

“Strategies for Rebuilding Your Orchestra Program”

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I teach orchestra at Overland High School, which is in the Cherry Creek School District (Aurora, CO). When I tell people this, they often think, “Oh? Cherry Creek! Like Cherry Creek High School? That must be a great gig.” While I do love my job, there’s a lot more to the story...and Overland’s a lot different from Cherry Creek High School. Overland is sort of the “red-headed step-child” of the Cherry Creek School District. It’s a white minority school, and the majority of the student population is on free and reduced lunch. When I started working at Overland, the orchestra had received straight IV’s at CHSAA the year prior, orchestra enrollment numbers were dwindling, and the previous director had been non-renewed. I knew all of that coming in to the job, and I was fully aware of the fact that I’d be rebuilding a fragmented program. However, I didn’t quite realize the extent of the work that needed to be done when I initially got hired.

On the first day of school, I discovered that I had a serious lack of technique and a serious culture shock on my hands. Essentially every kid had significant technique issues (99% were holding their bows “Suzuki”-style with the thumb on the outside of the stick), many couldn’t read music at all, and still others didn’t know which string was which (I’ll never forget the first time we tried to tune, when I asked everybody to play their A’s and I got responses that were all over the map...). I realized pretty quickly that I was going to have to scrap everything that I’d spent all summer planning in terms of repertoire and ideas for the year and meet the students where they were at.

Now, two years later, the orchestra program has doubled in size, students consistently receive superior ratings at contests, and we can actually play repertoire that a high school orchestra should be playing. But more importantly, there’s a sense of pride and family that permeates the performing arts hallway at Overland. Orchestra is cool, and students aren’t ashamed to be a part of it anymore.

I’m very proud of the things my orchestras at Overland have accomplished, and I believe that we are beginning to develop a very strong orchestra program. However, **I am by no means an expert on rebuilding orchestra programs.** Every program is different, just as every director has a different teaching style. This presentation will cover some strategies that have worked for me over the last few years, but it is by no means a comprehensive plan or the only way to achieve desired results. **I’d love to hear about ideas that you have as well!**

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

1. **Students want to be successful and therefore want to sound good.**
2. **Once students know that you care about them and have their best interests at heart, you can get them to do almost anything. Kids are super loyal to people they care about.**

DOING YOUR RESEARCH

You’ve just gotten hired as the new orchestra teacher at a school, and you’re taking over the program from someone else. Whether the orchestra program is already CMEA-ready or is completely in shambles, you should start preparing for the new gig exactly the same way: by learning as much about the orchestra program as you possibly can.

1. Talk to other directors
 - a. Your predecessor (if doing so won’t burn any bridges—I personally didn’t have this luxury)
 - b. Performing arts faculty at your school
 - c. Feeder teachers
 - d. Other orchestra teachers in district (or nearby)
2. Talk to anyone you can
 - a. Parents/booster group
 - b. Students
3. Get copies of old programs
 - a. This can help inform repertoire choices
4. Collect any old paperwork/resources you can get your hands on
 - a. Instrument inventory, music library, handbook, syllabus, letters to parents/families, etc.
 - b. This will help you understand what the students are accustomed to and will provide some great insight into how the program is run
5. Determine what can and can’t (should and shouldn’t?) be changed

- a. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”
- b. HOWEVER, the LESS the previous director was liked and the less successful the group was before your arrival, the MORE you can change
 - i. While rebuilding a broken program can seem like an incredibly daunting task, this is the silver lining
 - ii. There’s hardly anything to prove, it’s easier to win students over, and the program can feel like it’s “yours” more quickly
- c. In college, they preach the “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” adage and discourage new teachers from changing too much too soon
 - i. However, I don’t think this is always true
 - ii. It really depends on the individual school/community/situation that you’re walking in to
 - iii. Use your best judgment, and be flexible
 - iv. There will be pushback if students, etc. don’t like the changes you’re making, but the flip side is also true (positive change will be celebrated)

🌀 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS 🌀

If I had to choose one thing that I think has helped me the most as I’ve been rebuilding the orchestra program at Overland, it would be the relationships that I’ve established with my students. There’s definitely a fine line between being a “teacher” and being a “friend” that music teachers have to watch out for, but it is imperative to get to know students outside of class, especially if you want to be able to have intense rehearsals. **Once students know that you care about them as people, you will have their loyalty forever, and they will be eager to please you.**

1. Make the orchestra classroom feel like home
 - a. Students should know that they’re welcome anytime (before & after school, lunch, off periods, etc.)
 - b. I allow students in my office, let them take selfies on my phone, etc.
2. Be real with students
 - a. This makes you more approachable and easier to relate to
3. Do fun things with kids outside of class
 - a. Can be ANYTHING
 - b. Movies, bowling, etc. as a group
 - c. Even simple stuff like eating lunch with students or talking to them after school (about non-musical things)
4. If you can’t name one interesting fact about every single one of your students, you don’t know them well enough
 - a. Students love when you take interest in their lives and appreciate the things they do besides music

I am personally a very intense person during rehearsals, and I can seem “mean” at first. It’s really just me having high expectations, but freshmen are often caught off guard because their middle school teacher was much more nurturing than I am. However, once I build relationships with my students, I can get them to do almost anything I want (and I have basically 100% retention in my program from year to year). My rehearsals aren’t always “fun”...they’re a time for hard work. I can be very demanding during class, but students know that I will be their “best friend” once rehearsal’s over and are willing to work hard for me because of it. Students recognize that I care about them as people and that I have their best interests at heart. **I would not be able to have rehearsals with the same level of intensity if it weren’t for the relationships I’ve built with students outside of class.**

🌀 REPERTOIRE & PLANNING 🌀

Much of your orchestra’s success depends on the amount of planning and preparation you do prior to passing music out and stepping on the podium for the first time. Effective planning takes a lot of time on the front end, but it pays off immensely in the long run.

1. Do your homework when choosing music
 - a. Especially as a younger or newer teacher, you need to take time to familiarize yourself with the string orchestra repertoire
 - i. There’s TONS of music to choose from, but some of it’s better (or more appropriate for your group) than others
 - ii. New music is being written every day
 - iii. There’s no way that you can be familiar with all of the repertoire without actually taking time to do some research
 - b. How can I find good repertoire? Some places to start...
 - i. Go through your school’s music library (you can save some \$\$\$ this way, especially if there’s some good stuff to choose from)

- ii. J.W. Pepper (and similar sites)
 - 1. Editor's Choice
 - 2. Basic Library
 - iii. UIL Prescribed Music List
 - iv. <http://www.texasmusicforms.com/selectionrank.asp>
 - 1. You can search for music by various criteria and see what the most popular selections were at Texas festivals in any given year
 - v. Teaching Music Through Performance books
 - 1. <http://www.teachingmusic.org/pdfs/TMTPComprehensiveList.pdf>
 - vi. Various "tried and true" lists
 - vii. New music reading sessions
 - viii. Ask colleagues for suggestions
- c. Spend some time listening, studying scores, etc.
 - d. Don't necessarily choose the first thing you come across
 - i. Publishers like to advertise new music
 - 1. Lots of this music is great
 - 2. BUT...don't forget about the "tried and true" stuff
 - ii. Take time to look in to titles you aren't familiar with
2. Criteria for choosing music
- a. Appropriate level for your group
 - i. Challenging enough that the students will learn something, but accessible enough that they will sound polished & put together at the time of performance
 - b. Something that kids will like
 - c. Something that YOU like
 - d. Balanced concert programs and curriculum
3. DON'T OVERPROGRAM!!!!
- a. We've all heard this a million times...BUT SERIOUSLY
 - b. Everybody's guilty of choosing the "wrong" piece for their group at some point in time
 - i. Be willing to admit this & go back to the drawing board
 - ii. Don't be afraid to cut pieces
 - c. It's MUCH better to choose slightly easier music and focus on perfecting it than it is to just gloss the surface of something harder
 - i. "No one cares what you're playing unless it sounds good."
 - ii. Even the most advanced students can be challenged with more accessible repertoire
 - 1. Tell them they need to sound as good as (or better than!) the recording
 - a. They're probably not being as picky as they could be about details like intonation, articulation, bow placement, vibrato style, etc.
 - b. Challenge them to pay attention to details
 - 2. Have them play things in different positions or make their parts harder in other ways
 - d. I very rarely hear orchestras polish their music as much as would be ideal, but it's such a treat when I do!
 - e. You will receive better ratings at contest if you choose appropriate music
 - i. Ratings aren't everything, and there's certainly value to challenging students & exposing them to particular repertoire...just something to keep in mind
 - ii. It's totally possible to have the best of both worlds (performing music that will sound good & be educationally enriching)
4. KIDS WANT TO SOUND GOOD!!!!
- a. And they know when they don't...
 - b. Your most important job is to make the students sound good
 - i. You can earn their trust this way
 - ii. While students sometimes complain about intense rehearsals (something that's a given if you're going to make a point of rehearsing details), they actually come to appreciate it in the end
 - c. Choosing the right music is a HUGE part of this
5. Be honest with yourself about what your group can and can't play
- a. Just because you "usually program grade 3's" doesn't mean that every "grade 3" piece is appropriate for your group (this goes back to doing your homework...)
 - b. i.e. If the violins have to play in fifth position for an extended period of time and they're not comfortable with upper position work yet, you're probably not ready to perform that piece
 - i. BUT...keep a list of music you want to perform
 - ii. Plan ways to start teaching whatever techniques & skills the students will need to play said piece, so that they can be successful when you put the music in front of them
 - c. We all have "favorite" pieces of music, but we need to be patient when it comes to programming them
6. Choose music that showcases your group's strengths

- a. i.e. I personally have very strong viola, cello, and bass sections in my top group. The violins are weaker. Though a lot of string orchestra music is “first violin heavy,” I make a point of finding repertoire that will highlight/challenge my lower strings and also continue to build up my violins’ technique
- 7. Put bowings, fingerings, etc. in the music BEFORE you hand out the music
 - a. There are different schools of thought on this (many people believe that students can learn something from marking these things in the music themselves), but if you’re trying to rebuild a program, doing this work on the front end can be a huge time saver during rehearsals
 - b. Just because a piece of music already has bowings/fingerings printed in the music from the publisher/editor/previous performance at the school doesn’t mean it’s ready to pass out
 - i. Different groups have different needs
 - ii. The fingerings I put in music for my students aren’t necessarily the fingerings that I would use if I were playing the music myself, and if I ever re-use a piece of music, I will need to re-visit the bowings/fingerings to make sure that they’re still appropriate for my current group
 - iii. Prescribed editor/publisher bowings may not match your interpretation
 - c. Playing through all of the parts (on the appropriate instrument) will help you be more prepared when you stand on the podium
 - i. This will draw your attention to difficult spots that you may have overlooked when just studying the score at sight
 - ii. It will help you empathize with students
 - iii. You should do this whether you’re a string player or not!
- 8. Study your scores well
 - a. You need to know the music inside and out before you step on the podium
 - i. You shouldn’t “learn the music with your students”
 - ii. The more familiar you are with the music, the easier time you’ll have with error detection, and your rehearsals will therefore have a faster pace
 - iii. Students will respect you because of how well you know the music
 - b. Listen, annotate, practice conducting, etc.
 - c. Have clear ideas regarding interpretation
 - d. Consider memorizing scores

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES

Every teacher has a different rehearsal style, but there are several things you can do to help maximize productivity during the early stages of rebuilding a program.

- 1. Have high expectations
 - a. Insist on the sound you’re going for, and don’t accept anything less than this
 - i. Even if you have to rehearse two measures for an entire class period, it will prove that you’re not going to settle for second best and will start establishing a culture of rigor
 - b. I tell kids all the time that I’m pushing them so hard because I know they’re capable of more
 - i. They sometimes get frustrated in the moment, but they know it’s true, and they appreciate it in the long run
 - ii. If you teach in a demographic similar to mine, the “underdog story” can be really motivating to kids...“No one expects us to be as awesome as we are, so let’s prove them wrong.”
 - c. High expectations for the music AND everything else
 - i. Kids need to demonstrate good character & good grades
 - ii. Consider an academic eligibility policy for auditioned groups
- 2. Perfect at least one section of music every rehearsal
 - a. Avoid just playing from the beginning to end of a piece over and over
 - b. Really think about what you’d like to accomplish during the rehearsal, and focus on that
 - i. If your school expects you to write learning targets or objectives on the board, challenge yourself to be really specific
 - c. Again, students want to sound good!!!
 - i. Perfecting an 8-measure section one day will have students leaving a class with a sense of accomplishment, rather than a feeling of indifference after glossing the surface of a larger section.
 - 1. “Wow, Ms. Smith pushed us really hard today, but that section sounds SWEET now!” vs. “We’re playing a cool song in orchestra, but it doesn’t sound very good yet. Hopefully we’ll be ready by our concert...”
 - ii. During the earliest stages of rehearsing a piece, start with loud/exciting sections (students like playing these parts and will be more likely to develop a positive opinion of the music early on)
- 3. Be mindful of the language you’re using
 - a. Don’t label something as “good” if it isn’t. Use “better” instead.

- i. I personally flat out tell students that they “suck” or that something sounds terrible
 - ii. “Good” loses meaning if it’s overused
 - b. “Again” vs. “one more time”
 - c. Offer praise when students have really accomplished something amazing
 - d. Avoid talking too much in general
 - i. Kids are in orchestra to play their instruments, not to hear you talk
 - ii. Only stop if you know exactly what you’re going to say, and keep feedback concise and specific
- 4. Insist on 100% participation
 - a. In terms of playing position, general preparedness, behavior, and mastery of the music
 - b. You may have to simplify parts for some kids, but there’s no reason why every single student can’t play his/her music with 100% accuracy
 - i. Don’t be the orchestra where 80% of the sound comes from the first row and everyone else is kind of following along, playing the “fake it till you make it” game
 - ii. More advanced students can get bored when you insist that other students catch up, but they appreciate it in the long run
 - iii. Students in need of remedial work can feel overwhelmed at first when you’re pushing them really hard, but they actually end up feeling empowered in the long run
 - c. Don’t be afraid to call out individual students if they’re not meeting your expectations
 - i. Have kids play a tough passage individually
 - 1. I sometimes warn kids that if a particular section doesn’t sound better by next class, I will go around the room and ask everyone to play it individually.
 - 2. I don’t do practice cards, but this kind of thing motivates students to practice without even having to do a full-blown graded playing test. Students don’t want to embarrass themselves in front of their peers.
 - 3. This promotes accountability
 - ii. You need to create a supportive classroom culture before you can do this
 - iii. You may need to follow up with the student after class if he/she seems upset that you called him/her out
 - 1. I used to be afraid that I would alienate students by calling them out, but I’ve actually found the opposite to be true.
 - 2. I thought for sure that some of the kids I constantly called out would drop orchestra, but it’s never happened.
 - 3. I tell kids that it would be easy for me to just ignore the problem. I called them out because I care and because I know they’re capable of more. Kids actually appreciate this, even if they don’t show it right away.
- 5. Establish routines
 - a. Tuning, warm-ups, etc.
 - b. Avoid wasting time, insist on a fast paced-rehearsal
 - c. Possible routine for starting class
 - i. Concertmaster tunes group one minute after bell
 - 1. Placing a student in charge of this frees teacher up to walk around the classroom to help with tuning, correct playing position, etc. and/or deal with other things (attendance, broken instruments, etc.) without wasting time
 - ii. Warm-ups
 - iii. Announcements
 - 1. I used to think announcements should happen before warm-ups, but then I realized that students weren’t totally focused until after we warmed up, so I wasted lots of time repeating myself and dealing with classroom management issues during announcements.
 - 2. I’ve seen a huge improvement in the overall level of engagement in my rehearsals simply by flip-flopping warm-ups and announcements.
 - iv. Repertoire/bulk of rehearsal
- 6. Get off the podium, stop conducting, and walk around the room
 - a. This forces groups to listen and become more aware
 - b. It gives the teacher an opportunity to correct individuals’ technique without being intrusive and also provides a new perspective
- 7. Consider mixing up the seating arrangement
 - a. Circles, quartets, sit next to a different instrument, etc.
- 8. If you want to get a group to sound good right away, focus on **tone, intonation, technique, and musicality**.
 - a. It’s not a long-term solution, but rhythms, etc. can be taught by rote at first if need be (DON’T DO THIS FOREVER...just until your kids have enough successful performances under their belt to feel accomplished and trust that you are helping them get better)
 - b. Intonation and tone go hand in hand
 - i. Most string teachers don’t focus on intonation enough

- ii. Yet the main thing that makes uneducated listeners cringe at an orchestra performance is bad intonation
 - iii. Use chorales, listening/ear-training exercises, etc. to help with this
 - c. I always tell students that the most important thing they'll ever learn in orchestra is how to hold the instrument/bow
 - i. You can only get so far with lousy bow holds and left hand position
 - ii. Spend time addressing this, even in high school. It can be tedious, but it pays off in the long run!
 - d. Focusing on musicality not only takes performance to the next level, but it's also "fun" and gets students to think about their music in a different way
- 9. Approach everything with passion and energy
 - a. If you're excited about something, your students will be too

🌀 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT & TEAM BUILDING 🌀

It doesn't matter how hard you as the director work or how prepared you are for rehearsals...if your orchestra doesn't buy in to what you're trying to do, and if they don't feel like a team, you're never going to be as successful as you otherwise could be. Embrace this! Student leadership is a wonderful thing, and you'll be amazed at how much your students can accomplish if they take ownership of what they're doing.

1. Establish section leaders
 - a. Consider having section leaders who aren't necessarily first chair
 - b. Your principal players can lead sectionals, but section leaders can help organize events and promote a sense of morale within their section (this is incredibly empowering to students who really try but who know they'll probably never be "first chair")
2. Do fun things outside of class (no rehearsal involved)
 - a. Movie nights, bowling, etc.
 - b. My school requires me to fill out LOTS of paperwork to do this, but it's well worth it!
 - c. We do something fun every month ☺
3. Orchestra camp/retreat over the summer or at the beginning of the year
 - a. Band does this...why not orchestra???
4. Get orchestra gear (t-shirts, hoodies, etc.)
 - a. Come up with a clever design (students can help with this)
 - b. This year, my top group is making tie-dye shirts. Each section (violin, viola, cello, bass) has a different set of colors on their shirt, and we're putting treble clefs of the violin shirts, alto clefs on the viola shirts, etc.
5. Find jobs for lots of different students
 - a. Highlight their strengths outside of music
 - b. Again, your student leadership can go beyond whoever's "first chair"
 - c. I let students do my hair every time we have a concert (they actually fight over this job!)
 - d. I also let students design shirts, help me grade papers, and many other things
 - e. These students feel so valued when you let them help with little stuff like this.
6. Build up team/family mentality
 - a. Remind students about this *constantly*
 - b. Consider rotating chair placement at least sometimes
 - c. Don't allow egos
7. Let the students share comments and feedback during rehearsal
 - a. The director can start to sound like a broken record after a while.
 - b. Sometimes constructive criticism from peers can mean so much more.
 - c. I remember rehearsing a piece and constantly bugging my violins about using more bow and playing out in a difficult section. No matter how many ways I tried to explain this, I still wasn't getting the result I wanted. Finally, my concertmaster said, "I know it's scary to play up high, but I know you guys can do it," and suddenly, the violins did exactly what I wanted.
 - d. This probably works best in high school, but it is important at any level
 - e. It helps students take ownership in the rehearsal process

🌀 PERFORMING & EXPOSURE 🌀

When you first take over a program, it is absolutely imperative that students feel successful when they perform. This is a big part of earning students' trust and buy-in to a culture of rigor. Once again, students want to sound good! So, depending on how much you're having to rebuild, performing may seem like a rather daunting task at first. However, people will notice your progress if you share it with them. Therefore, it's important to allow students to perform as much as possible and to embrace every opportunity to bring good PR to the program you're trying to build.

1. Accept every performance opportunity you're offered (as long as your students can handle it)
 - a. Exposure is awesome, and you never know who's listening
 - b. BUT...if students won't be successful, you shouldn't accept the gig
 - c. Also, performing frequently is great, but be mindful of students' other commitments (you don't want them to get burned out)
2. Think beyond concerts—get creative!
 - a. School assemblies
 - b. Homecoming parade
 - c. Senior homes
 - d. Other community engagements
3. Perform at events where “important people” will be watching
 - a. District events, school board, superintendent
 - b. Bug administrators about coming to your concerts
 - i. Whether they're supportive or not
 - ii. Really push the concerts where you're performing the most accessible music (i.e. pops concert, pep band, etc.)
 - c. Invite lots of people to your concerts
4. Host events at your school
 - a. District Honor Orchestra, Solo & Ensemble, Large Group Festival, etc.
 - b. If done correctly, these kinds of things can bring tons of good PR to your school/program

🌀 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS 🌀

1. Rebuilding a program takes time. Be patient, and celebrate the progress you're making
2. The younger kids (i.e. freshmen) are the ones that matter. Some of the older students will be “stuck in their ways.” Choose your battles with these kids...sometimes it's easier just to “wait them out.”
3. Develop a long-term vision for your program
4. Fight for what's important to you
5. Collaborate with others in the music department at your school (combined pieces, etc.)
6. Develop a strong feeder program. Building a great program at any level requires that the elementary, middle, and high schools all be doing the right thing.

🌀 FINDING SUPPORT 🌀

Rebuilding a program is a lot of work, and you should expect it eat up a lot of your time (there's no way around this, and there's no way to sugar-coat it). There may be days when you feel like you eat, sleep, and breathe school and you question why you're giving so much of yourself for such little validation. The results are well worth the sacrifices in the end (as with most things in life, the more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it), but you shouldn't ever feel like you're all alone in the process.

1. Find at least one person in your building who you can talk to
 - a. Someone who understands what you do (or at least appreciates it and “has your back”)
 - b. Other music teachers
2. Reach out to other string teachers in the district/state/country
 - a. Colorado ASTA is a great resource! ☺
 - b. CMEA, Summer Conference, etc. are good for networking
 - c. People are willing to help, share ideas, etc.; sometimes you just have to ask
3. Rely on friends and family
 - a. They can support you when things are stressful at work
 - b. Be sure to also take time for yourself to avoid burnout
4. Students and families in your program can also be a good support system
 - a. If you build relationships with your students, they'll be eager to help out and spend extra time with you
 - b. “If it doesn't require a degree in music, let someone else do it.”
 - i. Filing music, grading papers, organizing fundraisers, etc.
 - c. Insist that your focus be on teaching music
 - i. We all became music teachers because we love teaching music
 - ii. Teaching becomes stressful when you get swamped with paperwork, are worrying about money, or have a negative interaction with a student/parent/administrator (non-music things!)
 - iii. Focusing on music and students helps you stay motivated and remember why you work so hard—it's a labor of love ☺

5. It's easy to feel alone as a music teacher, particularly one who's rebuilding a program
 - a. But there are lots of people who care about you and your success
 - b. Don't feel like you have to do everything by yourself (this won't work out...as much as we try, none of us can be Superman/Superwoman)
 - c. Learn to delegate and ask for help

🌀 TIPS FOR WORKING IN A LOW-INCOME AREA 🌀

Schools with demographics like Overland's love to ask interview questions along the lines of, "How will your teaching at a school with these demographics differ from the way you'd teach at a primarily white school in a more affluent community?" I honestly HATE this question. In my mind, the correct answer is, "Not at all. I'm going to teach these students exactly the same way as I would any other students. Kids are kids, music is music, and students (no matter where you go) all have individualized learning needs." However, ensuring equity, promoting diversity, and defying the stereotypes surrounding low-income schools are all subjects within music education that I'm incredibly passionate about. While the way you teach music should essentially be the same regardless of where you're teaching, there are a few things to keep in mind when teaching in a less affluent area.

1. Students have less access to financial resources
 - a. Many students will need to use school instruments
 - b. Fees have to be dramatically less than they might at another school
 - c. Most students cannot afford private lessons
2. Students may have less-than-adequate support at home
3. Transportation is an issue for a lot of students
4. Many students live in apartments or other situations where it is difficult to practice at home

So...what can you do to help?

1. Make yourself available
 - a. Help students outside of class (private lessons, sectionals, etc.)
 - b. Come early and stay late
 - c. Allow students to do all of their practicing at school
 - d. Give kids your cell phone number (or some way to reach you whenever they need to)
 - e. You may need to drive kids home, pick them up, etc. if you want them to be at something
2. Form relationships with students, and be willing to wear a lot of different "hats"
 - a. Many students will view you as a parent figure, as they don't have anyone to turn to at home
 - b. You may also feel like a counselor, etc. (be aware of mandated reporting issues)
3. You honestly have to work twice as hard to "keep up" with schools that have more resources, but anything's possible if you set your mind to it. ☺
4. Be real with your students
5. NEVER accept "deficit mindset" or use the "achievement gap" as an excuse
 - a. One of my biggest frustrations with Overland is that a large percentage of the student body and staff is "ok with being ok."
 - b. Being the "underdog" can actually be a good thing
 - c. Embrace the reality (diversity is actually a beautiful thing), and use it as motivation
 - i. "No one expects us to be great, so let's prove them wrong."
 - d. There is research suggesting that the "achievement gap" might not exist if it weren't for society constantly perpetuating stereotypes and calling attention to disparities.
 - i. There's no reason why students at a school with students from a lower socioeconomic status can't perform music at a high level—we just have to stop making excuses
 - ii. I've made it my mission to prove this!

🌀 PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION 🌀

Please feel free to contact me anytime with questions. ☺

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