

# What Every Band Director Ought to Know About Preparing for Festival

by Jim Matthews

Every day, band directors dedicate precious time training their students, trying to prepare them for the biggest performance of the year—band festival. Even if your band sounds great and appears to be ready, there are still quite a few things that every band director should know when preparing for band festival. This article will provide a checklist to help you get organized and keep stress to a minimum on your big day.

## **Scores**

Most band festivals have three judges, and each one should have an original score. Due to copyright laws, you cannot submit photocopied scores for judges to use. Most publishers offer extra scores, but they can take a long time to be received. Make sure that you have three numbered scores for each selection piece. If you need to, borrow a score from another school.

Also, make judge's folders for each judge. As part of the judge's packages, make sure all scores are numbered. Even if numbering scores is not required in your district, it's convenient for the judges to refer to specific measure numbers when critiquing the performance.

## **Check each student's GPA**

Depending on your district, most schools require each student to maintain a certain Grade Point Average (GPA) in order to participate in extra-curricular activities such as band festival. If your school carries this policy, check each student's GPA so that you're following the guidelines.

## **Invite band parents**

Don't forget about the parents! Remember to invite band parents to band festival and give them an information sheet with all details (send the letter home with students or email it). Inform them of dates, times, location and any other information.

## **Travel forms**

Hand out travel forms to be filled out by all students and notarized. Travel forms are usually required by most schools, and they can protect the teacher and the school if something undesirable occurs. It also ensures that the parents know where their child is going to be.

## **Transportation**

Although your county should be able to accommodate bus transportation for the trip to band festival, remember to order the bus (or buses). If necessary, order one from a professional bus line. Double check if you need to have an extra vehicle to transport equipment and uniforms. Give all drivers directions to festival and itineraries of what will be happening the day of festival. It's also a good idea to exchange cell phone numbers or provide two-way radios to have communication between vehicles.

## **Chaperones**

Chaperones are a requirement for extracurricular functions where students travel together. Ensure that you have all your chaperones picked out for the performance (if multiple bands are going, consider assigning chaperones to different groups). Chaperones should always ride on the bus with the students. Also, print out a copy of the band roster for each chaperone so that they can keep track of all students.

## **Substitutes**

Depending on your situation, if festival is during school hours and you're going to be missing classes, be sure to ask the front office for substitutes for the days that you'll be out. Also, have substitute plans ready for classes while you will be gone.

## **Itineraries**

Give copies of the festival itinerary to all students and their parents. Make sure they know all the particulars about the festival: when, where, equipment needed, etc. By keeping everyone informed, there is less of a chance for a misunderstanding the day of festival.

## **Students' Sheet Music**

This one seems like a no-brainer, but it's an important one: make sure all students have all their music! It will add much more stress to the situation if a student forgets his/her sheet music.

## **Equipment**

Another easy-to-do task that you don't want to forget is to make sure all students have their necessary equipment (especially percussion equipment like mallets, etc.). It might be a good idea to use a percussion equipment checklist. Have your section leader use the list to pack the boxes before leaving your school.

## **Seating chart**

Be sure to provide a seating chart for the festival host to help the set-up crew organize the exact number of chairs in a formation that is similar to

your everyday setup. Draw out a seating arrangement listing the chairs and stands needed for your group. Be sure to list the number of chairs and stands by row and also total the numbers for all rows combined. It's always better for the host to make sure to have enough equipment before the performance day rather than finding out they cannot meet your needs the day of festival.

### **Conductor's baton and scores**

It'd be a shame to conduct at festival without your baton and scores, so make sure you pack them.

### **Recording supplies**

If there will be a recording system set up in the festival's auditorium, you should bring enough CDs/DVDs/video tapes so that you can take a copy of your band's performance.

### **Food**

If your group will be leaving sometime during school hours, it might be a good idea to check with the administration and the cafeteria manager if the students' eating schedule must be adjusted.

### **Notify secretaries and teachers**

To prevent any confusion regarding attendance, you should email the attendance secretary and all teachers a list of students going on the trip.

### **Instruments**

Check over all school instruments for proper playing condition. This is important even if the instrument seems to be working properly. Periodic adjustment of instruments, especially woodwinds, can clear up intonation problems that may be occurring. A properly regulated instrument will allow you to spend more time working on intonation problems caused by the student and not the instrument.

Also remember to order school wind instrument accessories early. If you know you have school instruments that need a new mouthpiece, order early so the student can have time to adjust to the feel and characteristics of the mouthpiece. Check to see if the woodwinds need new ligatures or neck straps. Check brass instruments to see if they need additional lubricants for valves and slides. Check your supply of reeds—a student breaking his last reed is a classic pre-performance accident before the band is about to perform at festival. Check your percussion equipment. Ensure that all drum heads are in good shape and order replacement heads early to make sure that they have time to "break in" before performance day. Inspect your mallets for any cracks or even missing mallets. During peak performance

seasons, mallets and sticks can wear out and need to be replaced. Check your inventory of auxiliary percussion instruments to make sure they aren't broken or missing, and inspect them to see if they need to be tuned.

### **Extra supplies**

Remind your students to have extra supplies. Students always expect their band director to have that extra reed, valve oil, or pair of drumsticks on the day of performance. Teach them to take responsibility for their own instruments and supplies.

### **Uniforms**

Check your uniforms for proper fitting and cleaning. Most bands will wear either a concert uniform or their marching band uniform. Regardless of the type, the uniforms need to be checked for proper fit and cleaning if necessary. Have your band booster parents help with fittings and cleaning tasks. The more help you can get with these tasks, the easier it will be for you.

### **Host-provided percussion instruments**

Oftentimes the festival host provides percussion instruments, but they may not have the complete set of timpani, extra xylophone, or gong that you may have at your school. Check to see if you need to make arrangements to bring your instruments. In certain circumstances, instruments that seem strange to the player can throw him/her off in performance, and it may ultimately hurt the entire ensemble as well.

### **Practice in a different rehearsal area**

A good way to keep developing the listening habits of your band is to practice in a different rehearsal area. By doing so, students will start to concentrate more on what they hear in order to make adjustments in dynamics and intonation. If your band normally performs in a room with built-in risers, try practicing in a room where the band all sits on the same level. The differences in the sound of the ensemble will benefit the listening skills of you and your ensemble. Dynamics and articulations that sounded fine in your band room may be too harsh or almost non-existent in another room.