

Retention and Recruitment Happens Daily

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Retention Strategies

Retention is a daily and ongoing process that happens in every rehearsal, every communication and every decision for your music program. The director is the one person who can control the most elements in any music program. Students' time, talent and energy are valuable. If you want high levels of student retention, then respecting those resources must be a part of the daily operations of the program.

Start With the End in Mind.

When creating rules, policies, calendars, etc. envision your ultimate goal for every student. If you want students to be long-term members, with independent musical growth, then keep that the focus. Do not get tied up in chasing trophies, creating burdensome schedules or unrealistic practice expectations. The program will never be more important to anyone than it is to you, and your priority of the program will not be shared by every family. Decide what are reasonable expectations to meet the program's' goals and be willing to live with the consequences. Many directors will win a battle or two but lose the war when structuring the program.

Quality Materials & Music

20% of the students will be "die-hard" band kids. These kids will love everything about the band almost all of the time. 10% will be "on the fence" and may only be there because a parent is insisting it happen. These kids will resist or at best tolerate almost everything about band almost all of the time. 60% of the kids will be casually committed. These students like band if it fast-paced, social, rewarding and meaningful. How do we engage all of these students? High-quality literature. Selecting your literature should be an ongoing and careful process that evolves as the group develops. The better the quality of music, the more your students will be engaged. Engaged students stay in band.

Communication

Make it easy for students, parents, and administrators to find information easily. Update websites and social media often so your band community has a reason to check in with these sites. Frustration in finding information often causes families to give up on a program. It is critical when communicating with families that you work toward solutions to issues or conflicts. Ultimatums end relationships. Is the program there for the student or is the student there for the program? Whatever your answer, that will be at the center of your communication. Keep in mind that reasonable flexibility helps students know that they are important to you and the program.

Consistency

Consistency in daily rehearsal structure, assessment procedures, routines, and expectations will give students a sense of security and build a foundation of trust. That trust leads to strong relationships with students and families. A critical area of consistency is in setting a calendar of rehearsals and performances. The earlier this is set and the less it changes, the easier it will be for families to keep their children in your program. Chaos in the program creates chaos for families and is disrespectful of the students' time and home schedule.

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