

# **Whatever It Takes: Building a Successful Music Program in a Title I School**

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# Whatever It Takes: Building a Successful Music Program in a Title I School

Building a music program anywhere is undoubtedly a challenging endeavor. Add the complications that can come with teaching in a Title I school, and your adventure can become monumental. In this clinic, you will learn about some key research based concepts that help to promote success of music students and some experience based methods and strategies from a Bay Area Middle School Instrumental Music Teacher.

- **Building Relationships and Trust in the Classroom: The Importance of Connection**
  - **Why** the Focus on Connection?
    - Benefits of this Focus
      - Being yourself helps you connect with the students
      - Helps with enjoyment and learning
    - Danger of Disconnect in Education
      - Disconnection → Disengagement
      - Disengagement from school is a disengagement from learning.
  - **What** does it look like?
    - Qualities of teachers that connect
      - Safety, comfort, trust
      - Open dialogue and higher level thinking
      - Personal stories
      - Engaging
      - Curiosity
      - Students are connected to each other
      - Cooperative Groups
      - Eagerness
    - What qualities do teachers that do *not* connect have?
      - Writing everything on the board and no relationship or acknowledgment of kids.
      - Boring
      - Self-Interested
      - Bright Side: We can learn to connect.
    - Connecting Through Honesty and Vulnerability
      - Sharing our own struggles can help make students feel comfortable
      - We must make students feel welcome and as if they belong
      - Encourage others to look out for their peers
      - The more vulnerable we are with our students, the greater the connection between us.
    - Connecting Through Personal Narratives
      - Share something that makes you vulnerable and personal
      - Share something that makes you happy
      - Letting your students know who you are at home and outside the classroom helps strengthen your bond. Let your students into your life.
      - Be careful not to belittle their struggles with your stories. Don't compare your struggles to theirs. Sharing is great. Comparing can hurt.

- Communication and How it can Impact Connection
  - Be mindful of Body Language and Eye Contact
  - Be careful with not only what you say, but how you say it
- Listening
  - You have one mouth and two ears. Use them proportionately.
  - Have dialogues, not monologues.
- Belonging Mindset → Based on the research of Brené Brown (See: “Daring Greatly”)
  - Students with a sense of belonging in school feel socially connected, supported, and respected. They trust their teacher and their peers, and they feel like they fit in at school. They are not worried about being treated as a stereotype and are confident that they are seen as a person of value.
  - Establish a familial environment where students are not only “there for each other” but *responsible* for each other. All members of our family build each other up, support one another, and never leave a family member behind.
- Connect Professionally → For both your growth and the growth of your students
  - Seek growth opportunities to keep your strategies and knowledge up to date.
  - Talk to other directors. Find ways to observe.
- Connecting with your School and District Community
  - Connect with other teachers in all subjects.
    - Don’t be afraid to ask for help.
    - Admit your weaknesses and find ways to grow from them.
  - Treat your support staff with respect (secretaries, custodians, paras, etc.)
    - You need these integral staff members more than they need you.
    - Your support staff know things that you don’t and they can’t help you. Keep them on your side!
  - Connect with Administrators
    - Always make sure to keep your administration informed and updated.
    - Show appreciation. Administrators need the praise too.
    - Be sure to follow protocols
- **How** → Strategies for Connecting and Building Relationships with Students
  - Build Empathy
    - Empathy does not necessarily require you to agree with a person, but understand them
    - Seek first to understand. Then to be understood (Habit 5 → Covey)
    - Empathy is not the same as Sympathy
      - Students don’t seek to feel pity, but to be understood.
      - You don’t need to fix their problems, you need to acknowledge their problems
      - Genuine trust is integral to Empathy
  - Build Trust
    - Components of Trust
      - Character: Integrity and Intent
      - Competence: Capabilities and Results
      - Both Character and Competence are vital to trust
    - In order to build trust, we have to trust. As teachers, we have to take the first step.

- Value Their Voice
  - Show Value in what your students think and do.
    - It causes them to value us more and elevate our relationship.
    - The reverse is also true.
    - The more we connect, the more the total value of our relationship increases.
  - Involve your Students in the planning and organization of the program.
    - Establish a common mission and vision
    - Establish norms and agree upon your values for the program
- Student Leadership: Empower students with responsibilities
  - Section Leaders
  - Librarians
  - Uniform Managers
  - Attendance Takers
  - Warm-Up Conductors
  - Mentors
- Learn their names immediately and be sure to pronounce them correctly.
- Greet your students at the door. Use their names when you greet them.
- Admit that we don't know everything and share that imperfection
- Be open about what your goals and visions are for the class and share with students
- Find out what the students are interested in and make connections where possible
- Ask your students questions
  - Students need to know you value their opinions and understand circumstances.
  - Learn something personal or special about your students.
  - Look out for their welfare outside of class (homelife, safety, other classes, etc.)
- Have open communication with parents (Letters, phone, internet, email, etc.)
  - Use an interpreter if needed
  - No parent support? Manage what you can at school and put the needs of your student first. Ask for help from administration if necessary.
  - Approach phone calls with positives first. Ask for advice from parents as opposed to telling them what their child has done wrong.
  - Don't forget to make positive calls too.
- Be aware that some of your families may be "Undocumented"
  - Do not ask about their status
  - Treat these families with the same respect you do any others
  - Work hard to build trusting relationships with all students and their families
  - Immigration status can be very stressful.
    - Your actions can help to relieve anxiety
    - Your actions can also heighten anxiety
- Don't forget to smile!
- Connect students to their peers. Provide opportunities for positive discourse.
- Maintain your space → Safe and comfortable spaces are easier to connect in.
  - Establish a safe space.
  - All students should feel welcome, supported, and safe.
  - Students are expected to be respectful and encouraging.
  - Students feel comfortable and safe to express their feelings and concerns
  - Maintain an organized and neat environment
  - Display inspirational posters



- Always maintain high standards for all students.
  - Despite all odds: English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, Students with Challenging Behaviors, Homeless Students, etc.
  - This may require more scaffolding and modification on your part initially.
  
- Connect to prior learning and understanding (Be aware of cultural relevance and bias)
  - Explain *why* students are learning what they're learning. Don't be afraid to use science!
    - Scales are patterns that we practice.
      - Sequencing notes into a pattern requires less brain activity.
      - Pattern recognition on the paper makes music easier to read.
    - Reference the skeletal system in class when discussing Body Mapping and why students should sit the way we ask them to.
    - Connect vocabulary terms and math skills wherever possible.
  - Take care of your English Learners. → School is harder for them!
    - Use an interpreter if you need one.
      - Ask for help calling their families and getting to know them.
    - Send all written communication home in their language
      - Example: English one side/Spanish on the other
      - Save your letters home as a Google doc for easier use next year!
    - Give English Learners visuals representations of words.



- Create charts of English words that you use frequently and display/distribute them.
  - Have intent when you use vocabulary terms
    - Use the word in multiple ways and tenses to reinforce usage
    - Be aware of their body language. This is often a clear indicator of a confused, lost, or overwhelmed student.
    - Teach and encourage students how to ask clarifying questions.
  - Write words on the board when you use them.
    - “When we ascend in a scale, that means going up in pitch”
    - Write the word and draw a symbol to help students understand.
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- Evaluate often → This is not just a written or playing test
    - Teach students to use positive discourse strategies and language.
      - Provide non-judgmental and observation based sentence frames
        - “I noticed that....”
        - “Did you notice that you are ....?”
        - “It helps me when I.....”
        - “How do you feel when....?”
        - “Have you considered.....?”

- Evaluate everything and provide opportunities for partner sharing/peer criticism
    - Behavior
    - Posture
    - Ability
  - Have data to support student abilities and assessments
  - Allow students to evaluate you and the program as a whole
    - Teach students how to do this constructively, and be receptive to their feedback.
- **Fundraising - Never let money be the reason you don't do something**
  - Provide opportunities for all students. Don't leave anyone out due to cost.
  - Find Grants
    - Urban locations often have grants available from wealthy neighboring companies (Example: Google, Facebook, Target, Twitter, Pinterest, Walmart, etc.)
    - Mr. Holland's Opus
  - Crowd-Funding
    - GoFundMe
    - DonorsChoose.org
      - Look for matching offers when you post
      - Promote via Facebook, Newspapers, Letters Home (Use QR Codes)
      - LIFTOFF code for the first project!
      - Always tag some sort of "Music" and "Special Needs"
      - Don't be afraid of Special Requests or Student-Led Projects
      - Develop procedures with the process (Thank you Notes/Photo waivers)
    - FDIC-banks with this moniker have to give you money-"C" stands for community or investment in your community
    - Social media
    - Building awareness of your program
    - Performance Marathons
    - Corporate Giving
- **Other Thoughts on the Profession**
  - Self Care is Important
    - You can't build your program or fix a program in a single year (and you should not try!).
    - Take time off. It's important to have downtime too.
    - Maintain hobbies outside of school: Musically and otherwise
    - Maintain your own personal musicianship. Don't forget why you started this.



← **Google Slide Presentation**  
**Suggested Readings** →



## Suggested Reading List

- Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York: Gotham Books; Penguin, 2012.
- Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989.
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- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 1998, 2007.