



Presented by Carlton Wright
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Alabama

AN EVALUATION OF

Benjamin Russell High School Band
Mr. Dale Bloodworth, Director and
Mr. Mike Muncher, Assistant Director

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The Benjamin Russell High School
Band Program**

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STUDENTS

The Benjamin Russell High School Band (grades 9-12) is comprised of nearly 200 instrumentalists who play woodwind, brass, string, and percussion instruments. These students' ages range from 14 to 18 years. This is a comprehensive band program, offering three Fine Arts Ensembles:

- Symphonic (advanced skills)
- Concert (intermediate skills)
- Freshmen (entry level skills)

The program also offers percussion ensemble, jazz ensemble, and marching band.

THE DIRECTORS

The Band Director Mr. Dale Bloodworth, and the Assistant Band Director, Mr. Mike Muncher are very knowledgeable professionals of Music Education. Both, Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher are highly qualified music educators, who have earned Master's Degrees from Auburn University and the University of Oklahoma, respectively. Perhaps, more importantly, they are stellar role models and father figures for all of their students! These gentlemen truly care for each of their students' wellbeing, education, and musical development. Subsequently, these men have established a strong family bond with students and parents alike.

SUPPORT (Parental/School/Community)

Each year on the first Saturday in October, the Alexander City Band Boosters sponsor the Lake Martin Invitational Marching Festival, which is probably their biggest fundraiser of the year! This festival is a contest/festival for high school bands, which attracts over twenty bands, all of which compete for top awards and honors. This one event takes months of planning and coordinating with parents, school officials, city officials, and local businesses. Having judged at this concert before, it is one of the best marching band festivals I've ever been associated with. This contest provide bands and their directors with constructive comments about their performances. The entire community, along with visiting band supporters packs the stadium to make this event the success it has been for many years!

BAND ADMINISTRATION/OPERATIONS

The BRHS Band Program is a "well-oiled machine". Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher do an outstanding job in conducting business with the students, parents, school administration, other band, and the community at large. For example, fundraising projects are in place to help students and parents pay for band trips and other band related activities.

Mr. Bloodworth also serves as Chairman of District VI of the Alabama Bandmasters Association (ABA). It is a challenging undertaking for a band director to manage the day-to-day activities of

running his/her own program. For one to volunteer to take on the responsibilities of District Chair is a mammoth task that requires a two-year or more commitment! This commitment requires that he hosts district meetings; schedules auditions for all state and Solo & Ensemble; schedule Music Performance Assessment (MPA) for 60 or more high school and middle school bands. Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher are to be commended for the smooth and seamless operation of the BRHS Band and the business of the ABA.

FACILITIES

The Benjamin Russell High School Band facilities are in very good condition! With ample floor space, there is room for an increase in numbers. However, a strong growth burst is inevitable, and expansion of the facility will be very necessary.

There is decent storage space for most of the instrument and uniforms. Some larger instruments are stored on top of the band lockers. The only drawback is that these instruments are not secured under lock and key. The music library is very functional and operational. They employ a filing system which utilizes filing boxes that are clearly labeled showing the title, composer, style and other information about the composition.

The practice rooms are not practical at all times, because the practice rooms are located in side of the band room rehearsal area. Although, the auditorium is a great performance venue, it is not in the most ideal location. The equipment has to be moved a long distance across campus. Regardless of the two possible routes, students and equipment are exposed to elements, as they go to and from the auditorium.

The band practice field is in a great location, providing easy access to and from the band room for both students and equipment. It appears that the band director's tower may need repair due to the age of the materials.

TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher strategically utilize technology to enhance the overall effectiveness of the BRHS Band program. They use the "Pride" Facebook page to keep students, parents, and others abreast of the program's current and future events. From the office, the directors are able to type lesson plans, announcements, and other information that is displayed on a large monitor in the band room, allowing the students to make note of such information.

They utilize the CHARMS software to manage student records such as, address, phone, uniform inventory, instrument inventory, and financial obligations. They even use this program to grade students. In short, the students use a computer or smart phone to record themselves playing an assignment. The students email the recording to the directors. The directors are able to playback the recording and evaluate the students' performance. The use of various technological tools allows the BRHS Band to thrive in a world that is driven by these advances.

INSTRUCTION

Band class and rehearsals are very carefully thought out and executed! Each class that we observed are set up by grade level or by skill level. For instance, the symphonic band class consists of the more advanced students in the band program, regardless of grade level. The concert band class is made up of students in grades 10, 11, and 12. The overall skill level of this class is not as developed as the symphonic band. Finally, the freshman band class is comprised of all 9th graders. These students skill levels are the least developed in the program. Each class is challenged with music and developmental materials that is appropriate for its particular skill level. The ideal situation is for students to progress or graduate to the next band or skill level each year. This system suggests that as students graduate from the symphonic band, the vacant positions are filled by students in the lower groups. The BRHS Band, in turn, feeds itself.

All classes begin with a thorough dose of fundamentals. These rudimentary studies are considered to be among the Best Practices in the development and improvement of band students nation-wide:

- Long tones are used to
 - Develop characteristic tone on each instrument
 - Warm up instrument
 - Warm up embouchures for flexibility
- Scales studies are used to:
 - Warm up fingers for dexterity
 - Develop technical prowess
- Chorales are used to
 - Further develop characteristic tones on each instrument
 - Develop balance and blend thought the ensemble
 - Develop awareness of intonation and aid in tuning the band

The importance of this warm up period is crucial. This process is vital because it is a *transfer of learning process*. Best practices in band have shown that warming up on the fundamentals above yield great returns because these very same concepts are applied to the music once the warm up period. A thorough review of these skills prepares the students to properly execute these concepts to the music at the appropriate times, thus increasing the chances for a successful rehearsal, and ultimately a very successful performance! If one were to visit the band rehearsals of successful band programs, one would find that the directors are taking their groups through a very similar process. Similarly, one should expect poor results from band programs whose directors do not take the time to develop their students in the prescribed manner.

SCHEDULE

The class schedule of the BRHS Band seems to work well for the students and directors. However, It is my belief that all three directors of the System should team teach! In my observation, the freshman band students are not developed and prepared as well as they should be to perform in a major league band such as the BRHS Pride Band! Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher do a fantastic job in advancing these students, as it is quite obvious in listening to the performances and skill sets of each group.

It is an overwhelming task for one person to develop beginning band students and prepare them for high school band after only two years of instruction. Whereas most beginning band programs in the state start in the sixth grade, this feeder program starts band instruction in the seventh grade. This extra year makes a very noticeable difference by the time the students enter high school!

I feel that the administrations at both schools should meet with all directors and come up with a workable schedule that:

1. Allow students to begin taking band in the sixth grade, and
2. Allow all three directors to team teach with each other all day, every day!

There are model programs throughout the state that embrace this philosophy, and as a result they experience very high levels of success without adding undue stress to the students and directors. Some of these band programs include:

- Thompson High School and Thompson Middle School Band
Alabaster City Schools (Formerly Shelby County Schools)
- Albertville City High School and Middle School Band
Albertville City Schools
- Minor High School and Bottenfield Middle School Band
Jefferson County Schools
- Buckhorn High School Band and Buckhorn Middle School Band
Madison County School

With the presence of all directors in the band room, more individualized instruction can take place, giving way to more productivity. Another benefit to team teaching is that it will cut down on classroom management issues that may occur with large band classes.

It is in my opinion that the Benjamin Russell High School Band Program is very sound in every aspect. The leaders, Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher constantly seeks ways to improve not only the teaching and learning process of this program, but they also look for ways to improve upon the specific details. This is quite evident, because of the fact that they invited a panel of educators to conduct this study. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with these gentlemen and

their wonder students. As a parent, I would feel very comfortable sending my children to learn from Mr. Bloodworth and Mr. Muncher. As Director of Bands at Alabama A&M University, I would be thrilled to have any of their students to matriculate at our University and contribute to our band program.