

The Business Side of Teaching School Music: Fiscal Procedures

Each school district has **specific procedures** that directors follow in order to conduct business. The best time to check on these procedures is during your job interview. **Review these procedures** with your administration once you have started your new job.

Know what your administrators expect and follow their directions to minimize errors that can cost your district time and money, as well as a delayed payment to your vendor.

Work with Appropriate Personnel

- Depending on the procedures in your building or school district, you will work with any number of staff when making purchases. The most important thing to remember is that **there are ALWAYS policies involved when spending taxpayer dollars**. Do not place orders without receiving instructions on how to do so beforehand. Not following procedures with regard to district funds can lead to dismissal.
- **Recognize the importance** of the functions performed by your district regarding the reporting of the financial information of the school district in accordance with district policies and procedures and state and federal laws and regulations.

1. Know the state laws regarding purchasing for public entities such as a school district.

- In some locales, **purchases of items in excess** of a certain amount are required to be bid. **Bidding** usually requires additional time—drawing up specifications that are best suited to your program’s needs, as well as the time needed to request, receive, tabulate and award bids.
- Find out **how many bids** must be received.
- **Be specific** with the item descriptions given to the companies from which you are requesting bids. Mention brands, models, delivery time, delivery charges, etc.
- **Confirm** the company is a reputable dealer for the items you need.
- **Reconfirm** the company can and will provide service after the purchase if warranty work is needed.
- Keep in mind that school bids are usually done with a **minimal profit margin**. Most music dealers prepare school bids as a **service to their customers**. Paying less for an item only to have service problems later is probably not worth the savings gained. Cheaper is not always less expensive.
- **Consider doing business locally** to assure that instruments are properly serviced and maintained in a timely and cost-effective manner. Purchasing locally also means the money and taxes stay in the local economy.

- **Leasing may be another option to extend the buying power** of a district in the short term by expanding the number of instruments and extending the payment for those instruments over a number of years.
- **Stay within your allocated budget.**

2. Each district has specific policies and timeframes regarding issuing requisitions and paying invoices. Learn how bills get paid in your district.

- **Generally, a requisition is submitted to your principal, district coordinator or the superintendent.** After receiving administrative approval, a purchase order is issued. A purchase order is a voucher for items specified. The vendor will submit an invoice to you, which you will submit, in turn, to the school secretary or the secretary of the school board. Once the invoice is submitted, approval for payment will be put on the school board agenda as an action item. Some boards handle approvals at each board meeting; some only once a month. Ask your supervisor how your district works. After the school board has authorized payment, the school district will pay the vendor. Knowing the process and handling purchases in a professional and timely manner will assure a good relationship with your vendors.
- **Make sure you have the correct coding and approvals** on requisitions.
- **Follow your district's established procedures** when collecting or expending funds. It is always best to keep your involvement with the handling of money at an absolute minimum. Utilize the appropriate school staff to facilitate the collection of funds as much as possible.
- **Reimbursement** for meals and other professional expenses generally may not exceed a specific dollar amount. For some districts, this is a specific amount per meal; for others it is a per diem. Reimbursements must be pre-approved.

3. Don't try to skirt the rules and regulations.

- **Don't wait until the last minute.**
- **Don't submit partially completed documents** and then expect the business office to complete them.

Student Resale Accounts

Ask your supervisor if it would be possible to establish a resale account for incidentals, including reeds, oils, traps, music books, etc. You will have to provide some of these items if your community doesn't have a local music store.

You can avoid running your resale accounts in the red by staying on top of your recordkeeping. No matter the amount, **ALWAYS** give receipts for funds collected and provide them to the student immediately. Use receipt books that create copies so that you maintain documentation of all transactions. Deposit funds received as expediently as possible. The teacher is the ultimate responsible official when it comes to handling funds for the music program.

One successful way to run a resale account is to use a **punch card system**. At the beginning of the school year, students purchase a punch card and use the card to purchase the resale items. Try to **avoid handling money directly**. If your school has a school store, inquire if they will handle the resale items. **Purchasing your resale items** from the music representative calling on your school is convenient.

In an Emergency

If you need something right away, the **good working relationship** you have developed with your school music representative can be helpful. He or she will most likely try to assist you.

Sample Purchasing Steps

- **Fill out a requisition** for requested purchases.
- Your principal, business office or superintendent **acts upon this request**.
- **If approved**, a purchase order with a specific number will be issued and sent to the specific store or vendor, or given to you to **initiate the purchase**.
- Merchandise is delivered. The **purchase order number** should appear on the store or vendor invoice.
- **Process the invoice** by first checking that what was received is what was ordered on your original purchase order. Then, immediately forward the invoice to the **school business office** for payment.
- **Payment** to the store or vendor may take 2–4 weeks.

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