

Recruiting: The Ongoing Process - Part Three

Recruiting and retaining students in the band program is one of the many, serious concerns for today's band directors. As the name of this article implies, recruiting students for the band program is a continual process where students are encouraged, every year, to continue their music-making. To aid in the retention of band students, the band program should be structured to ensure that students are successful.

The Gemeinhardt Company, Inc. has been actively engaged in research to determine the reasons why band students decide to continue their participation, or alternatively decide to drop out of the band program. The *Gemeinhardt Report 2* specifically addresses why students discontinue their participation in band. While the reasons are many, most can be grouped into four major categories:

1. Public Awareness
2. Program Administration
3. Communication
4. Teaching Strategies

The previous two issues of *Kjos Band News* examined the areas of public awareness and program administration. In this issue, we will consider the third area, communication.

In order for a band program to be strong, there needs to be effective communication with three groups of people: students, parents/guardians, and administrators. Most problems in any given situation can be traced to ineffective communication. Consider every action and every word, written or spoken, as an opportunity to build and strengthen lines of communication. Here are some tips for good communication:

Apply the Basics!

1. Believe that students, parents, and administrators want to know what is happening in your classroom or rehearsal hall.
2. Choose the right time to communicate. People of differing moods will have a difficult time communicating. Perhaps asking "Is this a good time to talk?" will help.

Focus on the Presentation:

Communication is 90% delivery, 10% Message

1. First impressions are critical. Be sure they are always positive!
2. Be aware of body language; nonverbals usually reflect the true message more accurately than words.
3. Plan and practice presentation, especially any comments to be made at concerts. Be sure to pronounce names correctly.

4. Attend to the details in preparing written information. Proofread carefully, and in particular, spell names correctly.
5. Be sure information is timely, accurate, and frequent.
6. Apologize immediately and sincerely when in error.

Be An Active Listener

1. Give the speaker your undivided attention.
2. Maintain good eye contact. React to statements with a nod, a smile, a frown, or some other small movement.
3. Paraphrase the speaker's points and comments to be sure that what is being said is accurate.

It's important when communicating that you know your audience, their needs, and their interests. As stated previously, timing is very important. Students and their parents/guardians should receive much of the following information before the student begins participation in the band program. Let's look at some of the things that should be communicated to students, parents, and administrators:

Students:

1. Students need to know the time commitment that is required, from when they begin until when they graduate.
2. Potential conflicts with other school activities and classes.
3. Stress the importance "that anything worth doing is worth doing well." This, however, requires commitment to time and commitment to excellence.
4. Your expectations regarding practicing, attendance, and classroom procedures.
5. The value of music.
6. Students need encouragement— not ridicule. Try to encourage them in something everyday.
7. Praise them in public but discipline them privately.
8. Get to know each student as an individual and let them know you are interested in their other activities.
9. Students should receive a copy of the band program's yearly schedule.

Parents/Guardians:

1. It is equally important that parents/guardians understand the time commitment required in the band program from beginning to end. Don't forget that, in most cases, they will be driving the students to special rehearsals and concerts.
2. Their role in their child's music education. Parents should provide encouragement, listen to their child's practicing, and attend their child's concerts.
3. If necessary provide the necessary equipment and materials. This may include "step-up" instruments, special mouthpieces, reeds, valve oil, ligatures, etude and solo repertoire, uniform rental or cleaning, and tour expenses.

4. The value of music. You will probably need to supply this information to the parents/guardians.
5. Parents/guardians should receive a copy of the band program's yearly schedule.

Administrators:

1. Your personal philosophy of music education. Make administrators aware that administrating a music program requires discretionary decisions that carefully balance the educational needs of students, and the public's entertainment needs.
2. Provide a copy of your curriculum. This should demonstrate that music is a curricular discipline with academic integrity. Emphasize the teaching of comprehensive musicianship. This, of course, is the thrust of the National Standards for Arts Education.
3. Share the good news of students' achievements.
4. Administrators should receive a copy of the band program's yearly schedule.
5. The value of music. You may need to supply your administrator with this information.

Effective communication is an essential component of a quality band program. Putting these suggestions into practice will break down many of the barriers to student participation in band and will reduce the number of drop-outs. Recruiting is an ongoing process.

Published in Kjos Band News, Spring 2001, Volume 3
Copyright © 2009 Neil A. Kjos Music Company