

Building a Healthy School Orchestra Program: Recruiting, Retention, and Creating A Culture of Success

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Recruiting:

Why orchestra?

What is needed to build a successful program?

Getting the word out:

- Communicate through multiple outlets
 - Email, mail, letters, signs, demos, whatever it takes!
- Create a flyer/brochure
 - Include FAQ's and a sign-up form
- Create presentations
 - Talk to the prospective students in large and/or small groups.

Types of Presentations:

- Classroom Visits
- Grade level assembly-style presentations
- School tours, concerts, and orientation events for perspective students

Presentation Tips:

- Create a “show” that is entertaining and interactive.
- Tell students about the FUN they will have. Concerts, trips, and more!
- Know the answers to FAQ's. Scheduling, Instrument rental, etc.
- Bring flyers (and candy, stickers, t-shirts, or prizes!)
- Give cooperating teachers a hardcopy and an e-copy of your flyer to send home in the weekly “folders” or post online.
- Get the names and contact information for potential students. Follow up with a letter or email.
- Do something that creates a bond or inside joke between you and the kids.

Recruitment Concerts/Performances:

- Use a large group or combined groups.
- Play something upbeat and popular. Whatever you play, it must be IN TUNE and exciting.
- Look and sound awesome! Wear your orchestra t-shirts and jeans.
- Look like you are having fun. Smile, yell, laugh! Rehearse this. Students are too serious!
- Add a drum set or electric instruments.
- Have your students talk about what they love about being in the orchestra.
- Have your students go into the audience for a 2-minute instrument petting zoo.

Other General Recruiting Tips:

- Create a website or online platform
- Post on school and/or parent social media or newsletters (have parents post for you!)
- Make it EASY to sign up (no deadlines if possible).
- Create an online sign up method
- Create a list of students that have signed up and give it to guidance dept. or admin. This can help make their job easier when creating next year's schedule, and it can be used as evidence when asking to expand the number of classes that are offered at your school.

What if I can't recruit in person?

- Make a short, high-energy video
- Yard signs make your program more visible to the community. Put them in the car drop off area at the schools if possible.
- Email flyers
- School Websites and Social Media
- Volunteer to play for other classes and school events (5th grade graduation or just the car-rider pick up/drop off line!)
- Your students will recruit for you!
 - Practice Buddies
 - Donut visits: have some Orchestra "Ambassadors" chat with potential students

Recruiting Time Line

Plan to have layers of contact!

Example of Year-Plan for Recruitment:

- Nov./December: 1st visit (meet and play for 4th/5th graders)
- March: Candy grams with QR code to info on website
- April: Class visits/paper sign up brochure sent home, 1st email to all 5th grade parents with links to video and online sign up
- April: concert for all 5th graders at the middle school (side-by-side with practice buddies)
- April/May: Posting on social media each week
- May: Students tour school (performance and electric instrument petting zoo)
- Mid-May: 2nd email to all 5th grade parents with links to video and online sign up

*Adjust as needed to fit your situation!

Retention, Creating Culture, and Developing Relationships:

Create an Atmosphere of Success:

- Students need to feel successful every step of the way.
- Set everything up for success; don't put students (or yourself) in situations that are not going to be successful.
- Be well-planned and organized. Students appreciate a smooth classroom environment. They want to feel welcome and safe.
- Orchestra is for everyone! Make sure your environment reflects this. Include music from many backgrounds and cultures.

Have fun!

- Students joined to have fun. They fall in love with the music along the way.
- Have fun during instruction. Play games and celebrate successes throughout the year:
 - Pencil Prizes
 - Prize drawer
 - Cheer: O-R-C-H-E-S-T-R-A Rocks!
 - T-shirts on Fridays
 - Wall of fame
 - Time Bank
 - Awards
 - Contests for fabulous prizes. (Can Can speed, note-reading)
 - Hula-hoop challenge
 - Birthday Brigade
 - Create celebration days or create your own traditions (Pi day, stand partner appreciation day, crazy sock day, funeral for all the broken rosin/strings, etc.)

Developing Relationships:

Student Connections:

- Develop personal connections and relationships.
- Students join orchestra to have fun. They will stay because they like you, their orchestra friends, and the music.
- Make Orchestra the place to be.
 - Morning practice club, bass posse, birthday brigade, donuts/ice cream/pizza parties
- Give everyone a job/role
 - Tuner, timer, librarian, rock stop collector, instrument caregiver, music stand repairperson, secretary, mascot, etc.
- Be positive. Have high expectations, but be fair and consistent.

Parent Connections:

- Show them you care about their child and that they are in good hands.
 - Open House, New parent meeting, be organized and confident
- Parents value having a connection with their child's teacher.
 - 600 classes together
- Strong relationships will improve support when problems happen.
- Your reputation precedes you (for good or bad)! Parents talk.
- Communicate Clearly!
 - Phone calls (if it's more than a few sentences, don't email, pick up the phone)
 - "Orchestra Updates" emails (newsletter), website, Remind
 - Ask parents for help!
 - Parent Volunteer form
 - Concert or rehearsal help
 - Be organized and show gratitude if you want them to keep coming back.

Community Connections:

- Become a valued part of the community

- Be seen (learn from the marching band).
- Fundraisers
- Performances
 - Nursing homes
 - Luncheons
 - Graduations or other ceremonies
 - Sporting events

T-shirts and other PR gear:

- Design a shirt that an 8th grade boy would want to wear...in public...proudly.
- Buy extras for your principal, AP's, secretary, bookkeeper, custodians, cafeteria workers, other teachers. Anyone who supports your program!
- Give t-shirts to chaperones or volunteers
- Include cost for t-shirts in your class fee if possible.
- Sell bumper stickers/magnets, hoodies, sweat pants,...its all good!



Margaret Selby is the orchestra director and 2020-21 Teacher of the Year at Laing Middle School in Charleston, SC where she grew the program from 42 to over 200 students in five years. She was the 2022 Featured Clinician for the Orchestra Division of the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) and is a contributing author of *Rehearsing the Middle School Orchestra*, published by Meredith Music and distributed by GIA. She has conducted the West Virginia Junior All-State Orchestra and multiple regional orchestras across the southeast, and has adjudicated orchestras in Las Vegas and South Carolina. Mrs. Selby has presented sessions for the Texas Orchestra Directors Association (TODA), the South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA), co-presented at the ASTA National Conference (2012, 2020, 2021) and was a panelist at the 2019 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago. She served as the President for the SCMEA Orchestra Division and is currently the SCMEA Orchestra Division Region 4 Representative. Mrs. Selby is the 2017-18 String Educator of the Year awarded by Southern String Supply. She earned degrees in Music Education and Cello Performance from the University of South Carolina, studying under Dr. Robert Jesselson. She has performed with the South Carolina Philharmonic, the Charleston Symphony, and regularly as a freelance cellist. She is also a registered Suzuki cello teacher. Mrs. Selby lives in Mt. Pleasant, SC with her husband and their two crazy teenagers. She enjoys running and sampling Charleston's many amazing restaurants.