

All-State: Recruiting and Retaining String Teachers

presented by Dr. Margaret Schmidt — reported by Sarah Duffy

Dr. Margaret Schmidt presented “Recruiting and Retaining String Teachers” on August 11 to address the teacher shortage we are currently experiencing in the field.

There are a few hurdles for a prospective music education major to jump over: they need to be accepted as a college music major, need to have started an instrument at a young age, usually need to have started private lessons by the end of middle school, usually need to own their own instrument, and they usually need to convince family members that it’s a valid career choice.

There is a national shortage. Approximately 11,000 music teachers leave each year. We only have 5,000-6,000 music education graduates each year. There was an expected shortage of 3,000 string teachers between 2010-2013, and 24% of the positions went unfilled nationwide in 2010.

This problem came about for a variety of reasons. One, greater advocacy and better teaching has led to string program growth. The demand for teachers now outpaces supply. Teacher schedules are often over-extended, which leads to burn-out. Unqualified or under-qualified teachers are now taking positions, and some programs are simply not being offered due to a lack of teachers.

Career Development Theory states that the process of career selection begins early,

people decide based on their own experiences, numerous people have an influence on a person’s choice, and people compare their individual skills with their perceptions of a career.

How does this apply to a music education major? Early exposure to music helps—music in the home, music at school, private lessons, Suzuki, community groups, etc.

School music experience is the MOST influential experience on someone choosing to pursue a career in music education. Other camps and honor groups are also influential.

The most influential person is the high school music director. Middle school directors and elementary music teachers are also influential.

Students compare their skills to their perception of the career. Teaching is a familiar profession. Students will ask themselves, Can I do this? And do I want to do this? How do your students view you, and how do you present the profession to them?

How can we help? Provide opportunities for students to learn about being a music teacher by helping you with various tasks. Develop a student ASTA chapter. Provide opportunities for students to teach, perhaps through a summer program. Host a student teacher. Make students and parents aware of the teacher shortage. Present the

career realistically, both good and bad.

Good prospects share the following traits: love of music, strong leadership, ability to work with others, eager to learn and improve, interest in helping others, optimistic.

If you know any students like that, encourage them to learn more about the profession.

Also, support young teachers and colleagues who might be “at risk.” Be proactive and check in. Reframe mistakes and “bad days” as normal growth opportunities.

It is important that we all avoid burn-out. Attend conferences, seek opportunities to connect, join the orchestra teacher facebook group (secret group—ask a current member to add you), make time to relax and recharge, keep a sense of humor, delegate, and accept that there are some situations you simply can’t control.

Recommended book: *Life in the Real World: How to Make Music Graduates Employable* by Dawn Bennett. Available from Amazon.

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