

# Recruit, Retain and Revitalize!

Katie Lewis and Laura Bell

Band programs everywhere have been seeing decreased numbers, increased apathy in students, and less willingness to embrace challenges. Our goal is to provide specific ways to help address these issues with practical ideas for immediate implementation.

## Recruiting - Beginning of the Year

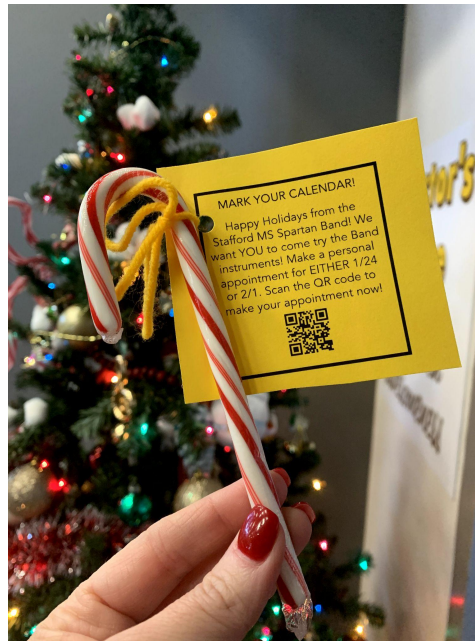
Make it a high priority to visit elementary music classes in your feeder pattern. Nothing is more important than the students already recognizing your face and your passion for music! The goal would be to visit each 5th grade class at least twice during the fall semester so that each student is familiar with band staff in advance. We even like to finish each visit with a guessing game where the students line up and we tell them what instrument we think they'll end up playing!!

When you're ordering your band shirts for your current students, order extras for 5th grade siblings! You can create a cute note and package it up to tell the siblings of current students how excited you are to have them in the Band Family in the future. This creates a long lasting bond without much extra work.

Make a conscious effort to perform at elementary "Walk to School" Days, holiday tours, and assemblies. The Band program should be visible and engaging so the elementary students look forward to being a part of it!

## Recruiting - Middle of the Year

Nothing gets kids more excited than being a part of the experience early, so ask a young audience member to guest conduct at your winter concert! Send out holiday cards from your Band program to elementary schools and in the neighborhood from your students. We have our Band Leadership Team (BLT) take a stack and personally deliver into neighbors' mailboxes! Use creative ways to invite your current 5th graders to your upcoming instrument tryouts. We include the information on a candy cane that is personally distributed to each campus.



As students are considering their elective choices for 6th grade, you can even include a QR code to a Bitmoji classroom with clickable links. This is the easiest way to share a lot of information about each instrument, links to videos of students playing, and parent testimonials, all at the click of a button. Parent testimonials are especially helpful as families are making decisions about their child's future. Experienced parents have great advice about how band can work in conjunction with other activities like sports or dance!

As you are planning for your instrument tryouts, work to ensure it is a wonderful and organized experience. You want for parents to come in and see the best side of your program, to feel informed, and to be welcomed immediately. Once students have selected Band as their elective choice for the next year and have tried out the instruments, we visit the elementary schools to give out Golden Tickets. All 5th graders gather together and each band student comes up when their name is called, accepting the Golden Ticket invitation to play their chosen instrument; everyone cheers and claps for each other making the excitement palpable!

After their instrument choices are solidified, we invite families back by the band hall for a Picture Parade where they get to take a picture with their new instrument and receive a welcome swag bag from the program! We encourage families to post these pictures on social media and tag our band programs for more exposure and excitement.



## Retaining Students

The most important contributor to keeping students invested in your band program is developing and fostering meaningful relationships and experiences. These are important with the students AND the parents as we want to create and keep those bonds for years to come. Creating a safe environment for all students allows everyone to feel like a contributing member of the band. We have so many fun ways to keep families and students involved throughout the year. Some of our favorites are below (feel free to reach out for details):

- Hot Cross Buns where students teach their parents
- All Region Bingo cards
- 18 Days of Holiday Spirit
- Winter Home recitals
- Student leadership/BLT's

Incentivizing students is one of the quickest ways to create buy in and keep them coming back for more! Reward positive behavior by giving out tickets which can be redeemed for items, candy, or special treats. An encouraging note in their band locker or an email to the student and their parents can go a LONG way to making everyone feel valued and appreciated. Try to find times throughout the year to reward milestone achievements like passing off all their scales, finishing levels of rhythm charts, or winning a contest. Award a STAR student each week to let them know how much individual students make a difference in your program!

One of the best ways to keep students motivated and excited is to schedule regular social events. This is a great way to foster the family atmosphere and ensure that even the less motivated students still have a home. There are tons of ideas that cost little to no money

and some that are more extravagant - choose what works best for your families. Here are some of our favorites:

- Band Family Picnic
- Ice Cream/Snow Cone Social
- Caroling Social and hot chocolate
- Band Hall elf (like Elf on a Shelf)
- Secret Gift Exchanges (Secret Santa)
- Band Hall Egg Hunts
- Birthday bags, playing Happy Birthday, Birthday calendar
- Breakfast socials
- Coffee/Donut performance for staff
- Outdoor/Indoor Movie Night
- Pinstack/Main Event/Six Flags

### Revitalizing your Programs

As we are all working to close the gaps that were created by online learning, we are seeking new ways to motivate students and hold them accountable. We use method books with advanced bands to foster sight reading skills and create easy ways to reinforce skills from the beginner year in an ensemble setting. Find fun ways to create contests to motivate students and allow an outlet for competition. Be sure to involve your high school staff and private lesson teachers so they can reinforce concepts being taught and provide extra support and encouragement as well.

We encourage you to reach out to other professionals in the field that you admire for collaboration and ideas. Get involved in a mentor program through your state or area. Everyone needs help and support, and we can all benefit from the camaraderie. We are ALWAYS here to support you, so please don't hesitate to reach out for extra ideas and information!

Katie Lewis ([Lewisk@friscoisd.org](mailto:LewisK@friscoisd.org))

Laura Bell ([Belll@friscoisd.org](mailto:BellL@friscoisd.org))