overly influenced by ratings, trophies, etc. Truly make teaching music your top priority.
- E. Emulate only the part of the huge programs that can help you reach your goals. Solve problems in creative ways-outside the box. If you can't do this, you ain't got a chance...
- F. Unfortunately, there are places you cannot have a quality program or even begin to teach musicianship no matter what you do. Don't bang your head against a brick wall forever. If you need to do so, move on and don't feel guilty about it. However, be completely honest with yourself: is having a quality program at the school where you are presently working possible or not? Could you be happy teaching there? Could you make a difference? Could you meet your personal goals?