



for music teachers

Thanks go to TMEA members who offered responses to the following questions. Go to www.tmea.org/q&a to view additional answers to these and other questions or to suggest a question for a future issue.

Q How do you recapture students who have left your program?

- In addition to my own appeals to students who haven't signed up for the upcoming year, I ask orchestra officers to reach out to them so that the students feel valued and hear from peers about how they are wanted in orchestra. To end each year in the happiest way, we host several socials where students have a great time surrounded by friends. When students have a sense of belonging and feel appreciated, they are more likely to stay in the program. —SALLY KIRK, DULLES MS
- I do my best to create good relationships with my students. I know who is good at sports, who is into anime, who has a new baby sister, and who loves robotics. My students know I care about them and want them to stay in band. Those who want to try something new know I understand. I make sure it is clear that the door is always open for their return and assure them they can catch up. —GENTRY RAGSDALE, ANNA MS
- The key to getting them back is getting them in the room. Get them involved early and don't let them hide. Meet them where they are. They're probably behind, so be patient and understanding. Be positive and keep encouraging them to keep trying.
- If their decision was pandemic-related, I have called parents and asked if there is anything reasonable we could do to get their child back in band. I explain that it's understandable that their child might not want to return since we didn't have regular band last year. After reassuring them that we'll be in person, many have returned. —JOHN CARROLL, PERMIAN HS
- The most effective way back is through their friends. Many return for the sole reason of being with their friends. I use my hall monitor status to touch base with all students, letting them know they are valuable and important to our school whether or not they are in my program. I aim to be the friendliest adult in school—I'm not a pushover, but a conversationalist with a genuine interest in what they do. —AARON A. RATHBUN, POST HS
- I am challenging myself to step outside of my comfort zone by building other ensemble experiences like Son Jarocho or Modern Band Ensemble. More than anything, consider surveying your students. Listen to what they want, and try to jump in even if it feels scary and foreign. We need to recruit more than just band directors and choir directors; we need amazing elementary specialists too, or as I call them, *elementary directors*. —ARTURO TREVINO, JR, AIKEN ES
- Running a private lesson studio with 35–40 students, I work a lot on retention. It's important to be personal and flexible with rescheduling (if reasonable). Answer email within 24 hours and communicate with parents regularly. This has proven essential for them to keep their children in lessons. Teach so that students are having a good time while honing their skills—it's the best promotion for a program, private studio, etc. —SHULAMITH BARBE, CLEAR LAKE ISD
- I always talk with them to learn why they wanted to leave and, most importantly, to tell them why I want them to return. If they have a good response to my questions or a good reason to have left, I simply respect their decision. Never try to pressure a reluctant student to sign back up for your ensemble. This can easily result in negativity that can spread to others. —CODY PARROTT, UT/AUSTIN

- If a student indicates they want to quit, ask them to envision returning for their 20-year reunion and consider who they want to see. They almost always say they'll want to see their band friends; then you can segue into asking why they were considering leaving. For students who leave, some will return and will be clearly happy with that decision. This serves as a testament to others about the value of staying. —TODD TONEY, NORTH GARLAND HS (RETIRED)
- Offer multiple means of participation, such as altered rehearsals and class meetings that allow previous or current remote learners to connect with those on campus. As always, adhere to standards such as ADA, IDEA, and IEP if this applies to a student, as students with exceptional needs are always allowed a place in the music classroom. —BONNIE LANICEK, LANCASTER MS
- I can only do so much, but the ones who will be most successful at getting a student to return to choir are their friends. —JASON MINCY, BARWISE MS

Q What's the most effective way to get parents involved and supportive while maintaining authority as program director?

- Develop a vision for the program along with a small group of your supportive parents first. After that, ask more parents to get involved to fill roles (e.g., collecting event tickets, calling parents about an upcoming event, loading crew, water

relief crew). This will ensure you are utilizing parents in areas where they can agree to offer support. I rarely allow parents to dictate rules within the program, but I want them as supportive partners with roles based on their interest and available time. —RENFERD JOSEPH, ALIEF ISD

- There are always parents who want to be involved, but sometimes that's not obvious. Whenever I see parents, I talk with them and try to learn more about them. Recently I told a parent how great it was when they cooked tacos for an event and asked if they'd like to be our cook for marching band. They were thrilled and excited to be a part of the group! When working with parents or any volunteers, treat them with respect, be grateful, and take time to talk with them even when you feel tired or stressed. This will go a long way. We must realize they don't know the full extent of our jobs, so we must be patient and take time to listen. Giving direct and specific information on how parents can help is important for preserving the director/authority role. —CHARLES GARDNER, WHITESBORO HS
- I have used online newsletters through MailChimp or Smore to give parents the opportunity to be informed and get involved. I have also communicated through Remind and use a Google Voice number for texting so parents can easily contact me. —HEATHER MCGOWAN, SUL ROSS MS
- Parents get involved when their kids are happy. Remember you're here for the kids; they're not here for your ego. —RAY RIDENS, QUANAH ISD

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- Headstrong parents can be very helpful. Be intentional about *responding*, not reacting. If the communication is via email, take time between your receipt and response and use that time to thoroughly understand the intent. This can help you find the best solution. If the communication is via phone or in-person, learn to be comfortable with not having all the answers immediately. Talking less in stressful situations can give you more room to be successful later. —AMY BENNETT, LEAMAN JH
- When you are organized and communicate clearly, parents will be more receptive to your requests. Include as much information and guidance as possible, and include the time commitment required. To preserve your director role/authority, the clearer your expectations and vision are, the better. If you don't demonstrate your role as program leader, someone else will. —DAVID STEPHENSON, ALAMO HEIGHTS HS
- The most effective way to involve parents is to share their child's progress and growth as a musician. Communication must be consistent, accessible, and directed toward positive outcomes. —KRISTI STROTHER, COMO AND DAGGETT MONTESSORI SCHOOLS
- Keep parents informed, and don't be afraid to ask for help! When dealing with strong personalities, let them talk—uninterrupted! Once they get everything said, then calmly respond. Most issues will get worked out. Sometimes you may need to compromise, and as long as you aren't compromising your teaching or your reasons behind it, be open to that opportunity. Be practical, be humble! —BRUCE J. BEACH, RETIRED
- If there is a need, parents will step up to fill it. They seem to come out of the woodwork to donate items and help complete the tasks you identify. When working with a headstrong volunteer, meet one-on-one in a non-threatening manner and explain why it is important for the directors and parents to be on the same page. We must work together as a team for “our

kids.” As the director, you know best what the band needs. Listen to their input. They will have good ideas, and sometimes they may simply not understand the program direction. In extreme situations, you can request a meeting with one parent, you, and your principal to review UIL guidelines on booster clubs. I have had some successful experiences in that regard if anyone wants to contact me for guidance with a specific problem. —MICHAEL HEJNY, ARLINGTON HS

- Build relationships with the parents slowly. Chat with them when they pick up their kids from late rehearsals or check them in for a special event. These were the parents I believed were most receptive to being asked to help. While I'm the kind of person to try to do everything myself, I gradually learned to say *yes* when a parent offered to help with something as simple as setting up the snack table for our choir mini-camp. Eventually, I learned to ask one of those parents if they could recommend someone to help move instruments or repair a show prop. Giving people credit on printed programs or shout-outs at the concert encouraged continued support. —LINDA RICHTER, RETIRED
- I am a private instructor and served in volunteer capacities when my kids were in school band. I find it most effective to meet in person, send regular updates via email (I do monthly), and send a get well card when a student is ill for a long time. In other words, make it personal. It also helps a lot to inform parents about their student's instrument: upkeep, maintenance, a bit of information on what it requires to be able to play it well, and give parents specific tasks to help them help their student succeed. Another fun and effective strategy is applauding parents at events: have them receive applause and pats on the back from students. Parents are their children's most important teachers. We must always respect and support that. —SHULAMITH BARBE, CLEAR LAKE ISD
- At the beginning of each school year, we send home a volunteer signup sheet that gives parents the opportunity to select events of interest. It also gives them an opportunity to tell

us about themselves and share strengths and skills they possess that could benefit the program and students (such as Web designer, setup/cleaning crew, tailor, fundraiser, volunteer coordinator). Creating a network among parents is also key. When they become friends with each other, they are more willing to consistently show up as a team. —SALLY KIRK, DULLES MS

- Using Google Forms helps me document interest from the beginning. When a parent volunteers, I politely ask at the next opportunity. A few parents have expected something different than what we offer, and I remind them that our orchestra can't be compared to one in a large public school. I focus a lot on solos and individual technique and growth rather than a large ensemble experience. When parents see their child's success at solo competition, they are usually quite happy. —KATIE JAMES, VANGUARD COLLEGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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- We try to involve parents in singular activities that let them see how successful students can be, such as hosting an audition round, and then we build from there. We frequently send emails that include reminders about the importance of volunteering at concerts and events, etc. At meetings, we make it clear we are the curricular leaders of the program, basing our decisions on the TEKS. The booster club supports through financial assistance and volunteerism. The other aspects of the program are determined by the school. We're polite, but firm, about this up front. —MARK ROHWER, FLOWER MOUND HS
- It is all about having a relationship with the parents. Leadership is about the people you serve, not just doing the job. Be a leader with the parents. Set an example. Keep emotions in check and remain firm, and compromise when possible. —ERIN SCALISI, NIMITZ HS
- Specifying your purpose and having input from choir members and their parents often prevents unwanted situations. I also regularly invite feedback from parents and students (via forms, questionnaires, and emails) to allow for private space in which concerns can be voiced.
- Initially, get parents involved in small events with simple responsibilities. Observe how they serve in those capacities, perhaps for as long as a year or even two, before gauging their interest in more significant supportive roles (e.g., booster club board member). The most important quality of a parent volunteer is their ability to get along with other parent volunteers. When booster clubs or parent volunteers teams generate momentum, they can begin to operate independently of the directors. The intention is almost always good, but the result can contradict the director's vision. Remember these two things: the director's job is to create a vision for the students in their program and the parent volunteers' job is to support the vision of the director. Find a parent you trust and who will advocate for you. That parent can help others join that purpose. —MICHAEL ZOOK, VANDEGRIFT HS

Q How do I get my administrators more engaged in and aware of what happens in my music classes?

- I invite my administrators into our classes, and I let them know it's a place where they can come relax and escape whenever they need a break. Then, they come on their own and know that I'm not worried about being under a microscope when they arrive. During their visits, I usually introduce them to the students and then return to doing what I was doing. Make them welcome and remind them they need music, too. —WHITNEY CROWLEY, MURCHISON MS
- Be proactive about regularly reaching out to your administrators. Briefly tell them about the great things happening in your classroom. Invite them to visit any time! Take a 20-second video of something exciting in your classroom and email or text it to them. "Look at what these awesome kids did during third period today!" Share your excitement—it'll be contagious! —CHRIS CANSLER, FRISCO ISD
- Don't pop in *only* when you have a need or a problem. Take

time to share the good, too. Be on their side and let them know you appreciate their position and the pressure that comes with it. We invite our administrators to conduct the fight song at a game once or twice a season. It's spontaneous, in a moment when they aren't busy and are clearly in a good mood. We wave them over and the students cheer for them as they take the podium and then they really cheer for them afterward. —TODD TONEY, NORTH GARLAND HS (RETIRED)

- To increase my visibility, I volunteer for campus committees that have nothing to do with music. I also try to connect with our administrators and invite them to the more unusual things our students do, like giving brass instruments a bath, hearing students buzz to pop songs, or listening to a class play a simple song. I leave post-it notes on my principals' doors letting them know we are doing something special that day and at what time. —GENTRY RAGSDALE, ANNA MS
- Drop by administrators' offices once a week for short visits, and don't talk about work unless they bring it up. When you're finished ask if you can do anything for them. You want them to be happy when they see you, not wondering what you're going to ask for now. Email all business so they can respond when they have time rather than being put on-the-spot. Eventually, they'll start asking you what's going on in your program. —RAY RIDENS, QUANAH ISD
- Sometimes in the middle of a beginner violin class, I'd call the office and say, "Mr Shaw! The violin kids just played something for the first time, and it sounds really good to me, but the test is—can *you* tell what they're playing? Do you have about 20 seconds to listen on the phone?" I never got a *no*. And they always could detect what was being played. When administrators came to my room to observe, sometimes I asked them to participate. The observer got the same materials as the students. —LINDA RICHTER, RETIRED
- At the end of a lesson, line up the young musicians and take them on a "field trip." Sing to the cooks in the cafeteria or to the principal and assistants in the office, or call up the district's fine arts director and sing over the phone. It's good for the children, the program, the school, and your administrators. —MARY NEELEY STEVENS, RETIRED
- I've worked with administrators who were too busy to visit my room. In those cases, I took videos of the students' shining moments and emailed them to my principal with a note asking them to compliment these kids the next time they saw them. Students love showing off, and it gives the principal a new connection and conversation point with them. —SUSAN HACKETT, PUCKETT ES
- Brag on students who often don't shine in other subjects. Let administrators know about the positive progress of these students in music class. Take videos of their progress to show your administrators and invite them to come to see for themselves how you are giving students a positive experience. —ROBINEL ALVARADO, CARPENTER ES
- We can't wait around for administrators to approach us. They have a lot on their plates, and we must unabashedly advocate for our programs. Be enthusiastically vocal about what your students are doing and your administrators will follow! —TANNA BILLS, MOE AND GENE JOHNSON HS

- I asked the librarian about having an ensemble play classical music for teacher gatherings and for a student relaxation session in the library. Any time there is an event, the orchestra or a smaller ensemble performs—parent night, PTA meetings, principal-sponsored meeting of city groups or school groups. Be visible; look for little things a small group of kids can do. Have your students wear their orchestra T-shirts on game days or school spirit days. All these efforts will add up. —BARBARA FOX, RICE MS (RETIRED)
- My favorite way I've engaged administration is by creating a faculty orchestra called "Treble in Paradise." It included teachers and administrators and met twice a week after school. We performed at our end-of-year faculty party. When teachers and administrators participate as orchestra members themselves, their involvement and support improves. Principals also love cross-curricular support. Involve your students in as many school events as possible. Whether it's a pep rally, art exhibition, teacher retirement party, or book fair, we volunteer to play in support. This presence demonstrates the value of music in enhancing any school experience that benefits all students. —SALLY KIRK, DULLES MS
- We must find ways to deliver our message by any means possible. Distributing a "Here's What's Going On in Choir" newsletter to parents and administrators has helped. Additionally, be sure your content area adds to the programs and initiatives established at your school. You are more than a director of a program; you contribute to the entire school. Find ways to amplify what you do by doing it alongside others outside your content area.—JEREMY BLEDSOE, STERLING HS
- Prior to the pandemic, whenever a choir made significant progress on a song, we would "Sneak & Sing." The class would quietly assemble on the staircase near the office where the acoustics are great and would sing the song. Front office staff, counselors, and principals would come out of their offices to watch, record, and celebrate! If they're not coming to you, go to them! —SHARNELLE JONES, KENDRICK MS
- Invite administrators to your classes and ask them to participate, learning alongside your students. Students gain a new perspective when they witness adults as lifelong learners. Administrators get the chance to experience school from the students' perspective and connect with them as a part of the school community. Also, when asking for authorization on any type of trip, invite administrators to be a sponsor, simply as a supporter of the group. —BONNIE LANICEK, LANCASTER MUSIC SCHOOL
- Stop by your administrator's office just to say hi, and share your calendar of events well in advance. This will allow them time to schedule your events in their calendar. Have your students sing "Happy Birthday" to your administrators, or record your choir singing it and email your administrator the video. It's the little things you do that will go a long way. —LINDA HOLKUP, STEPHEN F. AUSTIN HS
- I have a standing monthly meeting with my principal to talk about what's going on in choir. We plan these out in August for the entire year. —JODI COKE, HILLWOOD MS



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