

Southwestern Musician • January 2018

Recruiting & Retention Articles

The following articles are compiled in this single PDF for your use as you consider how to implement proven strategies for recruiting and retention of music students.

Students Can Continue to Choose Music

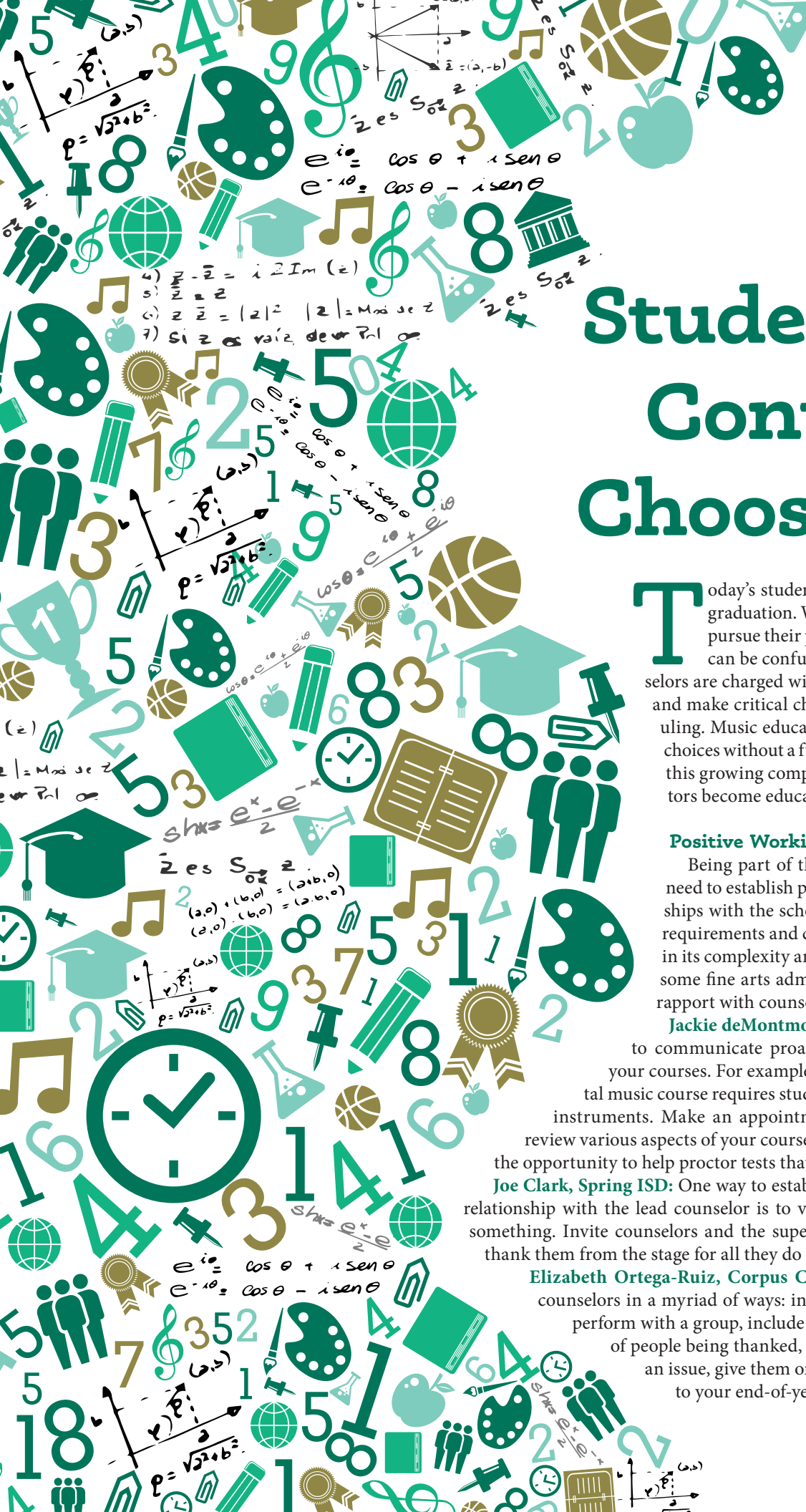
Amid so many requirements, elective opportunities, and GPA pressure, students often struggle to remain in a music program throughout their schooling. Several district fine arts administrators share how they are responding to these challenges.

Maximizing the School Counselor's Impact by Sara Stringer

A strong partnership with the school counselor will help ensure their support of your program. Learn from the perspective of this former middle school band director who now works as a school counselor.

Helping Students Pursue Their Passion by Sundas Mohi

Growing up under the pressure of parents who expected her to study medicine, this orchestra director offers her story and advice for helping support your students who want to continue studying music.



Students Can Continue to Choose Music

Today's students face an increasingly complex path to graduation. While opportunities to make choices and pursue their passions are indeed positive, what results can be confusing—to say the very least. School counselors are charged with helping students establish their paths and make critical choices about course selection and scheduling. Music educators often find that some students make choices without a full understanding of their options. Given this growing complexity, it is imperative that music educators become educated and active agents of the solution.

Positive Working Relationships Go a Long Way

Being part of the solution means that music educators need to establish positive and productive working relationships with the school counseling team. With ever-shifting requirements and choices, a counselor's work has increased in its complexity and demand. The following is advice from some fine arts administrators about how to establish good rapport with counselors:

Jackie deMontmollin, Denton ISD: Be aware of the need to communicate proactively about the special challenges in your courses. For example, inform the counselor if an instrumental music course requires students to handle expensive, school-owned instruments. Make an appointment in advance of course selection to review various aspects of your courses. In addition to being informative, take the opportunity to help proctor tests that often are the counselor's responsibility.

Joe Clark, Spring ISD: One way to establish an authentic and personal working relationship with the lead counselor is to visit the counselor when you *don't* need something. Invite counselors and the supervising counselor to performances and thank them from the stage for all they do for the arts.

Elizabeth Ortega-Ruiz, Corpus Christi ISD: Show your appreciation to counselors in a myriad of ways: invite them to performances, ask them to perform with a group, include their name in your concert program list of people being thanked, send thank-you cards when they handle an issue, give them one of your program T-shirts, invite them to your end-of-year banquet, and more.

A School Counselor's Perspective



The following is from Sara Stringer, a former middle school band director and now school counselor at Arlington ISD. Read more from Stringer in her article "Maximize the Counselor's Impact on Your Program" on page 48.

What is the most important thing teachers can do to improve their relationship with the school counselor? First, show that you have a stronger heart for the student than the program. Second, make your counselor feel valued and worthwhile to you and your students. Third, do your best not to make their job more difficult. Brainstorm new ideas and try new things, but don't make the counselor do all the heavy lifting. You are partners.

What information can music teachers offer counselors to support their advising of students? Treat the counselor as a parent. *What information do you want parents to have? Dates of events? Information on how to select an instrument?* Also, ask the counselor about the most common reasons students give for not wanting to join or continue. What information do you have that could help the counselor during that moment when the student says they don't want to be in the music class anymore? If the reason is related to fees, your district may have a way to help students that counselors are not aware of. If the reason is related to time commitment, let the counselor know ways you can work with students to help them resolve conflicts.

Starting in January, what can teachers do to help inform and support counselors as they start working to schedule students for 2018–2019? During registration season, counselors are likely placing students in your program's various levels of ensembles. Make their job easier by supplying a preliminary list of forecasted placements for the next school year so the data for staffing is at least close to accurate. Make sure your counselor understands clearly that you will send an updated placement list in May following auditions. If you supply a good preliminary list, there should be few changes, and this will relieve some of the work demand. Also, if your counselor requests reports or documents from you, complete them on time to help make the registration process move more smoothly for you and your students.

Jeff Bradford, Richardson ISD: As a high school teacher, I visited with our lead counselor every few weeks. I asked for feedback on how I could make counselors' lives easier, and I asked to be included on meetings that might affect my students and their choices. I also educated counselors about the importance of participating in a music program, beyond the credit earned. Sometimes we need to make it more personal and about the *why* for the student. With the time we spend and relationships we build with our students, it's our job to share those stories with counselors and to advocate for the students and the programs we teach.

In my final years at Lake Highlands HS, I convinced our lead counselor to let me sit in on their cluster counseling staff vertical team meetings. I didn't speak at first—I just listened. As time passed, I sought to understand the demands placed on them. I found they were often doing exactly what they were directed to do, which helped me understand how to better serve at the next level.

The biggest thing I've noticed is there is a lack of communication about timelines for rollouts, new programs, and expectations in the cluster or district. Most counselors I've worked with are simply trying to do what they know is right, sometimes with inaccurate information or lack of support to properly guide students in the arts. When I stopped fighting people and sought to understand, life got much better.

As an administrator, I schedule opportunities to speak with all counselors across the district every year. I thank them and work to build a sense of mutual work for the best interest of students. I outline the timeline for all arts organizations, specifically discussing assessments for our areas and how we recruit. When they have more information about how things work, they usually ask questions, and this leads to a more productive partnership. Finally, I provide them my contact information and ask them to reach out to me for support or clarity.

Shawn Bell, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD: Work with counselors well in advance of deadlines. Establish a reputation of being organized and strategic, rather than being a last-minute, sky-is-falling teacher. Overall, I strongly believe that the success of these challenges depends on relationships. When strong relationships exist, there tends to be a mutual respect and

commitment to find solutions that are best for students.

Michael Ouellete, Katy ISD: I worked with our counseling program to design a brochure that outlines each of the plans and endorsements (available at www.tmea.org/stayinmusic). In addition, I hold staff development with fine arts teachers so they understand how to help students use the required and elective spots to earn an endorsement while staying in their arts program all four years.

James Drew, Fort Bend ISD: I created a PowerPoint presentation for a meeting with counselors. This includes several pair-share slides designed to incite productive conversations about the varying perspectives of topics that affect our students' choices. Counselors pair up and discuss the opposing views of specific topics. The goal is to support conversation that can lead to a greater understanding of the many sides of each issue.

David Jennison, Round Rock ISD: Many of our district decisions on inform-

ing students and families about course offerings are made at the campus level. Thus, we encourage educators to build strong relationships with campus administrators and counselors and get involved in the course selection process as much as appropriate. Enrichment versus foundation course options can be confusing for families, and sometimes for counselors as well. To help both, we distribute a brochure highlighting the benefits of fine arts participation. This document sets the stage for efforts by our teachers to engage and retain students (available at www.tmea.org/stayinmusic).

Jenny Parry, Del Valle ISD: Each year, I try something new to help improve our working relationship. I have taken district counselors on a walking tour of active fine arts classes and then treated them to lunch in the school's culinary arts café. During lunch, I answered questions and talked about highlights for each program. I have presented course catalog information on all fine arts programs during a counselors'

meeting. I explained our recruiting plan and our unique master scheduling issues. I collaborated with the Student Support Services Department to create a chart that identifies the extracurricular activities students are able to participate in while enrolled in ECHS. I also have distributed copies of "The Benefits of Music Education" advocacy piece (available at www.tmea.org/advocacymaterials).

Abby Crawford, Castleberry ISD: The most challenging time of year for counselors is the last two weeks of July through the first two weeks of school. They are pulled many directions and aren't told enough how much they are valued. Offer your help, bring them a treat, and recognize them during National School Counseling Week (February 5–9 this year). When you need something, offer a solution; don't just present the problem. Above all, counselors enjoy building work relationships as much as directors do—spend the rest of the year developing this camaraderie.

Helping Students Do It All

Many schools have sample graduation plans to show students how they can pursue various endorsements while staying in a music program all four years and how they can participate in athletics and fine arts all four years (go to www.tmea.org/stayinmusic to download samples provided by the fine arts administrators who participated in this article). Some schools have established flexibility in their schedule so that diverse interests can be supported. The following are how some districts ensure students and counselors understand the options:

Pat Leaverton, Fort Worth ISD: I have found one of the keys is to talk with the eighth-grade instrumental students before the high school counselors visit them to ensure they understand how the sequence of music classes fits into their four-year plan. I tell the eighth graders about graduation plans, credits, endorsements, and the importance that college admittance staff places on continued participation in arts.

Danny White, McKinney ISD: Probably the most important talking point with parents, students, and counselors related to the endorsements is that electives are open to student choice, regardless of the declared endorsement. No one should dictate to students what elective courses are best for them to take.

Elizabeth Ortega-Ruiz, Corpus Christi ISD: Create a brochure for counselors to give students about participating in fine arts all four years (make it a fine arts department group effort). Ask to attend parent/student meetings at the middle school when counselors are going to speak about the endorsement options, and offer the counselors a digital presentation about sequential fine arts course participation.

Joe Clark, Spring ISD: The information that we will ultimately provide all counselors we first share with just a few counselors to gain their feedback. This helps us

gain buy-in from that small group while helping ensure our information is easy to understand. Once we have a common understanding of how this information will look in our district, we collaborate with the counselors at all levels (district and campus) so that everyone is speaking the same language and using the same district materials in communication with students.

Sara Stringer, Arlington ISD School Counselor: We personalize every graduation plan to address student interests and goals. I meet with students individually



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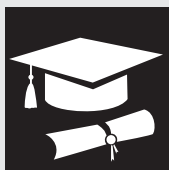
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University Admission Is About More Than Your GPA



The following story is from Westlake HS Director of Bands Kerry Taylor: About 10 years ago, Westlake had two drum majors who were very strong musicians and high achievers in their other academic courses. As juniors, one had his heart set on attending an Ivy League school and the other was destined to follow her family's legacy at the University of Texas. Daniel received a lot of pressure from his parents to drop band because they believed it limited his study time for "more serious courses" and was bringing down his GPA (seemingly putting him at a disadvantage when compared to other students). Daniel continued in music and ultimately became our head drum major. When acceptance letters came out, Daniel was excited to turn down his offers from several Ivy League schools and accept an offer from Stanford. His parents were very pleased.

Several days later the news hit that our valedictorian wasn't accepted to his number-one choice—Stanford University. Perplexed, our College and Career Counselor called the Stanford admissions office to find out why the valedictorian of an academically recognized high school wasn't admitted. Our counselor later told me that the admissions office said they limit the number of offers per out-of-state high schools, and Westlake's limit was two. One went to an outstanding athlete whom their swim coach wanted; the other offer went to the other most promising and outstanding student—the *drum major of the band*.

I have repeated this story to my high-achieving students over the years, and I have heard our counseling staff share it with the freshman class. That Senior Counselor became one of my best recruiters!

As I've watched our students gain admission, I've learned the following:

- Many of our students do not go to in-state schools, and most out-of-state schools do not use high school ranking to determine admission.
- Almost all out-of-state institutions use their own system to determine GPA or academic rigor. Weighting systems and Texas GPAs are often ignored. This is plainly stated on their admission websites.
- More universities are interested in student portfolios (cumulative work product) and essays (communication skills) to determine admission rather than GPA, high school rank, and standardized test scores.
- Even the University of Texas recognizes that work product and performance are better indicators of success in certain areas, such as fine arts, than class rank or standardized test scores.

Be sure to read the article "Helping Students Pursue Their Passion" by Sundas Mohi on page 67. Her personal story underscores these points and is another valuable story to share with students struggling with these GPA/class rank issues.

throughout their high school careers to establish an initial game plan for meeting graduation requirements and to adjust it along the way. When students present requests that exceed our eight-period capacity, I inform them of a variety of options so that they can take what they want.

I always take them back to the basics: high school students must graduate with 26 credits and an endorsement if they want to apply to four-year universities. While

students may be interested in more than one endorsement, the state requires completion of only one. With four credits of a music course, they can earn the Arts & Humanities Endorsement. While many students will have room in their schedules for another endorsement, they should never feel pressured to complete more than one.

Our school district supports all the available endorsements; however, some districts focus only on one—Multidisciplinary.

This endorsement is closest to the former "4×4" plan. In the Multidisciplinary Endorsement, fine arts play an expanded role to the one credit required to graduate. In addition to completing the 22 credits of the basic graduation plan, students may earn the Multidisciplinary Endorsement by completing four credits in AP, IB, or dual-credit courses selected from the following: English, Math, Social Studies, Languages other than English, or *Fine Arts*. In some metropolitan school districts, fine arts departments are already looking for ways to bring in more AP, IB, and dual-credit fine arts courses to support students wanting to stay in their fine arts elective.

Managing the GPA and Class Rank Race

Many students feel pressure to be at the top of their class, with a GPA that reflects this position. In some cases, this leads students to drop out of a music program because the course doesn't offer a weighted grade. Many music educators struggle with this since their best musicians also often have a goal to be at the top of the class, believing this will help them gain admission to their top university choice. Districts have responded to this quandary in a variety of ways, including the following:

Joe Clark, Spring ISD: We have a weighted-credit option (as well as an unweighted option) for several of our fine arts courses for juniors and seniors in advanced ensembles. The weighted option includes additional requirements that are intended to match the rigor of AP and pre-AP courses and prepare students for college-level courses. We borrowed this model with permission from Allen ISD and presented the plan to the school board for approval.

Shawn Bell, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD: Although this is a continuing struggle, our district offers a pass/fail option in music classes for juniors and seniors who are competing for class rank.

Danny White, McKinney ISD: We currently have a program in place where students in their junior and senior years can opt to take fine arts courses on a GPA-exempt basis. We have debated about whether to move toward providing honors credit in our top ensembles. (Go to www.tmea.org/stayinmusic for their GPA-exempt option brochure.)


Kerry Taylor, Westlake HS, Eanes ISD: Westlake HS has implemented two rules that, in my opinion, have done much to alleviate some of the pressures on high achieving students as they try to balance their love for fine arts subjects and an overt emphasis on GPA in the college admission race.

The first is that every student is required to have a minimum of four regular-level credits, three of which must be completed prior to their senior year, averaged into their GPA. This allows students in four-year programs to be on a more level playing field with those who are trying to play the GPA game. For our most serious music students, at least one of their music courses not receiving a weighted GPA multiplier per year will not hurt their GPA when compared with others. Our administration is in the process of exploring the future

possibility of expanding the requirement of regular credit courses to six, and possibly eight.

The second change that has proven helpful to fine arts students and the student body at large is that we publish only the top 10% when ranking a graduating class. This has lessened the importance of a class ranking beyond the top 10% and raised the value of a student's body of work or portfolio. As a result, more of our students are being accepted into highly respected Texas schools that may have some sort of limiting admission policy based on high school GPAs.

Sara Stringer, Arlington ISD School Counselor: Arlington ISD has an Advanced Honors Credit grade point scale for students who participate in fine arts. It gives students an opportunity for a more rigorous curriculum in fine arts

programs for college readiness and provides advanced credit for the higher-level fine arts achievement within a curriculum structure. Advanced credit is available to all students in grades 10–12 in sections of band, choir, orchestra, and theatre. Advanced points are earned with the completion of Advanced Honors course requirements, designed to allow students the opportunity to extend their education in an enriched, independent curriculum for college readiness. All assignments are completed independently with a time line provided by the instructor. 

TMEA thanks these contributors for sharing strategies. Download brochures and sample graduation plans these districts use, at www.tmea.org/stayinmusic.

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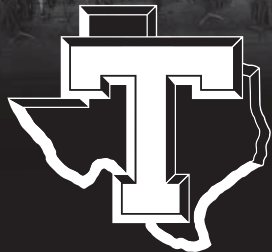
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Helping Students Pursue Their Passion

by Sundas Mohi

When a student wants to be in our music program but their family doesn't understand its value and wants them to drop out, I often share my personal story to help them understand how music education can benefit their child's future. If you have students in this situation, I hope that offering the following information can help them remain in your program and continue to benefit from your instruction.

In their twenties, my parents immigrated to the United States from Pakistan. I grew up in a largely South Asian cultural environment, but I was also obviously influenced by the American culture I experienced in school and in my daily life. I have found that in South Asian culture, there is great social pressure to impress those around you in every possible way—what others think of you is quite important. I believe this is a big reason why there is so much pressure to pursue careers in “prestigious” fields, such as medicine, engineering, or law.

When I was in school, I never thought about what I would do when I grew up, and no one asked me what I wanted. I assumed I would be a doctor because that is what I was told to do. By the time I began discovering a love for music, it was already time to apply to college, so I stuck with my original plan. I majored in biology and viola performance because I heard that music majors were

accepted into medical school at a higher rate than other majors. It wasn't until my sophomore year of college that I really started to ponder why I enjoyed music so much, and it didn't take long to realize that my love for music went beyond performing for fun.

My family was shocked when I told them I wanted to switch majors to music education and pursue a career in teaching. They worried about my financial security and thought I was making the wrong decision. Several times I heard, “What will so-and-so think of you?” It took me a long time to understand that in Pakistan, being a teacher is not a well-respected career because there is no formal education required to teach in a school. Quite often, I also heard, “Why don't you want to be a doctor? Don't you want to help people?” I found it difficult to convince them that while I may not be helping people in the way doctors do, I still help people every day and am very passionate about it. I love supporting students as they discover who they are, and I love helping them through their daily struggles. I believe this is the best way I can help people. Another frequent comment from my community was, “You're so smart! Why would you want to be a teacher?” This always led me to respond with the perplexed question of why anyone wouldn't want their child's teacher to be smart.

Finding a balance between defending what I wanted to do while maintaining respectful relationships with my parents and

my circle of involved family, friends, and acquaintances was probably the most difficult part of this time in my life. I experienced a great amount of pressure. I didn't want to disappoint anyone, but I also knew what I wanted to do with my life, and I

decided that was my choice to make.

The best thing that happened during this struggle was that my teachers and professors went out of their way to advise, encourage, and support me. They educated me about a career in music education by

doing things like guiding me around my first TMEA convention, taking time out of their day to speak with my parents, helping me establish connections by introducing me to other teachers, and, of course, offering teaching advice. They frequently checked in on me, and I developed a close relationship with many of them. I felt comfortable speaking to them in times of frustration, and it was wonderful to have their support.

Likewise, I believe the most helpful thing you can do as an educator for students in this situation is to be there for them and encourage them to keep doing their best. Tell them you are proud of them and tell them specific things they are doing well. They may not be hearing this type of encouragement about their musical accomplishments at home, so it is important for them to hear it from you.

Helping My Parents Understand

I had a perfect GPA in college and had finished almost all my premed classes when I decided to depart that path and follow my heart into the field of music education. We had already invested time and money in MCAT preparation classes,

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and I was about to start narrowing down which medical schools I would apply to. My parents and I had a strained relationship during this time, and this was very hard.

To help them understand more about careers in music, I did a lot of research about teacher salaries, managing finances, and budgeting to show them that it was possible to live comfortably. Because I did all of this at a young age, I believe I was much more prepared to start my life as a music teacher. Though I did not need to work to pay for school and did not leave college with student debt, I still worked three jobs because I wanted to start saving money as soon as possible.

When I began teaching with the UTSA String Project, I invited my parents to our concerts. As a high school teacher, I still invite them to our concerts, and I often share stories about my teaching with them. As time passes, their perspective is changing. They are starting to see that it is possible for me to be financially stable and independent and truly love every day I get to spend with students. At the end of the day, I think every parent just wants their child to be safe and happy.

Sharing the Value of Music Study

Parents who are unsupportive are often this way simply because they do not know the benefits of fine arts, or they may not know their child's potential for success in fine arts (even if it is obvious to you). When I teach a student whose parents seem unsupportive, I send a positive email about the student's progress or accomplishments, and I explain that success in fine arts is not something that comes easily to every fine arts student—that their child is special and gifted and has potential to be amazing. I also regularly check in with the student (as my teachers did for me), even after they graduate. We are all busy, but we must understand the impact that even having a short conversation or email or text exchange can have on their lives. I am a music educator now because my teachers did this for me.

Sundas Mohi is the Assistant Orchestra Director at Tompkins High School in Katy ISD.

University Admissions Value Music Study

Some parents have the notion that studying music is a hobby and that it simply takes up too much time. At our school's annual orchestra parent meeting, I share a presentation that includes data from current research about the emotional and developmental benefits of music study. I highlight information from top-tier universities about what they look for in prospective students, as well as testimonials from alumni about the impact participation in music has had on their lives. Colleges look beyond GPA, grades, and SAT scores. If a student already has good grades, involvement in a fine art further benefits their application. When I speak with admissions officers about their selection process, they often say that anything that differentiates one student from another is going to help them have a chance of being admitted. Including their experience in fine arts as part of their application is a great way to help them stand out. Additionally, music study can lead to scholarship opportunities even for students who don't pursue a career in music.

I include the following quotes from university admissions officers in this presentation. These regional admissions officers are the ones who review applications for our region of the state, and it has been very helpful to share their words with our community. Even though the ideas are obvious to us, it is much more credible for parents when it comes directly from the source.

- *We are looking beyond the academic profile, for students who make an impact in some way and who are following their passion when possible.* —Rachel Brown, Harvard University
- *It is too competitive to take students who just have good grades. It's not enough to be good at school; there's gotta be something else.* —Rachel Brown, Harvard University
- *All students who apply here have generally excelled in their academic career. What distinguishes students in the application pool are the experiences outside of their academic career. High school should be fun and enjoyable.* —Kate Noonan, Rice University

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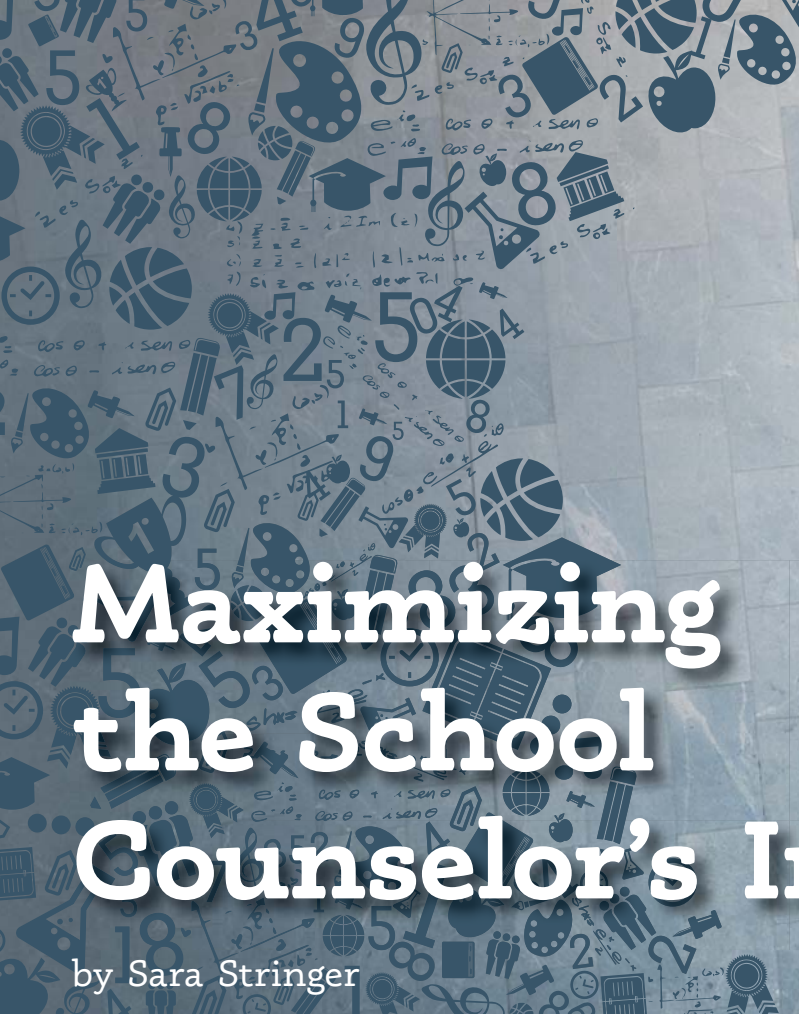


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Maximizing the School Counselor's Impact

by Sara Stringer

The secretary. The custodian. The counselor. These people in your building play an often behind-the-scenes—yet vitally important—role in your program's success. Of these three, however, the counselor is often the most underutilized. It was not until I became a school counselor after 10 years of teaching band that I realized the many ways counselors affected my band program and wished I had known then what I know now.

What follows only scratches the surface of how school counselors can help music programs. As a teacher, think of the school counselor as a partner, supporting students so they can have positive experiences at school—the *Alfred* to your *Batman*. Understanding what school counselors can do will help you identify ways to maximize their impact on your program.

Understand their role. School counselors first serve as advocates for student academic and social-emotional well-being. Moving from the band hall to the counselor's office, I gained a wider perspective. I realized my music class was just one positive part of our students' school experience. The school counselor sees this big picture of student interests and goals, as well as what helps or hinders their progress toward achieving them. Ultimately, an effective school counselor has the heart of a helper. They work to help students as well as the family and school staff who support them.

Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. A happy counselor is a helpful counselor. With the rollout of House Bill 5 a few years ago, demands on school counselors increased dramatically. In response, school districts across the state hired more counselors to

handle the load. I encourage you to gain a better understanding of how the school counselor position has evolved. Ask your counselor how you can make their job more efficient or more pleasant. Be available and helpful on test days, submit documents on time and completed accurately, and respond to communications in a timely fashion. Any counselor will be more willing to help you when you are willing to help them.

Value your counselor and they will value your program. Find ways to make your counselor feel appreciated. Get creative! At concerts, recognize them on the mic or in the printed program; ask them to guest conduct, perform, narrate, or be the master of ceremonies. Provide comp tickets to events where you charge admission, and invite them to chaperon field trips. Take every opportunity to amaze the counselor with what the students can do! A thank-you note from you or the students always serves as a reminder of why the counselor loves his or her job. Even playing "Happy Birthday" or caroling at the counseling office for the holidays is a memorable treat. Knowing your counselor's favorite treat goes a long way, too. While the suggestions presented here are ideas for showing gratitude, they are also strategies for involving your counselor a little more in your program. If the counselor has a positive experience with your program, the memory will be with them as they work with students and parents in deciding whether to join or remain in your program. If the school counselor posts a review about your program, will it be positive? Will the review even be accurate?

Don't assume they know. When I help students choose classes, they always have questions. Find out what the counselor knows,

The counselor's goal is always student success, not the success of any single program. As you work with a counselor, asking questions and brainstorming new ideas, always keep the best interests of the student in mind.

correct misinformation, and provide answers to the most frequently asked questions. Providing this support will be worth its weight in recruitment and retention gold. Also, train your counselor to contact you immediately when there is a question for which they are unsure of the answer (and respond to them quickly). While general guidelines help with most students, sometimes you and the counselor need to work with students on an individual basis. Your availability and efficiency in such cases raises the likelihood of a positive outcome for you and the student.

Know the state's requirements. School counselors are tasked with ensuring stu-

dents meet the state's academic requirements. In the middle-grade levels, students are required to have one language arts, one math, one science, and one social studies course per year. These middle schoolers are also required to complete one fine arts course, one year of P.E., and at least one class that involves the study of careers and utilizes technology. Students in grades 9–12 are bound by the Foundation Graduation Plan as outlined by Texas House Bill 5. The state will graduate its first senior class on this newer graduation plan this spring. For an excellent start to understanding the requirements of this graduation plan, read "Understanding Graduation

Plans" written by Fort Worth ISD Fine Arts Administrator Patrick Leaverton, published in the November 2015 issue of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN* (available online at www.tmea.org/emagazine). Once you've read this article, take your questions to your school counselor to gain clarity and to brainstorm ideas on how your music program will help students satisfy the new graduation requirements.

Plan registration together. Knowing the school counselor's registration timeline will help your recruitment and retention. In most districts, registration for the following year is completed around spring break so the district can use the data to see what classes students are requesting and how staffing should be adjusted. If your school counselor plans to register potential beginners for next year's classes or conduct a future freshman orientation in February, plan recruitment activities to precede that.

Registration timelines can change each year, so meet with the counselor annually to confirm them. You should leave this meeting with a list of important registration dates, and the counselor should leave it with a list of dates and descriptions of the music program's

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recruitment events. Also, when registration is completed in mid spring, students still have the option to change their minds on initial course choices. When the district works with staffing based on registration data, you can request data, too. Ask

your counselor for a list of students who requested each of your courses. Between spring break and the end of school, you can analyze retention and work with students as needed.

Speak counselor-ese. While there are a

few counselors with music education experience, many simply do not have enough musical background to understand the difference between concert band and wind ensemble, or philharmonic orchestra and symphony orchestra, or choraliers and chamber singers. While your ensemble names hold meaning for the teacher and students, they mean nothing to the person who deals with registration of students in the course. When it comes to classes, school counselors think in course codes. It's a little thing, but using course codes in your discussions, correspondence, and enrollment lists will prevent confusion and help the counselor perform registration more accurately and efficiently for you. Don't know your course codes? Ask!

Plan ahead. If a student tells the counselor they can't participate in your program because they can't afford the fees, how will the counselor respond? If a student says they don't want to take the class again next year, what process does the counselor follow to exit the student from your program? If a new student enrolls in the middle of October, in what level ensemble will the counselor schedule them? If a student

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shares information with you that causes concern, what step do you take next? These are just a few examples of situations that occur often enough that they will benefit from planning sessions between you and the counselor. And if there is no plan, both parties should know how to reach the other quickly.

Collaborate creatively. Two of the most common obstacles to participation in your program are related to master scheduling (grades 6–12) and GPA (grades 9–12). While the counselor may not be the official

master scheduler, they will have a strong understanding of the master schedule needs and know what to look for and what questions to ask. Are there enough periods to allow students to take required courses and your class? At the middle-grade levels, students may need to take supplemental reading or STAAR-preparation courses, or they may be encouraged to take high school credit courses. To allow students to take advantage of these extra options and continue taking their required courses and chosen elective, some campuses have

adopted a “zero hour” before school or an afterschool “bonus hour.” Additionally, some secondary campuses on a block schedule have found a way for students to double-block their athletic and fine arts courses so students can have daily practice.

GPA and Class Rank

Regarding GPA, some of your students may be in the top for their class ranks, and even earning a 100 in your class would bring their GPA down and move them lower in the ranks. High-performing students have dropped their athletics and fine arts courses for these reasons. A few districts have responded by developing a process for this type of student to earn honors-level GPA points in your class. To develop district-wide programs like this takes effort and coordination between the fine arts director and other district administrators. Ultimately, the counselor and you will work together on the campus level to implement it.

The Student, Not the Program

The counselor’s goal is always student success, not the success of any single program. The last decade has seen the introduction of more educational opportunities. With so many choices, counselors must work with students and their families throughout the decision-making process. I have had the pleasure of working with student-minded fine arts teachers who have made themselves available as a resource and who have been willing to help a student stay in their program while still taking advantage of other academic opportunities. As you work with a counselor, asking questions and brainstorming new ideas, always keep the best interests of the student in mind. In all the work you do together, ultimately, you and the school counselor are partners in helping students have a positive experience at school. ■

Sara Stringer is a high school counselor in Arlington ISD and will present a clinic on this topic at the 2018 TMEA Clinic/Convention.

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