

BEGINNING BAND RECRUITING

Marvin T. Wortman

Welcome to “Beginning Band Recruiting 101,” a class not offered in colleges and universities. You have completed all of your methods courses and instrument technique classes; and hopefully are quite proficient on most of the instruments of the band.

One of the most important aspects of building an excellent beginning band program is the utilization of and carrying out of the formal recruiting process; a process which is usually not a part of your formal college training. As music education consultants, we are often invited to make a brief presentation to college methods classes on the importance of and techniques of successful recruiting methods.

We are all aware of the daily informal recruiting process, which “just happens” by the way of concerts, parades, halftime shows, and the music of our daily lives. One never knows what child may be influenced by one of the above during the years before they are eligible to become a beginning band member.

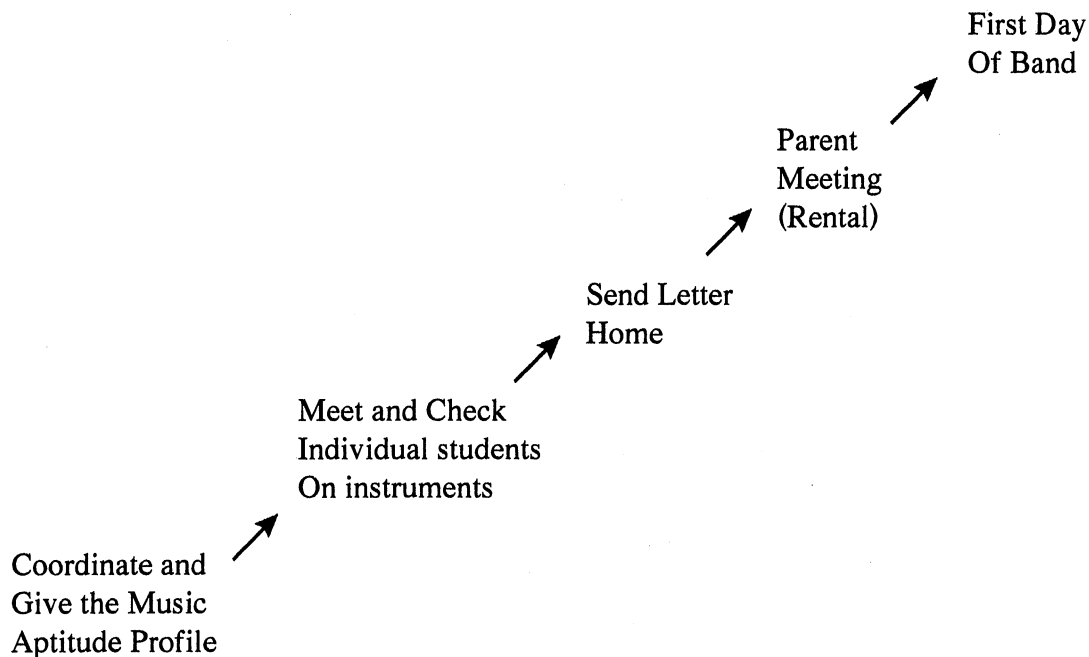
Let us address the formal recruiting process. When you meet with your school administrator, it is important that you have a well defined, organized method of recruiting in detail. Most administrators really do not approve of the word “test” in determining the students’ inherent music abilities. We prefer to use the phrase “Music Aptitude Profile (MAP), which is determined by one of the many current tools available from the music industry. One of the latest and most comprehensive of these is the IT (IN TUNE), a recruiting program for band from UMI (United Musical Instruments) available through your local music retailer.

Recruiting should be done in an organized sequence, with the culmination point being that of getting an instrument and being ready to play the first scheduled day of beginning band. The following schedule is suggested:

1. Coordinate and schedule the giving of the MAP (Music Aptitude Profile) with your administration. Every student should be given the MAP regardless of whether or not they are going to be a beginning band member. (This profile can be included in the students’ permanent record. In the case of many elementary schools, the general music teacher will be happy to assist in giving this profile and instruction. As mentioned before, the In Tune Beginning Band Recruiting kit is an excellent source. It contains recruiting video, student forms for completing the profile, as well as other valuable suggestions.
2. After the initial MAP is given, the band director should score the profile and meet with each individual student to discuss their profile, check them physically on an instrument, and discuss with them the possibility of becoming a beginning band member.
3. A formal letter is then sent home to the parents informing that their child has been given the Music Aptitude Profile, checked on an instrument, and

- informing them of an upcoming meeting for parents.
4. Send a follow-up letter a few days before the meeting, outlining the rental meeting (with information from your local music store about renting or arranging for an instrument for their child). Have them indicate on a form to be returned, whether or not they will attend the meeting and if they have an instrument already or if they plan to rent an instrument at the meeting.
 5. Last minute preparations include checking with the custodial staff and administration to ensure the meeting place is ready i.e. chairs, tables, public address system, including making sure the after hours heating or air conditioning system is working and that the building will be open.

Successful beginning band programs do not “just happen”. Most of them culminate at the end of a well organized recruiting process and what we refer to as the culmination curve:



Following the proven methods of recruiting and utilizing the techniques suggested in the following publication “A Recruiting Guide for Band and Orchestra Directors,” produced by The Music Achievement Council, and funded by the National Association of Music Merchants, will usually assure you of a proven 70 to 80 percent participation rate of the total available students in your class or school. A copy of this recruiting publication is attached to this article for your use. Good luck and remember to ask your local music dealer for the latest materials and suggestions in recruiting techniques.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

Nancy Seward

I. Preliminary Recruiting

1. Have your high school band, in uniform, play a short concert for the elementary grades. Include clapping to marches and sing-alongs.
2. Bring a few of your best players to the elementary school to demonstrate the basic instruments with simple tunes like, "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain". One year, when all of the boys wanted to play trumpet, we had the trumpet player do a dorky minuet and that evened things out nicely.
3. I think that the most effective form of recruitment is the use of tonettes, song flutes or flutophones with the entire class. You can teach the concept of following through with steady air from the diaphragm, tonguing the start of the air and the use of the foot-pat to physically feel the down and up subdivisions of the beat. Best of all, you can make it lots of fun and get to know the students!

II. Who's Going to Play What?

Steer students toward the instrument that you think they will have the most success with. Have everybody try to buzz. Then try everybody on every basic mouthpiece. Get a can of "Sanimist" (about \$6) and a box of Kleenex and disinfect the mouthpieces after each try.

Check carefully to see how the student's teeth meet:

Overbite – upper teeth in front of lowers. The most common bite and suitable for any instrument.

Evenbite – teeth meet evenly. Suited to trumpet or saxophone, maybe French horn or trombone.

Underbite – lower teeth in front of uppers. Will have difficulty with flute, clarinet or brass. Maybe saxophone. Try percussion.

1. Flute: look for an average to generous lower lip. A teardrop formation in the center of the upper lip or a thin lower lip will have difficulty.
2. Clarinet: look for an overbite and fingers that can cover the tone holes.
3. Saxophone: might be difficult with an underbite.
4. Trumpet: look for an even or overbite. (The jaw is brought forward to form a solid anchor for the mouthpiece with an overbite.) Lips should be average to thin. The student should be able to produce 2nd line G easily. An extreme overbite might have difficulty and could try trombone or bassoon (saxophone for now).
5. French Horn: look for students with a good sense of pitch! Have them sing "America" a cappella.
6. Trombone: look for average to generous lips. They should be able to produce a 4th line F comfortably.
7. Tuba: look for average to generous lips and boys who are apt to be large, although we have had some fine tuba players who were mid-sized girls! We had good luck starting tuba players on baritones with tuba books, then, a year later; "Here's your tuba. It

sounds an octave lower. No big deal!”

8. **Percussion:** should be able to mimic various rhythm patters including syncopation and after-beats.
9. If you're in a small school, encourage girls to take up brass and percussion to protect your football half time shows later. Your boys may all be on the football team!

III. Before They Get Their Instruments Be Sure They Know:

1. Good posture! Sit straight, feet on the floor, back away from the chair.
2. How to form a correct embouchure.
3. How to put the instrument together.
4. How to hold the instrument.
5. Proper hand position.
6. The concept of blowing through the instrument from the diaphragm to produce a characteristic tone.
7. A steady down-up foot-pat for the physical feel of the subdivisions of the beat. A whole note lasts until the rest begins!
8. The use of the tongue to start the tone. Reinforce by playing 4 quarter notes allowing no space between the notes. Blow a whole note and just interrupt it with the tongue. Follow through with the air! Try singing with the syllable tah or too.
9. Proper care of the instrument.
10. Always bring a pencil to class to mark assignments, add breath marks, etc.

IV. A Brief Woodwind Refresher Course

Flute

Embouchure:

1. Start with only the head joint.
2. Place the edge of the tone hole at the edge of the lower lip. The lip will cover about 1/3 of the tone hole.
3. Close the lips and smile or smirk a little.
4. Blow the lips open by saying “poo”. (Later “too”.)
5. Forming the aperture around a sharpened pencil point can help give the concept of the size of the opening.
6. With a small aperture, direct the air stream towards the opposite wall of the tone hole where it will split.
7. To play the higher register, make the aperture smaller and aim the air higher on the tone hole wall. Do not blow harder! To play lower notes, flatten the aperture with a little more smile and aim the air lower.

Flute Assembly:

1. Grasp the body of the flute where there are no keys.
2. Insert the head joint with gentle quarter turns back and forth. Align the tone holes with the top of the keys.
3. Add the foot joint to the main body with the same gentle turns, holding the main body next to where the foot joint is being added. Align the rod on the foot joint with the middle of the last hole on the body. If a student has a short little finger, adjust the foot joint to a more comfortable position.

4. If the joints fit too tightly, apply a little bit of cork grease and then wipe it off.

Holding the Flute and Hand Position:

1. Hold the flute parallel to the floor.
2. Keep the left elbow down.
3. The right arm is almost horizontal and there is a slight downward curve to the right wrist.
4. After the pads of the right hand fingers are placed on the keys and the little finger is pushing down the Eb key, place the right thumb barely under the flute beneath the first finger (the F key).
5. The thumb of the left hand is placed on the B natural key while the instrument rests against the index finger above the large knuckle. The 2nd and 3rd fingers should be curved over the keys with the pads of the fingers on the keys.

Clarinet

Embouchure:

1. Use the mouthpiece and barrel joint only.
2. Roll a tiny bit of the red of the lip over the lower teeth and pull muscles down for a flat chin.
3. At a 45-degree angle, place the reed side of the mouthpiece on the lip at the point where the reed leaves the tip rail of the mouthpiece. Take enough mouthpiece into the mouth to allow for maximum reed vibration. The top teeth are placed firmly on the top of the mouthpiece 1/2 to 5/8^{ths} of an inch down. Don't bite but have a firm enough grip that the mouthpiece can not be wiggled in the mouth. Anchor the corners of the mouth firmly against the teeth and around the mouthpiece.
4. Open the corners for a big breath and anchor again to blow fast, steady air through the mouthpiece. If the embouchure and air are working well, the pitch top line F# will sound. Try firmer bite, less bite, more or less mouthpiece in the mouth until the proper pitch is attained.
5. To begin the sound with the tongue, pull the tongue away from the top of the mouthpiece and the top of the reed to start the air through the mouthpiece.

Clarinet Assembly:

1. New clarinets have tight corks and it will be necessary to use a lot of cork grease for the first several weeks or months.
2. In the right hand, palm down; pick up the longest joint at the bottom.
3. In the left hand, palm up; hold the upper joint so that the fingers are holding down the tone hole rings, thereby raising the upper bridge key.
4. Carefully guide the two parts of the bridge key toward each other with small back and forth twists while pushing the joints together.
5. Add the bell, barrel and mouthpiece, always holding next to where the joints are going together. If you put on the bell while holding at the barrel, the clarinet can twist in the middle and bend the bridge key and several others!

Holding the Clarinet and Hand Position:

1. The right thumb contacts the thumb rest between the top joint and the nail and lifts

the clarinet firmly against the top teeth. Until a callous forms, thumbs will be sore.
Keep a box of Band-Aids on hand.

2. The left thumb covers the tone hole at the angle of two o'clock.
3. The left index finger curls around the Ab and A keys and covers the first tone hole at the downward angle.

Use #2 reeds at first and go to stiffer reeds as the embouchure develops strength. A Vandoren B45 mouthpiece with a Rovner dark ligature will do wonders for the sound of a student line instrument!

Saxophone

Embouchure:

1. Use the mouthpiece only.
2. Cover the bottom teeth with as little lip as possible. Since it is a cushion for the reed, it is not tightly drawn. The chin is normal and relaxed, not pointed as in clarinet.
3. Place the reed on the lip at the point where the reed leaves the side rails at about a 90-degree angle. Take enough mouthpiece into the mouth for maximum reed vibration. The top teeth rest on the mouthpiece and the corners of the mouth are drawn in, like rubber bands, to keep air from escaping.
4. Open the corners for a big breath and close again to blow fast, steady air through the mouthpiece. If the embouchure and air are working well, the alto sax will sound concert A about the staff; the tenor sax will sound G above the staff; the bari sax will sound concert 4th line D. Try a firmer grip on the mouthpiece if the pitch is flat.
5. To begin the sound with the tongue, pull the tongue away from the tip of the reed and mouthpiece to start the air through the mouthpiece.

Holding the Saxophone:

1. Sit straight, arms away from the body.
2. Adjust the neck strap to bring the mouthpiece into position. Don't duck to meet it! The neck strap carries the weight of the instrument.
3. With the right thumb under the thumb rest between the top joint and nail, push the saxophone forward until the bottom of the bell is in the middle of the thigh.
4. Turn the mouthpiece so that the student's head is straight! A magazine on the head works wonders. Keep a few Readers' Digests on hand!

Use #2 reeds to start and go to stiffer reeds as the embouchure strengthens. A Selmer C* mouthpiece and a Rovner dark ligature do wonders for the sound of a student line instrument.

V. A Brief Brass and Snare Drum Refresher Course

Brass Embouchure:

1. Place the lips together naturally.
2. Keep the corners firm and the cheeks against the teeth to avoid air pockets.
3. Produce a clear, steady buzz without the mouthpiece.
4. Place the mouthpiece on the middle of the lips, half on the upper and half on the lower lip. French horn should use about 2/3 of the upper lip and 1/3 of the lower lip.

5. Start the air through the mouthpiece by placing the tongue at the base of the top teeth and using the syllable “tah” or “too”.
6. Sustain the sound with steady air support from the diaphragm.
7. Release the tone by stopping the air.

Holding the Brass Instruments

Trumpet

1. The trumpet is held horizontally with the left hand holding the valve casings and the left little finger in the rig for the 3rd valve slide.
2. The pads of the right hand fingers are placed on the valve buttons and the right thumb is placed under the lead pipe and between the first and second valves. The right little finger may be placed in the hook.

French Horn

1. Rest the bottom edge of the bell on the thigh while the pads of the left fingers operate the valves.
2. *The right hand should be slightly cupped with the fingers and thumb together side by side. To find a good hand position, imagine that the bell of the horn is a clock face. Place the hand in the bell at an angle which puts the thumb between 12 and 1 o'clock, and the bottom of the little finger is around 6 o'clock. The knuckles and backs of the fingers should be against the far side of the bell.*

Courtesy of Dr. Ann Ley, French horn extra, Kansas City Symphony

Trombone

1. Assemble the trombone so that the bell and the slide section form a right angle.
2. The last 3 fingers of the left hand go under the crosspiece and the index finger is placed on the mouthpiece stem.
3. The right hand grips the slide in its crosspiece between the thumb and first 2 fingers. The wrist should be very relaxed and flexible.

Baritone

The left hand holds the outer tubing and the pads of the fingers of the right hand press the valves.

Tuba

The tuba is placed in the lap and the left hand balances it while the pads of the fingers of the right hand operate the valves.

Snare Drum

1. The left stick is held in the hollow between the thumb and first finger about 3-1/2 inches from the butt end of the stick and then is placed over the third finger between the first and second joint. The wrist rotates to produce the stroke.

2. The right stick is held between the thumb and the side of the first finger about 3-1/2 inches from the butt end of the stick. The wrist waves "goodbye" to produce the stroke.
3. The drum should be positioned about five inches below the player's waistline and slanted to the player's right.

VI. Contacting the Parents

Early in the year you need to set a date with your dealer for the rental of instruments. Give yourself plenty of time to be sure the students understand correct embouchure, etc., etc.

After you have determined what each student is suited to play, send a letter home to the parents.

United Musical Instruments puts out two wonderful little brochures: "Your Child's Future with Music!" and "Your Child Deserves a Musical Education." Both extol the many benefits to be derived from music study. For instance, "Did you know that when children study music in school, they also improve their reading, spelling and math skills?" Ask your dealer to get enough to send one home with each letter.

Your letter might be something like this:

Dear Parents,

Band in the _____ Schools is an on-going process, beginning in the _____ Grade and developing through high school. (Here you need to brag about meat things that the bands have done: contests, concerts, parades, and everything that you can think of.)

Your youngster has been tested on all of the basic band instruments and I recommend _____ as the one to which he or she is best suited.

For your convenience, a representative of _____ Music Co. will be at the high school band room on Oct. 20 from 3:30 until 8:00 to assist you in making arrangements for renting an instrument. I strongly suggest that the student has a wire music stand (\$12.95?) and you can purchase one at that time, also.

Please cut off the lower portion of this letter and return to me by _____.

Sincerely,

_____, Band Director

Parents' names _____

Student's name _____

What time can we expect you at the high school band room on Oct 20? _____

VII. Retention

1. Retention takes care of itself if the student is well suited to the instrument, is started with a good basic embouchure, concept of blowing through the instrument, good hand position, understanding of the basic fundamentals of counting and if band rehearsals are positive experiences. Always find something to praise! Be enthusiastic! Remember, several months ago they didn't know which end to blow. Look how far they have come because you started them right! "You're the best beginning band I've heard all year!"
2. Send out progress reports to the parents or phone them to keep them informed.
3. Get the band in front of the public as soon and as often as possible, perhaps with one or two older bands. They all need lots of exposure!
4. Instill pride! Give the group a snappy name like The Panther Cadets or The Richmond All-Stars. Give each band member a pencil with the name of the band inscribed in gold. (Lillian Vernon, 40 brightly colored pencils - \$7.98 1-800-545-5426) Have the local newspaper come and take their picture as publicity for their first concert.
5. A star for an exercise played well is still a good incentive. Be sure everyone gets some stars.
6. Know your students and show them that you are sincerely interested in them!
7. Beginners can play in tune! You don't have to listen to a train wreck. Get a chromatic tuner, like a Korg, and have them match the pitch. Concert F works well to start.
8. Don't try to play softly until a good tone with lots of air is established.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

Joe Pappas

The success of your band program will depend on how well you recruit and retain students. The strategies will differ from teacher to teacher and school to school. You will need to find one that works for you. In this section, we will discuss strategies that have worked for several successful directors.

Recruitment

There are many approaches directors use to recruit new band members. No matter what level you need to recruit, the procedures are generally the same. Below are items that I feel are helpful in having a successful recruitment.

- Get to know the primary teachers of the group you plan to recruit. They can be helpful in promoting your program (especially if they played in band as a student). Make a special attempt to know the music teacher in that level. Let them know about your plans and how you feel they are important with assisting in the development of the young band student. (This is especially important! A good elementary music teacher can eliminate many problems for the beginning band member, i.e. rhythm, note values, names of the notes and clefs, etc.) The classroom teachers can inform you of student's study habits, math scores, behavior, and perhaps family background. All helpful information when picking the right instrument.
- Set your goals on the necessary instrumentation. I always looked ahead with the idea that the beginning class will replace a group of seniors. In other words, if you begin a group in sixth grade, they will replace your present sophomores. In order to maintain the present size and instrumentation of your program, you must begin a minimum of your sophomore instrumentation. But, to be more accurate, add ten percent for each year. The national attrition rate is about ten percent for each of the first three years.
- Before your first visit with your prospective recruiting class, try to give a concert with one of your performing groups. Keep the music up-tempo. Allow your performing students to interact with your prospects. Showcase the instruments that are important, i.e. French horns, tubas, and double reeds. Avoid showcasing saxes and percussion.
- After gathering helpful information from classroom teachers and counselors, meet with the students and find out their instrument choices. Make sure that you set up the day for meeting the student well in advance of the date. Perhaps use the general music class time or after school. If you are fortunate, you might be able use regular class time.

I recommend giving prospects three instrument choices, attempt to channel the student in the direction of your instrument needs. The student's desire to play a certain instrument may be overshadowed by physical characteristics and size. Check the fingers, teeth, and

lips. Assist the student in making the final choice. In today's society, it may be impossible to "audition" each student on an instrument due to disease and school policies.

When selecting percussion students, check math scores, previous music experiences, i.e. piano or other instruments, rhythm recall, natural rhythm, etc.

As a side story to checking each student, in my first year of teaching I failed to check out the fingers of a student. I had a young man interested in playing the sax. He was a good student and everything showed he had promise. After the third week, he had problems playing D and E. I checked the instrument, the reed, etc., but no notes! I looked closely at his hand position and told him to put down the second finger. He said, "I am!" What I failed to notice at the initial meeting was the young man was missing the top half of his second finger. Thank goodness for a music store willing to make alterations to the sax. They built an extension for the key and the student continued with many years of successful experience!

- Some teachers prefer to give a pre-band test. I always found the test to be time consuming and not too valuable. I really feel they are useful in selling instruments and can be a useful tool in keeping a student out of the program who has little potential.

If you do use one, be sure you have a cut off point and stick to it. Parents can be a problem if you don't!

- Display night! You may have one or more than one vendor if you do a display night. Before the night begins, try to have all students locked in on the instrument selection. Use the night to communicate the beginning band program with parents and make yourself available to meet the parents and discuss any questions they may have. It is also a good idea to send letters home to the parents discussing your procedures and policies.

Be sure to include in your communication that music broadens the student's learning experience!

Retention

Once you have enrolled in the program, it is often difficult to retain them for one reason or another. There are as many ways to lose a student, as there are to retain one. Let's look at ways to retain them and avoid the loss.

- Keep students involved in the program. Allow them to take ownership through student leaders, band officers, and section leaders. Give them some latitude in assisting with choosing music, planning performances, and preparing for trips. Give responsibilities to students, they love the opportunity.
- Expect the very best from each student, but keep in mind they may be giving their best. Try to find something good in each student. Be positive as much as possible. Build up the student who needs it. Avoid putting students down in front of their peers.

- Treat all students alike. Have policies that are effective and easy to administer.
- Get students involved with all aspects of the band program, i.e. pep band, solo and ensemble festival, private lessons, and jazz band.
- Get to know the school counselors. Many times, they can help with schedule conflicts and assist with keeping students in the band program. Counselors can assist in planning the four year schedule and find room in each year's schedule for band.
- Parent involvement can help in retaining students. Whether you have a booster club or a small group of parents, they can communicate your program needs, our operations, and plans to other parents in the community who will in return discuss the band program. Parents will assist with keeping their child in the program if they see you are trying to develop a strong program.
- Choose music that is enjoyable to play. This plays an important roll in the success of the student and the band program. If students enjoy the music, they become less bored and will work to make the performance successful and keep them coming back.
- Publicity. It is important to keep your community informed about the success and operation of your program and students. When your band does something successful let the community know it. Parents and students love to see their names in print.
- Band trips can also be successful tools in retaining students. Try to get your band out for a tour, one day or several days. A trip can build morale and keep the students working together and it gives students something to look forward to each year.
- Peer pressure works in both directions. However, with a low-keyed approach, it can be helpful in retaining students. Try to find a good assistant among your students to assist with retaining students wanting to drop. Many times, especially among the younger students, there is a "click" and what one does, they all do. Therefore it is imperative to find the leader and try to ward off the problem the problem if you want to retain all or certain ones in the click.
- Commitment from parents is important in retention. Suggest that parents buy instruments rather than renting them after the initial starting period of three months. As a result, they now have an investment. Students who play school owned instruments should purchase mouthpieces and supplies. Percussion students should be required to purchase a snare drum or bell kit, gig bag and all sticks and mallets. Sell the idea "music broadens education and learning."
- Have fun and let the students enjoy it too. A few things you can do to help with retention: let younger band members pass out programs at the next level concerts; older students sit in on rehearsals of the younger bands; use older students for tutoring; incorporate younger bands in high school band programs, i.e. concerts, halftime, etc.