



ADVOCACY

Recruitment: It's a Way of Life

by Brian Cole

Have you ever given the following a thought: what if every subject in your school was an elective (like orchestra) and each fall the teachers in your school would present a 5 minutes talk on why students should sign up for their class. Hum? As orchestra and music teachers in general, that is what we do every year. If students don't sign up for our program we won't have an orchestra...let alone a job. The day-to-day operations of our programs are important, but there are very few attributes that are more crucial than getting students into our classroom. Recruitment is where it all starts. The following are some ideas to keep recruiting fresh and relevant. This two-part article will use as its model a program that starts in the fall of the fifth grade year.

Active Recruiting

(The next issue will take about passive recruiting.)

Effective recruiting occurs multiple times throughout the year. In Moorhead there are three times that I see the students before they sign up for orchestra.

#1 In the spring of the year we bring our sixth grade orchestra over to each elementary school to play for their fourth graders. The concert lasts about 15-20 minutes and includes the following: a big sounding work like *Dragon Hunter*, *March Heroic*, or *Sword Dance*. We then introduce each section of the orchestra by having them hold their instruments above their head. Next we play the music from *Its a Small World* arranged by Bruce Chase. We play the opening eight measures first with just the basses playing, then layering the cellos, viola, seconds, etc. This gives the audience a sense of the importance of teamwork in the orchestra. We often play a work like Pachelbel's *Canon*

arranged by Balent. It is a great piece for showing how different sections come in at different times. Deborah Baker Monday has a piece that sounds a lot like *Pirates of the Caribbean* that we usually play for our recruiting concert: *Crossing Pirates Cove*. We usually end with a fiddle tune like *Bluegrass Bingo*, *Fiddles on Fire*, or *Simple Square Dance*. This concert is a subtle infomercial for orchestra. It is our hope to break down the stereotype of orchestra being a complicated task. I make certain that I place both guys and girls on the outside seats so we can keep our 50/50 ratio of boy and girls. I try to find a cool "alum" of that elementary school to do a little demonstration. We take an old bow apart and pass it around so kids can see and feel the horsehair. We set a cello on a fourth grader's head so they can feel that the entire instrument vibrate when it is pizzicatoed. And often a fourth grade teacher will come up to conduct our final fiddle tune. It is a quick concert (always err on the side of playing too little music than too much) and one that is upbeat and exciting. Each teacher is given a letter on a sheet of colored card stock that they then send home with their students informing the parents of the concert they heard, and when and how to sign up for orchestra in the fall.

#2 Our district has a back-to-school night during teacher workshop week. Professionally printed card stock handouts are placed in every child's folder. This concise handout explains the process for signing up for orchestra and the details of the lesson program.

#3 During the first week of school in the fall, arrangements are made with the general music teachers for us to come and

give the final sell. Usually two general music classes are combined and I come and give a 20-minute program. The program reviews the members of the orchestra: I bring in a nice new cello, a shiny new viola, and a double bass. I mention the word violin only once!! I have one student come up to try the cello—they pluck open strings and I finger *Twinkle Twinkle*. Another student comes up and bows the *Jaws* theme on the viola. As with our spring recruiting concert, it is not so important what you do but how you do it—not what you say but how you say it. Remember the sense of drama and excitement that 4th and 5th graders have. There will always be students who have always wanted to be in orchestra and they are going to sign up regardless. To be honest, I don't care about them at this point. (I do but I don't.) My primary purpose is to make orchestra look attractive to the student who has never even thought about being in the program. A formal written invitation (much like a wedding announcement) is given to each student to take home giving them the exact details of the sign-up night.

There is not success in numbers, but there is strength. In the next installment we will focus on ways throughout the year to keep the orchestra a visible and viable part of your community's identity.

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