

All-State: Retaining Students in Orchestra

Wendy Barden's Gallery Walk

As part of her *So... Now What?* presentation, Wendy Barden presented a list of what students have said in a “normal” year about why they are drawn to stay in orchestra:

- I like to play my instrument
- I want to learn more, to improve
- I need the Fine Arts credit for graduation. This is a better elective choice than others.
- I like the classroom community. My friends are here.
- My parents want me to continue
- I like being part of something special
- I like the teacher
- I like performing in concerts
- This class provides stress relief in the day from my other classes or other problems.
- I want to travel with the group
- I plan to pursue a music-related career.

Then Wendy posted large sheets on the gallery wall with common things students say when they are not committed to continuing. Workshop participants were invited to write suggested responses / ways of influencing these students to remain in orchestra.

I don't practice enough

- Do you enjoy playing?
- Let's set a goal
- It's OK to practice in shorter chunks or come in and use a practice room for 10 minutes during advisory
- Try to find a time of day that works for you. E.g. before the bus, after dinner
- Neither do I!
- Build accessible practice goals
- *You* are enough
- Most of us don't

I don't like performing in concerts

- Dialogue—why? What would you prefer
- Concert alternatives, e.g. “informances,” open houses, informal community spaces
- Is there something we could do with concert seating that would make you more comfortable?
- The only people who will be watching your are your posse and they are already proud of you!
- Are there any cool pieces we could play to make it better?

- Are there some fears we can talk through or problem solve? What *do* you enjoy? We talk a lot in class about how it's OK to like different songs or activities from your stand partner
- There are some techniques to overcome nervousness if that's why. Why do you not want to play concerts anyway?

I don't like the music

- Will you put some songs you'd like to play in the suggestion box?
- What's a song you like? I could help you find it online for your instrument or figure it out.
- Help me know what kind of music you do like and I can help you play it.
- Have the students program their own concert for an assignment to get a good idea of what they like
- Let's change it!
- I value your voice. How can we diversify our repertoire?
- I get it. Give piece X a chance. It's one of my favorites and I think you'll really dig it when it comes together.

I'm done with the Arts credit; I want to try other classes.

- Tell parents and students: colleges like to see multi-year participation in an activity?
- When you are in 11th/12th grade you will probably have more electives than you know what to do with!
- See what's out there. Did you know you can skinny XYZ with orchestra?
- You can try other classes and stay in orchestra.
- Is there a way to do both?
- Can we sit down and map out all of the classes you would like to take and figure out how to fit orchestra into your schedule?
- Especially when you are in 11 or 12 you will have more “opens” to take both -> cumulative learning

It depends on who the teacher is.

- Who is your favorite teacher? What makes them awesome?
- The most important combo in music is you and your instrument; many different teachers can help you sound better and better
- I know the next teacher and I can tell

you Or: I don't know the next teacher I know they will ...

- We learn things from all kinds of teachers
- Different perspectives are good! Don't be afraid of something new.

I'm not very good. This is too hard.

- Stop by for a lesson. I'll help you out!
- Let me show you a different way to try it; see if it works better for you
- Thank you for letting me know. I want to help.
- Can I give you a system of scales and tone exercises to help, or you have a difficult area in positioning / playing?
- What about this is too hard? (make less overwhelming)
- You are right where you need to be on your journey. We all need support moving forward.
- I believe in you!

This is not my career path.

- Music and art are a part of most commercial transactions. The skills of excellence translate over.
- Habit(s) of mind
- That's OK. Many people continue to learn from things that aren't in their career path. We hope that you have fun playing and learn something that relates to broader skills while you're here!
- Career paths can take unexpected turns — try lots of stuff!
- 99.999% of athletes won't have it as a career—but still participate in sports. Why? It's fun! And it's good to be well-rounded.
- It will still teach you something valuable.
- It's nice to have a fun class to relieve the stress sometimes.

I don't like my instrument.

- Let's try another one
- Ukulele
- Do you feel this way because you perceive that you struggle?
- Why not? (Find the root of the issue.)
- Tell me more
- What did you like about it when you started?
- Would you be interested in learning a new orchestra instrument?
- Are you having trouble with some-

thing? Come see me for a quick lesson; let's help you with it.

It depends on what my parents say.

- Talk to parents!
- Discuss self-advocacy
- What are *you* thinking for next year?
- Reiterate positive aspects of playing.
- What do *you* feel?
- Talk about their goals for their group — get the student excited. Also problem solve if there are logistic issues (do they need to borrow a bass for dad's house?)
- I'll make sure to talk to your parents, but I will also advocate for what you want.

- I get it. Want me to get a hold of them?

My friends are not in this class.

- I didn't have too many friends so this is not really my domain, but playing an instrument is good for your brain and you may meet more interesting people.
- You have the opportunity to meet someone new
- Invite your friends to be in the class!
- That's OK
- The cellos have tacos.
- Meeting new people/traveling in multiple circles is good for you!
- New friends can happen in a music

environment. I've made friends as an adult in a music ensemble. You can too! I believe in you!

Wendy Barden, PhD, is Minnesota's Music Education Specialist. Currently, a major part of her work centers around implementation of the 2018 Minnesota Academic Standards in Music. Wendy serves the work of Minnesota music educators through dynamic face-to-face and online workshops, consultation, and customized professional development. More info at <https://perpich.mn.gov/professional-development/state-arts-education-specialists/music-education-specialist>. ↗