

Top Tips for Success in the Small School Band Program

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1. We can all agree there are many obstacles that all of us face as Band Directors:
Scheduling issues, Dual Credit/AP courses/Enrichment classes, Club Sports, Retention issues, Standardized Testing interruptions, Budget funding (or lack thereof), sustaining Parental Involvement, Fundraising (Do we have space to list everything?)
2. However, there are some obstacles that are *specific* to small school/rural Band Directors:
 - *There is a limited pool of students to begin with
 - *Most Band students are involved in multiple school activities/sports
 - *One teacher teaches it all (or almost all of it), and they are expected to know every single thing about...well, everything
 - *Limited options for private study due to location, unless the teacher does the lessons
 - *Real or perceived lack of recognition of the importance of the Fine Arts in general by school administration and/or community
 - *Inadequate and/or outdated facilities and/or equipment and/or music library
 - *Limited financial resources inherent to small/rural communities
 - *Band is far from the “top dog” in the school hierarchy
 - *Small schools are more susceptible to changes that can have negative impact
3. There ARE advantages to teaching Band in a small school environment!
 - *In general, when reached out to, parents and community are supportive and eager to help teachers and kids, and the kids involved care and want to be lead
 - *In general, retention can be dependable to fairly strong because teachers can establish effective relationships with their smaller numbers of students/families
 - *You are the “Master of your domain”...over time you can set up the program that you want, and run it how you see fit...and experience success if you are consistent
 - This depends on you having a clear vision of what you want, and knowing how to enact both short and long term plans to achieve it. Teach by Mark Hindsley’s famous 14 words: “If you know what you want, you will find a way to get it.”
 - *Since you are viewed as the “Expert”...take advantage of that
 - *It gives you a chance to cut your teeth and learn valuable skills in all areas of the profession that will help you succeed if your intent is to move on
4. The Absolute No-No’s of Small School Band Directing
 - **Take it personally when kids quit...then shut the door behind them*
 - Put your ego aside, leave the door open, and find solutions...you can’t save everybody, but maybe you can *create* somebody
 - **Being over-focused on numbers in your program at the expense of quality*
 - **Letting students (or you) have an “Us vs. Them” attitude to build “Pride” in your Band*
 - **Being unwilling to compromise when conflicts arise*
 - You can’t win every battle, nor should you fight every one
 - You win when the KIDS win, which means the ADULTS involved must make the decisions**
 - **Appearing to be “disengaged” from your school and/or community*
 - You are a public representative of your school, program, and the community...embrace it and benefit from the relationships you build (OVER)

**Letting “small town/small school politics” be a negative influence on you*

**Letting it get out that this is just a brief stop in your meteoric career trajectory*

-“The corn has ears.” If you are viewing the job as a temporary stop until you land “The perfect gig for you,” you definitely want a good track record and colleagues that speak highly of you, not burned bridges and/or a lackluster program

**Accepting excuses because of your situation instead of working harder, smarter, and better to change it*

-Any time you use the word “Because” when lamenting negative situations present in your program, it is a sign that you are relying on excuses

****“90% of what is wrong with your Band is standing on the podium.” - Dr. Stephen K. Steele**

****Owning everything is both the best and the worst part of teaching in a small school, you have to be prepared to embrace the responsibility for everything****

5. Absolute Musts for Success in the Small School Environment

***Define/target successes for your situation and realize they will change over time**

***KNOW WHERE YOU ARE**

-What type of community is this? What are the kids like? What is expected of the Band program? What are the traditions we need to keep? How does my philosophy of teaching music fit in with the school and community’s expectations, and am I comfortable with that?

***You must be willing to embrace “Everybody Band” and be comfortable with how that fits in with your expectations/standards (be demanding but be realistic)**

***YOU ARE NEVER NOT RECRUITING**

-Expect your kids to recruit...it’s *their* Band

-Do everything in your power to BECOME A BETTER TEACHER because creating musicians out of previous non-players is an absolute necessity

-Show your kids you are interested in them as people and in what they do outside of Band...you will earn more trust and non-Band kids take notice

-Attend their athletic contests, community, school and church events, talk to them about stuff other than Band when you see them in school

***BE PATIENT...it takes time (years) to build and maintain a program that enhances the school, community, and as a result, your professional reputation and resume**

***Be creative and determined in finding resources and opportunities for your students**

***Involve your younger students with older students as much as possible to create program continuity and improve retention (pyramid concerts, joint halftime performances, mentoring, performance visits to elementary schools, community events)**

***SELL your program to students and community by making it constantly visible and talked about. A truly invested teacher and director knows how important this is.**

***COMMUNICATE and BE HONEST...in everything, with everyone**

***Develop excellent working relationships with Parents, Faculty, Guidance, Administration, Support Staff so they will work with and for you instead of against you...sometimes this involves compromise on your part, and that’s OK**

***Warning: Personal Opinion ahead: If possible, live in the community...if not, BE SEEN in the community**

***NEVER...SELL...YOUR...KIDS...SHORT**

<https://tinyurl.com/y7ppbc4d>

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