

KEY CHANGES: REFRESHING YOUR MUSIC PROGRAM

Stronger Together

How to Get the Principal on Your Side

I can recall all of the administrators with whom I've had the pleasure of working during my teaching career. I remember all their names, roles, idiosyncrasies, and expectations. I can't say I've enjoyed every individual moment with each of them, but without hesitation I can say I did my best to build a relationship with all of them. I've learned that administrators may not always understand your subject's content, but they do understand what a positive impact you can make within the school and community.

I have a vision for my music program. I know what it should look and sound like and I know how to make that happen. I take pride in holding myself, my students, and those with whom I work to high standards. In return, I expect these same traits from the leaders of my school. Although I'm confident in my craft and consistent in my professionalism, I remain cautiously kind in my demeanor. I understand the importance of this balance and realize how failing to maintain it could damage a relationship with an administrator, potentially hindering my program's success.

After working eight years with a seasoned administrator, I was not surprised when she was named principal of the county's newest school. Before hiring staff, she was permitted to ask five of her current staff members to transfer to the newly constructed school and assist with its establishment. I was

humbled when she selected me, the band director, to serve in this capacity. By doing so, she demonstrated to me that she valued music as much as academic subjects, despite the tremendous emphasis that our data-driven society places on testing.

In her previous position as an administrator in a Title I school assigned to corrective action, this particular principal had overseen departments and held staff accountable for creating exemplary lessons.

However, I never felt she singled out my program or myself in any way. She trusted me to build a successful music program, unite its members and supporters, and create a superior-sounding band. Because of this trust, the music program flourished.

Our years of collaboration were filled with admiration, inspiration, and respect. The relationship wasn't all sugar-coated, though. I'm certain I pushed her buttons from time to time, and I know she occasionally did the same to me. I particularly recall an intense one-on-one meeting where she ended with "We may not always agree, but we always do what's best for the child." At that moment I realized how strongly



A concert came from the principal—even on triangle—can be meaningful.

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success." — HENRY FORD

she supported my efforts and valued my worth as an educator and colleague. It was clear we shared a similar vision for academic excellence.

Consider how you build relationships, not just with administrators, but with adults in general. Do you present yourself and your program with efficiency, enthusiasm, and pride? Do you appear organized? Do you have the needs of the students and their whole academic success at the forefront of your vision? Do you manage your classroom in a positive and effective manner? Do you communicate clearly? Do you go directly to the source to obtain information? Are you dependable? Do you demonstrate flexibility? Do you offer creative solu-



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tions? Do you show gratitude?

Administrators often set the tone inside a school. They develop mission statements, formulate policies and procedures, and establish academic and performance objectives. However, they may not fully understand where music fits into schoolwide developments. To ensure that your program is always included, respectfully communicate with your administration what you perceive as music education's purpose for students, the school, and the community.

Plan a meeting each marking period, or at least after each performance season, with your principal or administrative team. Arrive with a list of items to be discussed. Share the recent accomplishments of the music program and individual achievements of students. Express your goals for the program's future and ask the principal what expectations he/she may have for further growth and enriched community involvement. Elaborate on the challenges of the program, but offer ideas for improvement

within the same breath.

When meeting with your administrator, assume that he/she is not familiar with the standards, requirements, and expectations for success in your subject area. Explain what sorts of materials and equipment are necessary for a highly functioning musical ensemble, and what type of classroom design is most beneficial for quality instruction. Budget constraints will certainly be an issue when addressing these matters, but an administrator cannot calculate potential funding for a program if he/she is not cognizant of its needs. Although many of your requests may not be granted or even considered for months or years to come, plant the seeds of discussion with your administrator as early as possible.

Never assume that an administrator will be present at your ensemble performances. Always be sure to invite your administrator to them, and brainstorm ways to include him/her in the performance, such as:

- serving as the greeter to give a welcome speech
- serving as the narrator to read program notes
- conducting a musical selection
- performing with the ensemble on his/her current/former instrument
- performing as a soloist, even if it's on the triangle!

Inform your administrator of your plans to meet with him/her throughout the school year to assess program needs, share accomplishments and positive community collaborations, and refine teacher and student expectations. During these meetings, continue to reiterate the need for whatever materials, equipment, or classroom renovations you mentioned in your initial meeting. Articulate the specific steps you've taken to improve your program and/or classroom, while at the same time offering an honest evaluation of what's still lacking.

Finally, remember that even though you are not taking the role of administrator, you are a leader. You lead a program. You lead a musical family. You are the leader of a superior sound. You are the leader of inspiration for your community. In the most genuine way, lead your administrator to a music education *crescendo*. 🎵

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