



The Successful Recruitment Program

A successful band recruitment campaign is perhaps the single most important step toward building a strong elementary band program; before one can begin to teach, one must first have students. The elementary band director who wishes to build a band must be at least as good at salesmanship as at musicianship. The fervor and zeal with which the director approaches the recruitment process directly affect student response and, consequently, the overall band program. The following is a guide to the recruitment process:

As early as possible in the school year, set up times for the recruitment (band instrument demonstration) assembly with the classroom teachers. Having an assembly sometime the first week is ideal—interest and enthusiasm are high, and students have not yet become committed to too many other activities which are newly available to them. I have found that an assembly for each grade level works well. If you have over 150 students in a grade, you may want to split them up into smaller groups and have additional assemblies.

You will need a large room for this assembly—remember to sign up in advance for the room you will be using. If using the cafeteria, check with the food service and custodial staffs to be sure that noisy machinery (dishwasher, vacuum) will be silent during your program.

PREPARATION
Set A Program
Date And Place

Some directors prefer to do a smaller presentation in the more intimate setting of the classroom. A smaller group facilitates the passing around of instruments, an important step to recruitment. The informal atmosphere is appealing; however, I view the recruitment assembly as a grand show and prefer to make it a special event to which the students look forward. Only you can decide what approach will work best in your school.

**Arrange For
Instrument
Demonstrations**

The primary part of an elementary band recruitment assembly is the demonstration of all band instruments. This is a director's opportunity to make or break the band program for the entire year. Students will not sign up to play instruments which they have never heard; consequently, unless enlightened by the band director, most students tend to go for the popular instrument choices—flute, trumpet, saxophone, and drums. The result is a poorly balanced, treble band which will weaken the elementary, junior high, and high school pyramid for the next eight years. The solution is to have a desired instrumentation in mind, to demonstrate and discuss all instruments, and to devote the greatest amount of time and attention to those instruments that are less popular but so necessary for a properly balanced band—tuba, baritone, trombone, French horn, and oboe.

There are several approaches to instrument demonstration: the band director may personally demonstrate all instruments, high school students in the pyramid may demonstrate, or sixth-grade, second-year students may demonstrate. The latter is my preferred choice for many reasons: students in the audience identify with the performers and can get an idea of what they might sound like in a year; the returning second-year students are motivated by the chance to perform, and this starts the year off well; and students may join together as a mini-band to play an effective grand finale. Some directors prefer to involve high school students since they should perform better than elementary students. The performance can be particularly effective when the high school musicians come dressed in full marching band uniform; however, scheduling difficulties arise since these students would either need to miss school or the assembly would have to be scheduled at the end of the day, after the high school has been dismissed.

If you decide to have sixth graders demonstrate, you will need to give them the musical excerpts to perform and you will need to set up a rehearsal time. This preparation must be done during the first day or two of school if you intend to have an assembly by the end of the first week. It

may be wise to contact students before school starts. If this is your first year at the school, you will need guidance in selecting demonstrators. If the previous band director is available, you may wish to ask for a recommendation. The general music teacher often knows the musically strong students and can offer suggestions.

The selection of musical excerpts for demonstration is an important facet of a band recruitment program—I have known students to select their instrument based on their preference for a song that was demonstrated. Give some thought to what would appeal to students. A pop tune, a folk song, or a television theme might be good choices. I recall that one year I played a short snake-charmer tune on the oboe and the students loved it; that year I had an overwhelming number of oboe students. If you are hoping to increase your enrollment numbers on a particular instrument, choose a piece which will best show it off.

Select Music For Demonstration

In advance of the recruitment program, you will need to prepare a letter to go home with students. The letter will be representing you to the parents; it should be inviting, professional, and letter-perfect. The following information should be included:

Prepare A Recruitment Letter

- Mention the role of band in the curriculum at all levels
- Describe your band program—frequency and composition of classes, goals, performance opportunities
- Inform parents about instrument rental
- Discuss the parents' informational meeting
- Include a portion of the form to be returned if interested

Submit the letter for the principal's approval far enough in advance to allow time to make necessary changes and to run off copies. Clip-Art books and computer programs are available commercially and can be used to add to a letter's appeal. (See sample recruitment letter—Appendix A.)

Following the recruitment assembly, it is wise to hold an informational meeting for parents of interested band students. The date should be set and marked on the school calendar as soon as possible. Scheduling the meeting approximately one week after the recruitment program is suggested as this allows time to follow up the assembly with classroom visits.

Set A Date For A Parents' Informational Meeting

Prepare a reminder flyer to be sent home with students on the day of the informational meeting. (See sample parents' meeting reminder notice—Appendix B.)

Begin Aptitude Testing | While I do not use aptitude testing in my program, it is commonly used by many directors. There are a few standardized tests which are available. These tests identify students who demonstrate high levels of musical ability. The director can then use this information to make decisions regarding student participation and choice of instrument.

THE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM Set The Mood | Try to create an air of festivity as classes arrive for the assembly. Sousa marches piped into the hallway and some colorful band posters placed at strategic spots leading toward the assembly can enhance student anticipation. An eye-catching display of instruments, placed in a prominent location, can further create interest. Your local music store may be willing to loan you shiny new instruments for this purpose.

Put On A Show | Once all classes have arrived, begin the program. Thirty-five to forty-five minutes should be sufficient for the assembly. The following is a suggested program order:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Briefly discuss the band program
 - as 5th/6th graders, students are eligible
 - no tuition is charged/books are provided
 - no music background is necessary
 - classes are held during school
 - instruments can be rented at a low cost
3. Do instrument demonstrations

I like to have student demonstrators seated up front, in score order (highest to lowest pitched instruments): flute, clarinet, oboe, saxophone, trumpet, French horn, trombone, baritone, tuba, percussion. This placement allows the audience to see and hear the instruments in relation to each other.

As each instrument is introduced, tell students a little bit about it (i.e., “The flute is the highest pitched instrument in our band” or “If I uncoiled the French horn, it would stretch all the way across the front of the room.”) There are many instrument “fun facts” to share with students; they are often fascinated by what would perhaps seem insignificant to professional musicians. Pass around a clarinet or saxophone reed and show them that the instrument will not play without this small piece—they will be awed. Involve the audience in the program by asking questions and calling for volunteers (i.e., “How many of you have ever tried blowing across the top of a soda bottle to make a sound? That is the way we blow the flute” or “All

brass instruments are played by buzzing into a mouthpiece like this—buzz. Let's see who can do that.”)

Students love to come up and hold an instrument. I often give students the “trombone test,” asking for a volunteer from the audience. I show the student how to hold the instrument, and I tell the audience that people often wonder how a trombone player knows where to move the slide for different notes since there are no markings to follow. I tell them that there are seven slide positions (or places to stop the slide) on the trombone and that we can get out more than one note for each position. Then I show them where first and third positions are (easy to see since the slide grip is either up against the stop or nearly even with the bell), and I ask them to take a guess as to where second position would be. Most students realize that this is halfway between first and third, and they enjoy moving the slide to the new position. Be prepared to have everyone in the audience begging to be called upon to try this.

4. Pass out the informational letter and go over its contents
5. Tell students about the parents' informational meeting
6. Answer questions

Some of the most frequently asked questions are listed below. Know in advance how you will respond.

- How much does it cost?
- Which instrument is the cheapest?
- What if I can't read music?
- Can you play in both band and strings?
- What if I want to quit?
- What subject will you pull me out of?

Many students are extremely concerned about the cost of renting instruments; they select an instrument based on rental price rather than on personal preference because they believe that their parents would be more agreeable to a less expensive instrument. I answer the students' questions regarding cost, but I try not to get stuck on this issue because it can usurp the program. Most instruments rent for moderate monthly fees through the local music stores in Fairfax County and for less through the schools; while fees may seem expensive to students, parents generally find them acceptable. I suggest that the students choose an instrument that they like and allow adults to discuss cost and finally decide.

7. Pass around instruments

Be sure to budget time for this final important activity. Children love to see the instruments up close, to push the valves and keys, and to move the

slides. I suggest removing mouthpieces from the instruments before passing them. This eliminates the overwhelming temptation of students to blow the instruments.

FOLLOW-UP
Visit Classrooms

During the week between the recruitment program and the parents' meeting, visit the classrooms as often as possible. Times can be arranged with classroom teachers in advance. Take extra informational letters with you because students frequently misplace theirs. Remind students of the parents' meeting and be prepared to answer a myriad of questions with each visit. Carrying an instrument or two with you on these visits is an effective method for generating interest. Students will want to handle the instruments and will look forward to seeing more instruments on your next visit.

Pass Out
Parents' Meeting
Reminder Notices

On the day of the parents' meeting, pass out reminder notices and have the meeting announced. If you are responsible for several different elementary schools, leave notices at each school in advance.

Administer Any
Music Aptitude Tests

Use your judgment in handling testing: fear of failing a test may turn off potentially good students, jeopardizing your recruitment.

Become A
Familiar Face

Make your presence known in the school. Visit the cafeteria when the upper grades are eating lunch; talk to students. Volunteer for morning or afternoon hall duty or bus duty. Keep a high profile!

SUMMARY

The elementary band recruitment program determines the band's enrollment for the year. When trying to build a strong band program, you first need a large enrollment. The recruitment program should be approached with all of the creativity, enthusiasm, and energy that a band director can muster. ■