

Recruitment and Retention

The NAFME Collegiate chapter invited the Gull Lake Middle School Band and Choir directors to come and present on recruitment and retention. The school is of class B size. In this meeting Mrs. Chabitch the band director said that in order to introduce new students to instruments they held a concert in which the middle schoolers came to the front of the stage and introduced the instruments that they play to the audience. The new students learn about the instrument opportunities and become exposed to the band sound. In addition to that she has done “pen pals” where she has current middle school students write letters of their fun experiences in band and how they have grown in order to recruit more kids. Mrs. Chabitch makes sure to stay consistent in classrooms of younger children so that the student knows a familiar face in the transition to middle and become encouraged to participate. Both teachers keep their door open well before and after school is actually in session just in case some students want to have fun playing, practicing, or experimenting with music making. It is just one of the many ways that they retain kids and encourage involvement. The students in general music receive a musical knowledge test administered by Conn-Selmer so that the directors can understand who will succeed best in band as well. They flatter the students with encouragement and congratulations after the test even if student performed poorly on the test, to encourage involvement.

I interviewed Bryan Van Toll at Three Rivers, and observed 8th grade and 6th grade while they were getting ready for a Halloween concert. The school is of class C size. He stressed that having a good relationship with a dealer that matched your ideals

was important. Marshall's cares more about exposing kids to instruments than they do getting paid on commission by number of students fitted. So they are not "pushy." He starts band in 6th grade but gets all 5th graders fitted for an instrument. He is to the point where the elementary schools know his face well. If someone quits band, they are not allowed in the program again. If you're out, then you are out. Only a few time kids have quit for sports, most of time he can make accommodations so that sports and band can co-exist for retentions sake.

If I were to run a program regardless of size I would make sure to become involved in the elementary music program. I would make sure that my face correlates with "hey, that's the band guy." It is important for students and teachers alike to know me so that the school can support the music program, know a familiar face in a transition from school to school and understand the importance of music in the lives of all. I would make sure to find an instrument fitter who has the students best interest in mind and that I feel comfortable with. I think it is important to get students involved in recruitment. I like the idea of writing letters from student to student, or speaking on behalf of the band from student to student. What is most important is that students talk to students to peek interest and advocate for the program. If I inspire the kids to do the recruiting and encourage others to join something bigger than just them, I can focus bigger things. Of course I will still find time to meet with counselors to decide course times to insure maximum enrollment and gain the support of the rest of the school. One thing that Mrs. Chabitch does with the band is the "Birthday Brigade." She takes the band to the rooms of teachers that have a birthday that day and play happy

birthday. I think this is a great way to advocate for the band, support other teachers, and spread music throughout the school. It sheds a good light on the program. I know that it will work to my advantage in retaining students as well if they have fun and interact with other classrooms. Another thing that I will do is encouraging the marching band to go on a “recruitment tour” field trip. Take the marching band to all of the local elementary schools to perform for the young kids in the middle of their day and cultivate an excitement for band within the elementary community. After we tour all of the some, hopefully most, of the “feeder” elementary schools for recruitment, I would take the Marching Band somewhere for lunch, such as a food court or fast food restaurant, for retention purposes. Vanity Trips such as Cedar Point, Six Flags, or Weekends at destination cities for musical purposes are great ways to encourage retention as well as get students talking to other students about the fun trips the band goes on. All of these things are great ideas that I have for my future school.

One of the great things mentioned in class deals with a concert early on in the year to show off the successes of the beginning band. Demonstrate how the 5th graders sounded on day one, have the students sound blatty, and talk a little bit about what happened in day 2 when they learned good tone and more notes. Then demonstrate the final product of the short time that they have been in music with a performance of the most polished piece they have. After that go on to the middle school band and show where those students could be in 2 years. Finally show the high school band and demonstrate the massive improvement from just 4 years of work. Parents will hopefully enjoy hearing and seeing the notable progress that happens over the course of a music

career in school. It is nice for them to have an aural concept and tangible proof that music can be good for their child. This concert is a fantastic idea that I would love to have the opportunity to coordinate someday.