

The Business Side of Teaching School Music: **Working with Administrators**

Instrumental teachers have a keen interest in professional development—studying conducting, instructional techniques, ensemble development and literature. Despite this commitment to professional growth, the thrill of having an outstanding ensemble eludes many directors.

Music Administration

- Music administration is a craft in which there is generally more than one right solution to a problem. To develop a strategy that maximizes your efforts, it is important to work within the system to obtain the staff, equipment and help you need.
- The relationship you establish with the school principal will help (or hinder) every aspect of your program. The principal's decisions about staffing, scheduling, building procedures and budgets set the priorities for the entire school. It is essential to understand what is important to individual administrators. Listen carefully!
- Develop a supportive relationship with the school custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, maintenance personnel and tech support staff.
- Be a part of the team and advance your leader's priorities whenever possible. Your program will soon become one of those priorities.
- Just as teachers set goals for students, it is important to know the goals that the principal has for the music program. These may include discipline procedures, scheduling, budgets, relationships with parents and the number of ensemble performances.
- Each principal is guided by district goals. Learn what these are and discuss how music fits into these district-wide goals.
- Know what criteria the administration will use to evaluate the music department. The best objectives are specific, measurable and musically understood. Remember, it is important for administrators to observe rehearsals. This is when you are at your best, managing a large group of students in a complex activity. The process of teaching music is the exciting part of the job. Be sure to get credit for it.
- It is equally important to let administrators know what is important to you, students and parents. In most school districts, teachers set goals for themselves; these become part of the evaluation process, so use this opportunity to put them in writing. Some of these expectations may include concert attendance, community service obligations, budgeting assistance, participation in awards ceremonies, letters to parents and scheduling. Consult administrators when developing ensemble policies rather than after sharing them with students.

- An administrator's scarcest resource is time. Value that time by being organized when you meet. Whenever possible, bring two or three recommended solutions or suggestions, not just problems, to meetings. Be proactive—suggest opportunities that benefit the students and the school.
- When making a proposal, include all the relevant information. In most cases, you will end up with what you negotiate.
- Never miss an opportunity to improve how the students and the music program are perceived by others in the building and community. Advocate for high standards and develop a reputation as a team player in your educational community.
- Always keep the best interests of your students first when making decisions. If you follow this tenet, you will rarely make a poor decision. If unsure, consult with your supervisor for guidance.
- Always follow through on commitments.
- Have solutions for problems before they occur.
- Avoid the divide-and-conquer approach.
- Never point to another program except to recognize excellence.
- Make time to visit with colleagues.

A Short Checklist for Building Valuable Relationships

- Show interest in the activities of others.
- Include the principal and other faculty members as special guest soloists or narrators on concerts.
- Help your principal prepare congratulatory letters to students selected for special honors. Everyone enjoys participating in a winning activity.
- If the band missed a day of school to attend a competition, thank the faculty for their support and accommodation.
- Keep faculty informed of department activities and concerts; send every member of the faculty a copy of the music department calendar.
- Regardless of age, have the music students send personal concert invitations to members of the administration, faculty and school board.
- Sign up to chaperone a dance, cover a math or science class, attend a basketball game and serve on committees.
- Share success! By helping others to be successful, you share in that success as well.



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