

Five (5) S.M.A.R.T. Steps for Retaining Beginners

SUCCESS: We all know the expression, “If you really want to learn something, teach it!” Ask each current student to teach their parent, other family member, or friend how to play their instrument and submit a video of them playing a tune out of the beginning method book. The student’s job is to serve as the teacher by introducing the family member and the selection being performed. At the end, the student (acting as teacher) should encourage rousing applause from within the family household. Students love this and parents enjoy providing this kind of support. Students are far less likely to quit if their parents become actively involved in the program.

MODELING: Young teens seek to maintain personal connections, friendships, or interactions with older peers who they often choose to imitate. Take advantage of this by asking a more advanced student/student leader to record a short video clip explaining what they like best about the program. It should be something short and exciting like, “band is fun!” or “the music we play rocks!” or “all of my friends are in choir!” Assemble these into a single video to share with your beginners. Seek approval to distribute over social media and post on your school website. Another idea is to ask each of these more advanced students to create a cool poster of themselves that could be shared similarly with the goal of enticing the beginners to stay with the program. The key to remember is that these younger students want to find someone to emulate or “follow in the footsteps” of their chosen role model. A more experienced student can serve as the perfect example.

ACTIVITY: Now is the time for directors to send a letter or note to EVERY parent/guardian of each beginning student to let them know how much you enjoy having their child in the program. Find something the student does well, praise him, and let the parents know that you are looking forward to having them in the program next year. Avoid emails and form letters if at all possible. Nothing is more powerful than a hand-written note. It does not have to be more than three or four sentences. It will pay big rewards.

REFLECTION: Ask each current student to provide a photo along with a statement indicating what they like best about being in their chosen program. Create a PowerPoint and share the presentation with the entire class. You might also ask each student to share the most fun thing they did in class this year so far. The students will love seeing photos of each other as well as reading the various comments made by their friends. This will provide an opportunity to reflect upon the valuable experiences and close friendships that have resulted from participating in the ensemble.

TEAMWORK: Have current students form their own ensemble of 3 to 5 players and ask them to select a favorite piece of music to play as a group. It could be anything as simple as each student taking so many measures each or even getting more complex by assigning parts. Have them record their selection using an app like acapella or have them send their separate videos to you to assemble and play back for the class.

