



ABA COVID-19 STUDENT SAFETY AND MUSIC PROGRAM CONTINUATION IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Document created by *The School Bands Committee of the American Bandmasters Association* and Endorsed by the Presidents/CEO's of *The American Bandmasters Association, The John Philip Sousa Foundation, The American Band College*

For a wide range of additional information and to pose questions please visit the ABA Online Forum at: <https://band-chat-2020.freeforums.net/>

Music is a fundamental element in the education of students worldwide. The unique value of ensemble music making is well documented and necessary to students and society. A student's ability to participate in bands, orchestras and choirs is unique and irreplaceable. The future of large ensemble participation must be of paramount concern to teachers and administrators alike. However, the health and safety of music students and teachers must be our most pressing concern.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our goal is to retain as much student enthusiasm and educational rigor as possible while we ensure the safety of our students. Teachers and administrators must carefully evaluate all decisions while navigating these uncharted waters. Temporary adjustments cannot set the tone for unplanned long-term consequences. Whatever accommodations become necessary, the goal must be to return to full ensemble instruction in the regularly scheduled school day once health and safety permit.

The information included in this document is based on the belief that our present focus should not be the "what" but the "how." The COVID-19 pandemic requires us to rethink "how" the American band program will deliver quality music instruction. Of course, students continue to be the main focus. Whatever the temporary solution, we must be steadfast in our commitment to provide musical opportunities that can only be found as a participant in a large ensemble.

The science behind the care and protection of the general public during this pandemic as well as the opinions of medical professionals are still evolving. The situation is fluid and we realize circumstances change day to day. Several research projects are now being considered to study COVID-19 and the performing arts. They include the study of aerosol projection of particles while playing and singing, surface retention of contaminants, appropriate methods for disinfecting instruments and surfaces, and the control of projected air. We hope these studies will provide concrete information and guidelines in the near future. Meanwhile, teachers and administrators must be vigilant. Apply what we DO know and reevaluate all procedures as we move toward the re-entry and reopening of schools.

Accumulated List of Possible Accommodations

Part 1: For All Classrooms

In a time when students have given up so much, the ensemble experience will be, as it always has been, the reason many students will continue to study music. Preserving these opportunities is very important in fostering the creativity, social responsibility and humanity that are necessary to return to normal. The value of teaching music through the large ensemble is impossible to replace and its future needs to be carefully protected.

Band directors and administrators need to work as a team NOW to plan contingencies for program continuation. Directors should be prepared to share the vast amount of material and research becoming available to help with this planning. Regardless of what temporary accommodations are made, the goal is to ensure that focused, well-planned music education takes place.

The first assumption is this: the school start/end date as well as daily class schedules will probably change. Whatever reentry and reopening strategies are put in place in the near future, be prepared for change as we approach the 2020-21 school year. At this moment, band directors and administrators should be discussing the various scenarios for the fall and should be prepared to pivot immediately, whatever the circumstance. This will allow directors to maintain sound educational goals and expectations no matter the situation.

The *ABA School Bands Task Force* has provided the suggestions listed below. Guidelines for protecting students and teachers during this pandemic are still evolving, but here are some recommendations:

- Use portable air scrubbers (HEPA filtration system for large square footage)
- Percussionists must use personal or assigned mallets and sticks. No sharing. Fresh gloves should be used if percussionists must share equipment. Bass drum, gong, chime mallets, etc. must be cleaned after each use.
- Mop tile floors regularly with an alcohol-based solution. Regularly disinfect any carpeted areas as necessary.
- Provide central “condensation” dumpsites. Use buckets containing an alcohol solution or provide personal sterilization materials as necessary for brass players to deal with water disposal.
- Explore outdoor rehearsal possibilities to maintain prescribed social distancing standards.
- “No instrument sharing.” In situations where not enough instruments exist, serious consideration must be given to how we safely serve all students. This may require additional school system investments, an “Instruments in the Attic” community donation program, a “between school” loaning program, a plea for music store loans, etc. -whatever you can pursue to ensure students without access to equipment are not unfairly penalized.
- Cleaning/sterilization of school-owned wind instruments should be done by adults, not students.
- Use of bell covers and/or room dividers to limit airflow are possibilities. These ideas are still being researched.
- Use fans to move air up if the ceiling height is too low.
- This is still being debated but consider using gloves when it does not inhibit the student’s ability to play the instrument. If you use gloves, a fresh pair should be distributed to each student for every class. Regular hand washing or the use of hand sanitizer is expected.

- The use of masks in the classroom may be mandated. At the least, masks should be worn during non-playing times. Consider purchasing or making zippered masks as demonstrated by the Czech Philharmonic horn section video. Percussionists, string players and vocalists should wear masks at all times. Singers will most likely be required to socially distance far more because of the manner in which air projects.
- Seating should be based on social distancing guidelines.
- Use sanitizer on mouthpieces as necessary. Do not share mouthpieces.
- Do not touch your face.
- Mallet instruments- research the best ways to clean and protect rosewood and other wooden instruments.
- Create one-way traffic patterns for entry and exit of rehearsal rooms. If only one door exists, make it one way before class, and the opposite after. NO simultaneous opposing traffic.
- Limit access to and the number of students in all storage spaces. Once again, create one-way traffic patterns in and out of all student access spaces.
- Expect to allow more time for entry, exit and cleaning. This will result in less playing time in each rehearsal.
- Students should not share sets of music. One folder per student. If possible, music should be sent and accessed electronically.
- Sanitize shared items: chairs, stands, etc.
- Hand sanitizer, antiseptic wipes and extra face coverings must be available for student/staff use at all times.
- Staff members must demonstrate and model appropriate safety precautions at all times. This includes wearing masks, hand cleaning and distancing.

All accommodations should be constantly reviewed and altered based on the best available science. Adjustments can be made as research findings become available.

Part 2: Some Classrooms May Require Minor or No Scheduling Adjustments

Smaller ensemble classes, housed in large rehearsal rooms, may have adequate space to meet appropriate social distancing requirements. Regardless, all precautions mentioned above should still apply.

Part 3: Scheduling Possibilities for Ensembles Too Large to Meet Social Distancing Guidelines in Currently Assigned Spaces

Consider fall and spring semesters separately. Plan for the possibility that the second semester will be adjusted to a “close to normal” or “back to normal” scenario.

- Consider the use of a portion of planning and lunchtime to open additional slots for teaching.
- Split large ensembles into woodwind and brass/percussion sections, meeting separately.

- If ensembles rehearse in sections, use woodwind class recordings once parts are mastered so brass players can learn in context. The reverse applies. This helps students experience a finished version of the composition. (Online recordings can be used in the same manner...not to teach parts, but for context.)
- Split large ensembles into two smaller ensembles that meet during the day.
- Use online resources to add students who have chosen to or forced to learn in a remote environment. Bring them back to class once they are cleared by a health professional.
- Use online resources, sectionals and private lessons for extra help. Zoom is a great tool to teach private lessons remotely.
- When there are multiple teachers and available rooms, split classes into smaller sections.
- When splitting ensembles into smaller groups, consider how to best use your staff. A teacher's workload must be a topic of discussion with administrators. As you know, band directors will do whatever it takes to maintain their program. But the hours they can be expected to work must be considered. Early-bird and late-day sessions offer options if teachers are willing to flex time throughout the day.
- Small chamber ensembles are valuable and can be used as centerpieces of this temporary curriculum.
- Using large rooms to house multiple chamber ensembles could be possible with proper distancing. Because of sound bleed, this scenario is not ideal. This requires tremendous planning on the part of the teacher(s) to account for acoustical challenges.
- Use of room dividers may be possible to separate/distance smaller ensembles in large rooms.
- "Alternate-day" scheduling may be used to reduce large class sizes. For example, Group A may rehearse in larger rehearsal rooms on one day while Group B engages in listening, style study, analytical and other non-playing assignments in a different space. The schedule would "alternate" allowing each student the opportunity to play.
- If schools adopt staggered opening/closing times for different grades limiting total instruction time, cross-grade options should be explored allowing ensemble members to meet together.
- Use auditorium space for performance ensembles (stage and/or seats.)
- In some buildings, large hallways and/or lobbies can be used for small ensemble rehearsals.
- If large ensembles are split into multiple classes, some smaller "specialty" classes may need to be suspended in the short-term to accommodate staffing needs.
- Expand listening projects that include responses and musical evaluation components.
- Use additional resources like the Marine Band online Sousa library and music publishing company online recording databases to allow students to access and play with a full ensemble.
- If "in-person" is not possible, testing, auditions and other individual playing requirements can be conducted by video or by using Zoom and other online platforms.
- While the grade is hardly the reason we enjoy ensemble music-making; clear guidelines, well-defined learning goals and established evaluation techniques are even more crucial in a time when traditional participation is not possible. Seek ways to enjoy the process and keep students engaged so we can return to normal class activities as better musicians ready to perform.
- Regardless of how we deliver instruction, a community presentation is crucial. This applies to the large ensemble and small groups/sections. Consider a holiday spectacular or an online presentation that involves every student and group, the art department, theater department and the technology classes. This could be a huge boost to music, the school, and the community. While various technologies may not be available at every school, teacher/student/parent creativity could help make a special performance possible.

Considerations for younger students/beginners:

- Recruiting beginners and reconnecting with younger students is essential to avoid a 6 to 8 year devastating loss to program continuity. Directors are currently working on ideas for recruiting and starting beginners remotely. This may involve using video and online options. Remote recruitment, instrument selection and first lessons can be accomplished with careful planning and clear explanations. Visit the ABA Discussion Board for ideas.
- If possible, like-instrument classes should be scheduled to reduce class size and be a benefit to younger students.
- Consider starting only basic instruments to simplify instruction: Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, Trombone.
- At lower grade levels, pulling students from one or two individual classes at a time may be an option. If band, orchestra and general music meet simultaneously, this approach could give the individual classroom teacher a planning break.
- Large recruiting events may not be possible. If this is the case, create a video of the teacher demonstrating each instrument. This can be shown in targeted individual classes and can be used to recruit students in the case that “in-person” school does not start in the fall.
- If school does not open “in-person”, it is possible to follow up with each student remotely after your recruitment video presentation. After getting appropriate permission, contact the student and do an online evaluation. Have the student sing back pitches, identify high and low pitches, imitate clapped rhythms, match the teacher’s modeling of a brass mouthpiece, buzz high and low pitches, use a finger to demonstrate the clarinet or flute embouchure formation, etc.

Suggestions for Viable Teaching Scenarios and Educational System Restructuring:

Scheduling Scenario 1 - Full School Day with Social Distancing Practices

Divide the concert band into instrumental families with each family meeting in a different class period. For example, the brass section would meet in Period 1, woodwind section in Period 2, percussion section in Period 3, etc. Instruction through instrumental family groups includes full band literature (in section rehearsals) as well as various chamber works. This provides a full ensemble experience to each student. At the point distancing guidelines are relaxed, add (after school) full-band rehearsals. Adjust the class meetings back to full band(s) in the subsequent semester.

Scheduling Scenario 2 - A/B School Day Designed to Reduce School Density

Should the school system employ an A/B education schedule with either alternate days or two sessions per day (Session A meets 8 - Noon, Session B meets 1 - 5), please note the following scenarios:

- Divide the band into instrument families. Work with the guidance counselors to ensure students are scheduled in the appropriate A or B Session, based upon their instrument. The instruction through instrumental family groups should include full band literature (in section rehearsals) as well as various chamber compositions. This will provide a full ensemble experience for each student. At the point that distancing guidelines are relaxed, add (after school) full band rehearsals. Adjust the class meetings back to full band(s) in the subsequent semester.

- Divide the band into multiple smaller full band ensembles with a band class meeting in the A (8 - 12) Session as well as the B (1 - 5) Session. At the point that distancing guidelines are relaxed, add (after school) full band rehearsals. Adjust the class meetings back to full band(s) in the subsequent semester.
- Divide the band into multiple smaller full ensembles (A/B/C, etc.) Deliver instruction to one group, “in person”, while the other group attends via videoconference. Alternate the groups in the next meeting, ensuring that each student receives face-to-face instruction for a minimum of 2 times per week.

Scheduling Scenario 3 - Blended Music Instruction Including a Combination of In-Person Meetings and Internet-Based Videoconference Participation

- As facilities allow, schedule a band rehearsal each day. Based on facility size and capacity, divide the band into smaller full ensembles with a different group meeting “live” each day. Remaining students would attend the rehearsal via videoconference to hear/experience all ensemble instruction. The “virtual” students would perform in their homes along with the “live” ensemble with their microphones muted. This allows the “at home” student to hear the “live” ensemble including instruction and feedback from the podium. It is suggested that a quality camera and microphone be in place in the classroom, allowing all online students to see and hear the conductor/teacher clearly.
- Based on available teaching resources, schedule online masterclasses and small group lessons via a videoconferencing system.

Scheduling Scenario 4 –If Classroom Space Limitations Require Multiple Groups to Trade Rooms (Band - Week One, Choir - Week Two, Etc.) or If No Other Possibility for In-School Exists

- Create video modules featuring teacher instruction including lectures, demonstrations and directed listening experiences for students. This should happen a minimum of one time per week while they are playing at home, preparing assignments for recorded submission.
- Create formative assessment assignments for student submission featuring individual performances of selected band literature as well as solos and pedagogical materials (etudes, technique exercises, etc.)
- Select a concert theme (i.e. Winter Concerts/Holidays). Direct students to record video performances of thematic solo literature and small ensembles (duets/trios/quartets). After formal review and student revision, edit the final video performances into a concert. The performance may be streamed on local media networks as well as internet platforms such as YouTube.
- Create a series of directed listening assignments based on quality recordings of band literature easily accessible through military and university bands. Create worksheets for each assigned composition with questions focused on ensemble concepts and skills.
- Create peer mentorship settings, pairing students with advanced experience and younger musicians. Assign each peer team a recording project, to be submitted by video, featuring a duet performance for presentation to the full band. Consider creating guidelines for students to select literature for the video performance.
- Direct students to program their band concert. In addition to the selection of literature, the student will select a quality video performance of each work. Each student will submit a playlist based on videos of quality band performances available online via YouTube or other platforms. As an extension, direct students to create their concert program including notes on the composition and the performing ensemble.

Part 4: Finances

- Schools must provide all needed supplies and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) such as antiseptic wipes, hand sanitizer, masks and disinfectants. Individual teachers nor music budgets should be forced to absorb these costs.
- Music budgets must stretch to pay for music, recordings and other materials appropriate for whatever classroom accommodations are made – chamber music, split ensembles, study guides, etc.
- If changes in marching band activities occur, teachers should consider reallocating funds usually spent on staff, drill, flags and props to be used for online specialists or future concert camp possibilities.
- Consider redirecting resources to commission or create consortiums designed for indeterminate instrumentation (Flex music.) Encourage composers to retool compositions already in existence.
- Online or in-classroom guest specialists can add variety and value to students' experiences.

Part 5: Marching Band and Other Outdoor Activities

- Weather permitting, rehearse some classes outside, particularly when you have more than one ensemble assigned to a room.
- While marching band is an important part of our band program's community outreach, participation requires careful student safety planning. Keep in mind, social distancing concerns may be flexible because it is an outside activity.
- Tight formations such as parade blocks are not conducive to social distancing.
- Carefully consider and monitor water breaks, students gathering at beginning and ending times as well as students' entrance and exit from buildings.
- Large numbers of students in the football stands, along with tight drill formations defy distancing considerations. One solution is to alternate the use of students, week to week, in the stands for games.
- Teachers and administrators must consider the added cost of extra busses needed for distancing if this type of travel is allowed.
- School may start without football and marching band. Have at least one show prepared in case both are reinstated. The show should be fun for students and entertaining for the audience and possibly involve other school groups.
- If fall camps and events are not possible, consider reallocating funds designated for camp, flags, props and performance plans to support possible spring activities These may include spring concert performances with specialists, spring competition activities and other intriguing opportunities.
- Seek help through online resources to provide ideas concerning teaching marching, movement, color guard and other related skills remotely.

Please visit the American Bandmasters Forum at <http://band-chat-2020.freeforums.net/> for more information from many sources including the opportunity to ask questions of others dealing with these issues. Challenging times make us remember just how important music is to our students and society. We have weathered many difficult times before and must now deal with this in stride. Just like in rehearsal, our focus must be on what we can and will do, not on the difficulty of doing it. Teachers need to smile, be positive, and do what is best for students!