

# Stopping the Leak: How to Keep Kids in Your Program

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Have you ever heard the cliché, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it?” This often used and seldom-understood phrase is very relevant regarding our teaching and our ability to retain kids in our programs. We as professional educators must realize that our teaching techniques are always broken and require constant tinkering. In order for us to truly be effective, we must be student-centered and goal oriented. The 21<sup>st</sup> century band student isn’t going to react in a positive manner to the “do as I say, not as I do” or the “because I said so” approach. More often than not, kids will just quit than deal with that kind of attitude. Parents and teachers alike have been learning this lesson over the past decade, all the while attempting to develop a plan of action that can be proactive for all involved. In the music idiom, we as educators must find a way to make our teaching methods continue to evolve in order to fit the ever-changing needs of our students.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

Things really aren’t the way they used to be. Recruitment of our students used to be simple. Kids had a choice between Band, Orchestra, Choir, and Art. Nothing more, nothing less. Today, kids have numerous additional options and requirements that make not just our recruiting, but our retention incredibly important. Kids have much more pressure

on them today than we did when we were students. Statistics indicate that the average ninth grader participates in four sports, two electives, three student clubs, and has a part-time job after school. Our band students are not simply just band students

anymore. We must be flexible with scheduling to allow students to participate in other activities. It is very likely that you will rarely ever have a rehearsal with all students in attendance. For instance, with the eight-hour marching band rule in effect, it is entirely possible that one third of your trumpet section

could be at a football practice during half of your band rehearsals. To prevent a mass exodus of students from your band, you have to be willing to accept sharing your students with other activities.

## **MOTIVATION**

A band director’s ability to motivate students is the key to his or her success. Whether it is getting kids excited about fundraising or that extra Saturday marching rehearsal, we must be able to employ numerous tactics in order to reach our goals. What methods do you use to motivate your students? Are you goal oriented? Do you give grade incentives? Do you utilize positive reinforcement? Do you have the respect of your students? When you are preparing for your UIL performances, what do you tell your students your goals are? If your performances are anything but a first division, have you failed? All of these questions are relevant to your ability to retain students in your program. Your goals must be student-based. Expect your performances to be the best your students can deliver. Remember that a good aesthetic experience with your students that shows musical growth on

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### INVOLVEMENT

It is simply amazing at how much harder students will work for you when they realize that you care about them as individuals. How often do you leave the band hall during passing period just to interact with kids? Do you meet your students and greet them as they come through the door into your classroom? It is critical for students, and other teachers, to see you outside of your environment. When was the last time you attended a play, a basketball game, or even a debate tournament to support your band students? You showing interest in their other activities will demonstrate they are more than just “band students.” Positive accolades will come your way by you showing support to your colleagues and students at other campus events. Campus administrators, counselors, and student’s families will notice these accolades. Never underestimate a counselor’s worth. The

campus guidance counselors can be your biggest champions or your worst nightmares. If you have your students’ best interests at heart, the counselors will always be in your corner.

### PRACTICALITY

The hardest point for all of us to accept is that times have changed and we, as responsible professionals, must change with them. Teachers that fail to realize the need to, or are simply unwilling to, change their teaching methods with the times are doing a great disservice to their students. It is important to realize that the student should be the focus of your teaching; not your pride, not your ego, and not personal recognition. A great educator once told me that I would be successful if I remembered to always treat my students the way I would want to be treated. It took me a couple of years to realize exactly what he meant by that. It is in that regard that I ask myself everyday, “Would I have enjoyed my class today?”

**Nick Nicholson,  
Richard Maher, Sue  
Fletcher, and Teri  
Poole-Brockway will  
present more on this  
subject on Sunday,  
July 25, 9:30 am**

*Nick Nicholson is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma having attained both Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Music Education. Mr. Nicholson is currently the Associate Director of Bands at Creekside Intermediate School in the Clear Creek ISD. Prior to his appointment at Creekside, Mr. Nicholson served as Director of Bands at Northbrook Senior High School in Spring Branch ISD, as Associate Director at Stephen F. Austin High School in Fort Bend ISD, and as Associate Director at Lake Olympia and Hodges Bend Middle Schools in the Fort Bend ISD. Prior to coming to Texas, Mr. Nicholson served as Assistant to the Director of Bands at the University of Oklahoma and as a visiting professor of Low Brass at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. Mr. Nicholson is an active drill writer, musical arranger, and marching band clinician for numerous band programs throughout the Southwest. Mr. Nicholson currently resides in Sugar Land, Texas with his lovely wife Mikki, who is a math instructor at Stephen F. Austin High School in Fort Bend ISD.*