

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF BEGINNING INSTRUMENTAL
STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SETTING

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MUSIC IN MUSIC EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2016

Abstract

The purpose of this capstone project was to determine if there are recruitment and retention techniques suggested in the literature that could contribute to higher enrollment in urban instrumental programs. The author will suggest specific strategies urban music teachers can implement to help build a more robust instrumental program including ways to find funding, practice strategies and parental involvement techniques. Finally, appendices in this document include a (a) Year –Long Recruitment and Retention Schedule (Appendix A), to be used as a guide for planning purposes, (b) Parental Involvement Incentive Certificate (Appendix B), to help encourage parental involvement, (c) Breakfast and Practice Flier (Appendix C), to help promote a well rounded practice environment, (d) Instrumental Selection Form (Appendix D), to assist students and instrumental teachers in the selection process, (e) Instrumental Selection Flier (Appendix E) to inform parents of the programs offered and encourage students to sample the different instruments offered, (f) Sample Practice Log (Appendix F), to assist students with guided practice.

Keywords: urban music, instrumental music, recruitment, retention

Recruitment and Retention of Beginning Instrumental Students in an Urban Setting

Mixon (2005) stated, “for several of his students, instrumental music motivated them to come to school and gave them something to look forward to” (p.21). Students enrolled in school instrumental groups enjoy the advantages of musical study, group learning, cooperative effort toward specific goals, and opportunities to encounter challenges and overcome them (Ester & Turner, 2009). Students learn how to be part of an ensemble, to take care of an instrument, and about being responsible for remembering their instrument on lesson days. How to practice independently and to self-assess themselves are other valuable skills that students develop while playing an instrument. Students likewise gain many life skills when involved in instrumental music. Given the many reported benefits, it would be ideal if all students had access to music programs and the opportunity to learn an instrument.

Many educators graduate from college envisioning they will get a job in a modern and well-funded suburban school district, never considering what it would be like to teach in an urban school district. To be specific, urban in this paper means a metropolitan area with a significantly diverse population, high minority representation and low-socioeconomic status. Urban is certainly not a pejorative term, yet such schools present several challenges in reaching the ideals of music education. Many of the unique demands and issues that urban teachers face on a daily basis are rarely discussed. It is difficult finding strategies to combat some of these issues due to the lack of resources dedicated to urban schools. Thus, it is challenging to develop methods to improve and grow urban music programs and therefore, many urban instrumental programs continue to flounder.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to review the literature on recruitment and retention, with a focus on urban school settings. Questions that were explored include:

1. What recruitment techniques may contribute to higher enrollment in urban instrumental programs?
2. What methods can be used to create and promote a positive learning environment for students?
3. What role might repertoire, practice, and social rewards play in effective recruitment and retention?

After synthesizing the literature, a yearlong model was proposed to promote and support growth in the urban instrumental program in which I teach.

Review of Literature

Defining “Urban”

There is no clear definition of urban; the dictionary simply defines urban as “of or relating to cities and the people who live in them” (Merriam-Webster, 2016). In the education world, an urban school district is most frequently viewed as being negative and an undesirable place to teach due to the low-socioeconomic status (SES) of students and the plethora of behavioral issues. Singer (1996) defined the urban schools as being oversized schools that are poorly funded with a large quantity of racially diverse students from low-socioeconomic status (SES) and high poverty backgrounds. Watson (2007) investigated how teachers view and define what makes a school “urban.” “The most common characteristics that teachers noted were: majority of students are non-white, is located in a city, has a variety of income levels and has a low-SES population” (p. 30).

According to Fitzpartick (2011), teachers perceive urban as being the opposite of suburban, meaning that while urban schools are believed to be comprised primarily of students of color and students from low SES, suburban schools are perceived as being primarily white and middle class.

Differences Between Suburban and Urban Challenges

“Teaching in low-income, urban, multicultural schools is different from teaching in suburban settings, which have more homogeneous student populations, more parental support and more stable student populations” (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996, p. 1).

Gehrke (2005) noted how urban schools typically have fewer resources and face challenges that are much different from their suburban counterparts. Lack of resources and funding are common obstacles that urban districts are notorious for being faced with. There are also many other issues that these districts contend with. Teachers are faced with a plethora of issues ranging from poverty, violence, cultural diversity and a multitude of languages (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996).

“Today, one out of four American children attends school in an urban district and one out of every six American children lives in poverty” (Gehrke, 2005, p. 14). With such vast numbers of students attending urban schools, one would assume that teacher preparation programs would address the needs of these students. Urban teachers felt their pre-service education prepared them for teaching the “ideal” students and left them unprepared for the reality of urban schools, where most of the students do not conform to the ideal (Fiese & Decarbo, 1995, p. 28). Timmons’ (2010) researched teacher preparation for teaching in urban schools, reporting that many teachers noted that there was a lack of preparation to deal with real life urban issues in teacher preparation courses.

She also noted “the teachers felt a need for more practical and hands on learning for a truly efficient teacher preparation program” (p.111). Learning to teach in urban schools is a complicated process, particularly when prospective teachers come from class backgrounds that differ from that of their students (Schultz, Jones-Walker & Chikkatur, 2008). Regardless of the vast number of challenges related to teaching in an urban district, there are also numerous rewards and successes (Bernard, 2010).

Specific Issues That Persist in Urban Instrumental Programs

Fitzpatrick (2011) stated, many times, that urban music programs lack the resources to provide students with the same opportunities as their peers in better-resourced settings. Resources and funding are major issues for urban music programs, but are not the only issues at hand. Creating a program that piques the interest of the students is another major dilemma for urban schools. After securing instruments and recruiting students into the program, the next hurdle is getting students to practice and to thrive in the instrumental program.

Urban instrumental programs are riddled with a plethora of issues, including funding and a lack of parental support (Mixon, 2005). “Urban schools have the highest percentage of at-risk students, the most pervasive problems, and extraordinary negative publicity” (Kindall-Smith, 2004, p. 42). Music teachers working in urban schools face a range of challenges consisting of poor funding, lack of materials, and little parental support (Renfro, 2003). Many teachers feel that they are musically prepared to teach in an urban district, but ill-equipped for the reality of these types of districts (Fiese & DeCarbo, 1995). Exclusive of the aforementioned factors, constructing a program of significance, in any district, takes time, effort, and planning.

Funding Disparities in Urban Schools

Urban districts are often inadequately funded and often have an inventory of older instruments (Mixon, 2005). Expanding an instrumental program in these districts can be challenging, with little to no funding, and students that move around every few months. The scarcity of instruments, textbooks, and other resources; a lack of parental and administrative support; and difficulties with classroom management, are just a few of the issues that confront music teachers who work in urban communities (Bernard, 2010). Inadequate funding is, and has been, one of the most pressing issues for band directors (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007). Funding appears to be a monumental factor in urban districts. Overall, the three most commonly mentioned needs were financial support/increased funding (20% of all responses), repair and purchase of instruments (15%), and administrative support (13%) (Fitzpatrick, 2011). According to Albert's (2006) study on band recruitment in low socioeconomic school districts:

...participants believed that having instruments on hand for students to use is crucial for student participation. The teachers indicated that over 75% of students in their programs use school owned instruments, many of them donations. Mr. Mundy and Ms. Getty's district hold two "Instrument Round-Up Nights" for anyone in the area to make an instrument donation in return for a charitable tax deduction (p. 62).

Teachers in urban schools can find it challenging to recruit and retain students in instrumental music electives because typically these schools enroll greater proportions of minority students, students from single-parent or single-guardian homes, and students from lower SES families who may not be able to afford the expenses associated with

instrumental instruction (Kinney, 2010). Ester and Turner (2009) worried that lack of financial support in lower income students will result in the benefits of instrumental music study becoming limited to more affluent members of society. Costa-Giomi and Chappell (2007) noted, based on their research, that urban schools with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students had less access to funds and that parent involvement with fundraising was low. Urban music programs need financial support, and yet continue to be a major challenge for most teachers (Fitzpatrick, 2011).

Kinney (2010) found lower SES was not a factor in initial recruitment of students, though it can contribute to a lack of retention of students in a program. Costa-Giomi and Chappel (2007) noticed a 50% decline in band participation in lower SES schools compared to high SES schools in the same district, thus suggesting, that schools with high SES have the ability to offer more incentives for students to join and stay in instrumental music programs when there is greater access to more robust funding. Budget concerns are at the top of many music educators' lists of concerns, especially in urban districts (Renfro, 2003).

Kay (1995) suggested a need for schools with a high population of lower SES families provide school loaner instruments to students. Mixon (2005) also suggested that schools with high poverty levels need to provide musical instruments for students and that active waiting lists for instruments can actually allow more students to experience instrumental music as students drop out, and thus not losing student volume. Fitzpatrick (2011) found in schools where over 90% of students require school-owned instruments, that a full instrument inventory is a way to ensure all students have access to instruments. Ester and Turner (2009) stated that data from their study indicates that "lower-income

students playing school instruments demonstrated equal achievement to all other instrumental students” (p. 68). With limited funding and supplies, finding instruments to loan to students can become a nearly insurmountable task for urban teachers. Though, with a little searching, teachers can creatively find ways to acquire instruments through grant writing and partnerships with other organizations (Mixon, 2005).

Differences between Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting students into the program is another essential factor in growing an instrumental program. Issues of recruiting, continuing involvement, and student attrition are of special interest to the instrumental music teacher, because most band and orchestra programs in United States public schools are elective (Gamin, 2005). The proactive director will begin planning, early in the year, an efficient and effective recruiting process (Bazan & Bayley, 2009). Jagow (2005) suggested that instrumental students are best recruited in the spring for the following fall. Instrument demonstration assemblies, creating an appealing band image, hosting all-district concerts, enlisting help from high school students, and making the program fit what the community needs, are different recruitment styles suggested in interviews conducted by Sussman (2012). Also, academic achievement played a significant role in predicting initial enrollment and retention (Kinney, 2010).

Relationships are important to people who live in poverty (Mixon, 2005). Having respectable relationships with students and their families can help begin the recruiting process, as students will be more comfortable with joining and continuing in the program (Albert, 2006; Mixon, 2005). Kay (1995) also suggested that students seem to be attracted to instrumental programs taught by warm, friendly and enthusiastic teachers.

Creating a positive relationship with students, with safe spaces, and a feeling of family contributes to students wanting to join, and in turn, remain in, instrumental programs (Albert, 2006). Urban schools typically have high numbers of students that are at-risk, with living environments and behavior that are unstable (Mixon, 2005). Establishing a classroom dynamic that has set rules and a caring heart makes students feel safe in the classroom.

Creating an environment where students succeed is another important factor when building an instrumental program. Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody (2007) noted the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation:

Intrinsic motivation comes from the activity itself and the enjoyment experienced from engaging in it. In general, people make music because of the enjoyment and fulfillment they get from doing it. However, because acquiring musical skills takes much time and effort, developing musicians also rely on extrinsic motivation, or secondary nonmusical rewards that come with musical participation (p.44).

Boren (2012) reported several studies have found a link between student reports of self-efficacy and a variety of measures of achievement. Unfortunately, many students who need assistance fail to seek the help they need due to their insecurities (Gordon, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, teachers can strive to engineer events to provide the students with the genuine experience of the importance of effort, the rewards of beautiful playing, and the satisfaction of self-expression (Smith, 2003). Jagow (2005) felt it is the teachers' job to ignite the student's interest with many positive aspects of becoming a member of

the instrumental program. The social rewards of band membership seem to be strong motivators for students (Kay, 1995).

Helping steer students toward finding the best instrument fit also helps aid in recruitment and retention. Choosing an initial band instrument, traditionally, has been a fundamental and critical process for beginning instrumental music students within schools throughout the United States (Payne, 2014). Bayley (2004) researched how teachers help guide students to pick appropriate instruments. He also states that some teachers may limit the number of instruments to choose from, giving more structure to the process, and improvement in communication with students and parents, as ways to assist students in choosing the appropriate instrument and thus aid in retention.

In one study, Martignetti (1965) reported that: “twenty-two (67%) children liked the instrument upon which they were taking lessons. The remaining thirteen (33%) students replied that they did not like the instrument upon which they were taking music lessons” (p. 181). One technique to consider involves demonstrations to pre-band students by live-model instrumentalists, particularly gender atypical instrumentalists, which can downplay the novelty factor and gender stereotypes attached to specific instruments (Bazan, 2005). Family and famous artists can not only impact a student’s choice of instrument, but may also influence their timbre preference (Kuhlman, 2005).

Students can get lured into playing an instrument based on how shiny it is or peer influence; helping select instruments best suited for the child is an important part of instrumental music. Having elaborate instrumental demonstrations can be overwhelming for students; age appropriate demonstrations, where students get to view and hear easily recognizable music, is more helpful when recruiting young students (Sussman, 2012).

Bayley (2004) suggests more frequent instrument demonstrations, increased communication between elementary and middle school instrumental students, and involving the local music store as ways to help increase enrollment and retention. Affording students an opportunity to try the different instruments will give the teacher the chance to match students with the most appropriate instrument for each student (Bazan, 2005).

Students need opportunities to feel excited about instrumental music to feel successful (Sussman, 2012). Creating opportunities for students to help make choices in their program helps empower them to take responsibility, thus compelling them to continue with the program (Albert, 2006). Giving students incentives to play, including solo and performing opportunities, assists in creating interest and desire to be in a program (Smith, 2003). Involving students in how the program is run, creates an ensemble that everyone wants to be a part of. Many teachers in urban districts have found that involving students in the decision-making process helps the teacher understand the level at which students are comfortable playing (Fiese & DeCarbo, 1995).

There are many ways to create a successful environment where students feel confident to achieve. Jagow (2005) suggested carefully selecting beginning band music to allow for immediate success for young students. An instrumental program does not need to be performing the most difficult literature to represent a quality program (Jagow, 2005). Fitzpatrick (2011) also suggested finding music that students can relate to, as an important factor for urban schools. Many urban students are not interested initially in playing songs that they are unfamiliar with; choosing music with which students can identify, is an important factor when teaching urban students.

Need for Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a key difference between urban and suburban districts, in the suburban setting, parents are able and willing to make sure their child succeeds at a musical instrument (Renfro, 2003). “Most parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, love their children and want them to do well academically” (Mixon, 2005, p. 21). Gamin (2005) found that peer and parental involvement play a large role in a student’s success in an instrumental music program. Sichicitsa’s (2004) research indicated that students received encouragement from their parents (p. 36). For urban students to perform to their fullest potential, continual parental and guardian involvement is key (Trotman, 2001).

Parental involvement of urban parents may be low, but Trotman (2001) warns not to judge or criticize these parents, but work on activities to help serve these children in an effort to increase involvement. Though, Jeynes (2005) suggests that parents that are highly motivated and involved with their child’s education also have the drive to pursue a higher SES level and that SES probably reflects certain aspects of parental involvement. Parental involvement is an important factor in building a strong program, especially in an urban district, though parents in this type of district do not necessarily understand how to be involved. Increasing parental contact and special events, paired with resources to help educate parents on how to be involved, can provide for increased involvement over time (Johnson, 1997). Identifying ways to involve parents doesn’t have to take a considerable amount of time, but needs to happen on a continuous and regular basis.

Instrument Practice Deficiencies

Daily instrumental practice on his/her instrument is crucial to developing and learning how to play an instrument (Bartel, 2008). Sichivitsa (2004) suggested that

involving parents in various musical activities with their children could improve students' attitudes toward music and enhance their motivation in music. That being said, urban educators are faced with a major lack in parental involvement and support; though learning an instrument does require regular effort outside of the classroom (Bartel, 2008). Kay (1995) discovered, in research involving struggling Hispanic students, that this type of student benefited from extra tutoring sessions and supervised practice time. Sichivista (2004) suggested inviting parents to practice and perform with their children to support their child's music learning experience. This might not be an achievable goal in urban schools, but there might be ways to modify these suggestions to help support urban students in their goals to excel in instrumental music.

Motivating students to strive to practice is a topic music teachers spend considerable time pondering (Pike, 2014). Bernard (2010) explained that many people have the misconception that urban students are not capable of learning like their peers in more affluent areas, but this is not the case. Just like any student, learning how to practice is part of learning an instrument. Through research, Gamin (2005) found that if a student perceives practice and learning to play an instrument as being too difficult, they are much more likely to drop out. Giving students ample performance opportunities helps stimulate and entice practice and thus, student improvement (Smith, 2003). Bartel (2008) noted that giving students choices in what they practice evokes ownership and increased motivation to practice.

Many urban students live in chaotic and unstable living environments that are not conducive to regular practice (Mixon, 2005). As stated in the previous section, urban students generally lack highly involved parents; therefore many students do not have an

adult at home to help supervise practice time. Prichard (2012) and Oare (2011) suggested giving students practice strategies, and modeling good practice techniques, regularly during lessons and ensemble time. Hewitt (2001) suggested that it is important to provide time, opportunity and the proper structure to formally reflect on specific individual or group work as a way to improve self-evaluating techniques. Adult guided supervision, especially for younger students, helps promote effective practice skills (Oare, 2011). Beginning band students find engaging in group practice sessions to be extremely enjoyable (Kay, 1995). Giving students time to practice at school for even very short amounts of time can make a great difference in student success (Mixon, 2005).

Applications of the Literature to Music Teaching

Bazan and Bayley (2009) suggest that teachers proactively start planning early in the school year to ensure efficient and effective recruiting and retention processes. For most teachers, recruiting is not a quick and easy process, because they want to ensure programs are as robust as possible. Urban music teachers encounter many hurdles when planning for a rich program where there are funding deficits both district-wide and within the student population, as well as, lack of parental and administrative support. Creativity and persistence are necessary when working on building an urban instrumental program that will benefit many students in the long run. In this section of the paper, recommendations derived from my examination of the literature will be presented on how to recruit and retain students in an urban instrumental program. Here in, funding issues and methods will be addressed which will help heighten interest in band with a budget friendly mindset. There are certain recruitment, retention, funding and parental

involvement practices that are valuable in any band program. However, these become particularly crucial to the success of an urban program.

Finding Funding for Urban Programs

Funding is the backbone to most instrumental programs, from purchasing music and equipment to trips and festivals. According to Costa-Giomi and Chappel's (2007) study on characteristics of band programs in urban school districts:

It isn't surprising that all high economic status or low minority representation schools reported an increase in student participation given the privileged resources of their band program. These schools have more financial support because of their higher program fees, more external funding, and more successful fundraisers. As a result, they can provide financial aid to students who could not afford the expenses associated with participation in band and couldn't otherwise join the program (p. 15).

That considered, urban music educators in districts with high percentages of low SES students, commonly do not have the funds at their disposal to provide instruments, music, equipment and travel opportunities to their students. It is an inherent part of the urban music teacher's job to find ways to obtain funding in a school that has no budget for instrumental music.

Fitzpatrick (2011), Kay (1995) and Mixon (2005) concur that providing students with instruments is a necessity for urban instrumental programs. As far as finding instruments for students, there are many creative ways to acquire a stock of school instruments for student use. For example, there are usually a few grants available for the

purchase or donation of instruments. For instance - Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation¹, VH1 Save the Music², and NAMM Foundation³ are all large organizations that take special interest in bringing quality music education to urban districts by providing instruments and equipment to well deserving programs. In large urban districts there is usually a person employed by the district whose entire job responsibility is finding and writing grant applications to these different foundations in order to procure materials, or raise capital, for the district.

Because applying for large grants might seem overwhelming and a little cumbersome at the onset, there are many other ways to build a sizable inventory of instruments. Donorschoose.org is an excellent place to consider to get instruments and equipment funded. Because this site operates throughout the year, there are no deadlines for submission of applications, Woodwind - Brasswind⁴ and Amazon⁵ are two more places educators may shop, so acquiring quality instruments in this manner is a realistic possibility.

In Connecticut, where I teach, there is a local organization, Horns4Kids⁶ that collects instruments, repairs or refurbishes them, and then donates the instruments to area schools. The organization does two rounds of instrument giveaways each year. The music teacher is required to write a description of what instrument they would like and why as

¹ Supplemental information about Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation can be found at <http://www.mhopus.org/Contact-Us>.

² More information about VH1 Save the Music can be found at <http://www.vh1savethemusic.org/>.

³ To learn more about the NAMM Foundation refer to <https://www.nammfoundation.org/what-we-do>.

⁴ For more information on obtaining instruments from Woodwind-Brasswind refer to <http://www.wbw.com/>.

⁵ To obtain more information about Amazon refer to <https://www.amazon.com/>.

⁶ Supplementary information about Horns4Kids may be found at <http://hornsforkids.org/>.

part of the application process, and the teacher may only receive one instrument each round. Finding local programs can be key to the procurement of some of the more expensive instruments, like most of the brass instruments and saxophones, which tend to be more costly.

One should not underestimate the potential of Facebook, Craigslist, local tag sales and flea markets. Paying for instruments out of ones own pocket may not be ideal, but sometimes a viable option to get great working condition instruments at cost effective prices. In some cases, supportive administrations might repay the teacher for the instrument, but in many cases it is just a personal expense that the teacher can write off at the end of the year when they file their taxes. Becoming part of local tag sale groups on Facebook is another great venue for finding and requesting instruments. Tag sale pages have more recently become popular on Facebook and generally require being added to the group, but once in the group members will post items that they are looking to sell or in search of. The most challenging aspect of searching for instruments in this manner is not traveling to gather instruments, but creating a sufficient inventory of good working instruments. Also, having a good relationship with the local music store can be beneficial. Sometimes, if it is just one pad that needs to be replaced on a clarinet and the store knows you will include them in your instrumental night, they might not charge you or at least give you a discount. Lastly, taking a course in instrument repair can also allow urban music teachers a cost effective solution to maintaining school instruments on a very tight budget.

Utilizing Local Colleges

Another possible place to look for support and instruments can be local colleges

and universities. Getting involved with a few universities can be a value to both your program, as well as that of the university, by affording prospective music educators the opportunity to gain some much needed experience in urban education. Fiese and DeCarbo (1995) suggest a need to better prepare perspective educators for urban schools. As a result, having a working relationship with local universities is one way to assist in preparing future educators for the urban school district. Also, universities may be able to assist with furnishing instruments in a few different ways. The university may be willing to donate instruments periodically, either newer instruments, or older instruments, that they are clearing out of their own inventory. Another option is to create relationships between your school and any music education groups at the college. These students might be willing to help fundraise for money, or used instruments in the community, as a way to gain instruments to donate to the program. This might relieve some of the stresses of teacher-organized fundraisers, and may be more lucrative because of the fact that the college students have access to the communities they personally grew up in, rather than the communities in which the urban students reside.

Another way to utilize college students is to create opportunities to have them come and work with urban students. College students typically have time off throughout the year, and schedules that may allow for them to come and work with students in need of free private lessons or even just to help run a practice session. College students may be willing to come and practice with students, which opens up a world of benefits for families that can not afford private lessons. This type of program is also a great way to help target some of the deficiencies that teacher preparation courses lack when it comes to preparing future teachers for the reality of the urban teaching environment. This hands-

on experience working with actual children would be beneficial for both the college student and the k-12 students, and in return, receiving a letter of recommendation from the school-based teacher and being able to add relevant professional experience to their resume will likely be appealing to most undergraduate students thinking about their future.

Another important factor in creating professional relationships with local colleges is to help educate all future educators. Timmons' (2010) found an overwhelming amount of urban educators felt significantly under prepared to teach in an urban setting. The only way to prepare future educators for urban education is to assist in their education process. Assisting colleges with creating behavioral strategy classes could be extremely beneficial for teacher preparation programs. Also, assisting in organizing events where urban music teachings go in and speak with prospective educators during elementary and secondary music methods classes would help assist in further preparing future teachers for the real world urban setting. Helping students understand the differences and strategies in teaching urban students could prove to be beneficial.

Planning for Recruitment

The recruiting process needs to be a year-long endeavor, rather than a once in the fall kind of activity. Costa-Giomi and Chappell (2007) suggest schools from high socioeconomic areas have more financial support, thus offering more opportunities for travel and finer resources that lend themselves as incentives for students to participate in the program. Urban districts inherently do not have the financial ability to take students on trips or have state of the art resources to lure students into the program. Therefore, creating incentives that occur throughout the year with little to no cost, is imperative for

an urban instrumental program. Creating a year-long schedule for recruiting and retention (Appendix A) will help assist with organization and thus the process might not seem as daunting.

Recruiting should start in the spring before perspective students register the following fall (Bazan & Bayley, 2009; Jagow, 2005). Urban districts frequently have large transient populations with students frequently changing schools, thus students interested in the spring might not be at the same school in the fall. Also, students coming from low SES families are typically not exposed to the arts nearly as much as students from higher SES families are, thus they potentially don't know the differences between the different instrument choices. Bayley (2004), Martignetti (1965) and Payne (2014) stress the importance of students choosing appropriate instruments. Giving urban students hands-on opportunities to experience instruments before joining allows students to get a better idea of what they are signing up for and to fit students with instruments that best suit them. Having instrument sampler events in the spring is a wonderful plan, but in urban districts, offering multiple opportunities to experience instruments throughout the year will afford new students the opportunity to try instruments and help to entice new students throughout the course of the year.

There are many ways to approach introducing students to the instruments offered in the instrumental program. One of the ways to introduce prospective students to instrumental music is to have advanced middle and high school students come visit the elementary school to perform for the students and give mini demonstrations about each instrument. This could also be done with college students from the local college that the school has set up ties with. When doing this type of program, presenters need to be

mindful of the audience. Presenters should play music that is not overly difficult and music that the students can relate to. This is to ensure that students are not turned off by the difficulty level of playing an instrument, as suggested by Sussman (2012).

In some situations, getting older students to venture to your school may be difficult to arrange. In a scenario such as this, allowing advanced elementary students to perform demonstrations can also be beneficial to the program. Advanced students can come into younger classes and give a brief demonstration about their instrument and play a song they have been working on. In this situation, students are getting to see what their peers are working on, and the advanced student has yet another performance activity to look forward to.

After students are versed in the different instrumental options, getting an idea of what instruments students are interested in can help the instructor guide the hands-on demonstrations, as well as, assist in creating a more stream lined process. Creating a simple form with pictures of the different instrument choices (Appendix B) will help students remember the differences between instruments, thus negating any confusion during hands-on sessions. Limiting the selection of instruments might be beneficial in the first few years, due to basic band instruments being typically less expensive than larger instruments. Starting off with clarinets, flutes, alto saxophones, trumpets and percussion might be necessary due to funding and availability. Motivating students to come to the school after school hours to try instruments with parents is not as feasible in urban districts as it is in suburban districts. Holding hands-on sessions during school hours will allow a greater amount of students to have the opportunity to try the instruments they are the most interested in.

Attempting to attract parents to a special event just for instrumental selection may be ineffective, but holding the event the night of open house may be beneficial. Open house nights in urban districts are very different from suburban districts; typically in urban districts the students and parents all come to open house making it a perfect opportunity, in the fall, to create a wonderful time for an instrument night. Having local music stores available to help demonstrate and allow students to sample the instruments is an excellent way to introduce both parents and students to the program. A notice can be sent home to parents enticing them to stop by the music room (see Appendix C), as well as, a note in the school newsletter that may help make parents aware of the special event. The music teacher can then follow up with students that did not make the event during free periods and general music classes.

Recorder units taught in third and fourth grade during general music classes can also offer assistance when starting to recruit new students. The recorder is a wonderful “pre-band” instrument that teaches students many of the basic skills needed for instrumental music. Listening to individual students and identifying the students who are most successful, as well as students highly interested in the unit, can help determine students that might thrive in an instrumental program. Approaching these students and asking them to come to an instrumental lesson or band rehearsal may be a great way to entice potential students into the program. Also, giving band members the opportunity to invite friends to band rehearsals to get a glimpse of what band is like can help bring in new students.

Retention Incentives

Keeping students interested in the program is not an easy proposition, especially

with limited or nonexistent funds for events and trips. Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody (2007) suggested the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to keep students interested in learning to play a musical instrument. While trips are a rewarding extrinsic motivator for students, creating intrinsic motivation will give students the enjoyment and fulfillment of participating in music making. Creating events throughout the year to hold students' interest in instrumental music is imperative for a healthy instrumental program. Giving students a say in the decision-making process is also an important part to any program (Fiese & DeCarbo, 1995). Having a pizza lunch-in to go over the goals for the ensemble will keep students involved, but also offer a fun social event during the year can be both extrinsic and intrinsic reward for students. To cover the cost of the pizza, the teacher may ask students to pay a dollar a slice, get a local pizza shop to donate a few pies, or ask the principal to buy a pie or two; this way the teacher is not necessarily spending their personal money to cover costs. Holding lunch-ins in the fall to plan for the winter concert and then again after the winter concert to reflect and plan for the spring concert are ideal opportunities to include students and have an enjoyable social gathering.

Well-funded suburban programs have the advantage of being able to go on trips to perform either at festivals or for local community events (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007). Bussing students is expensive, and it is difficult to obtain funding in urban schools, so trips are not an extremely realistic option. Creating other opportunities for students to perform will help create a desire to stay in the program (Smith, 2003). Performances might be as simple as playing for a younger class. Kindergarteners love to hear all of the beginning songs typically found in the first ten pages of any of the method

books. As a result, teachers should ask the principal if there are any school events that students could perform at, for example, student of the month ceremonies or parent events. Advanced students may even feel confident enough to play for their own class or a small group of teachers.

Holding mini recitals throughout the year can offer yet another performance opportunity. Small recitals for either parents or school friends can be simple events with students that have performance-ready music prepared that is not being used for an upcoming concert. This encourages students to continue practicing and is also a way to recruit other students that may attend the recital. Also, giving students opportunities to create and improvise music either in small groups or individually can be a very rewarding intrinsic motivator for students. Students may also enjoy sharing their creativity with parents and other students at mini recitals.

Advanced students that show an excellent understanding of the different parts of their instrument might be interested in doing an instrument demonstration for a younger class. This does not have to be part of the recruiting activities mentioned above, though it can be. Having students come in to a kindergarten or first grade general music class and give a five-minute presentation on their instrument can be very rewarding, as well as helping to keep students interested in wanting to learn more about their instrument. The younger students will also start to see the different instruments available and programs offered to older students.

Having middle or high school students venture to the elementary school to play with the students can also help create interest and help introduce the younger students to the instrumental teachers at the higher-level schools. It also might be beneficial for the

students to go and visit the middle or high school to play with older students in their music rooms and to see what the music rooms look like. Having the older students come to the school could also open up opportunities for recruitment, if there is time available. Either event is beneficial for a cohesive music program throughout the district; working together as a team with the other music teachers in the district helps create unity in the district and a solid music program.

Instrumental Practice Solutions

Once students have begun playing, you must find ways to keep them interested (Mixon, 2005). Albert (2006) suggests including students in the decision making process as a way to create interest in the program. Including students in music selection is a great way to keep students interested and take an active role in what they are learning. Having a number of different beginning band method books available for students to choose music from can be a worthy resource for finding music that the students are interested in. Each method series offers slightly different songs or variations of songs that can add diversity for students. In one series, a simple song like “Jingle Bells” might be too difficult for students, but in a different series the same song will be arranged in a manner that is much more attainable for specific students. Having a wide assortment of beginner songs gives students an array of music to choose from. Students are more likely to practice the music they are interested in rather than music they are forced to play, as suggested by Bartel (2008). Also, as stated above, giving students many opportunities to perform will help ensure that practice is happening if the students have the desire to perform.

Many students in urban districts come from homes where they are unable to find a

suitable location in which to practice. Some students have extremely chaotic homes that are not conducive to practicing, while others live in apartments where practicing can be too intrusive on their surrounding environment. Kay (1995) finds students enjoy group practice time, while Mixon (2005) suggests giving students an opportunity to practice during school hours to be extremely beneficial. Offering students time while in school to practice is an excellent way to keep students working. Most urban schools must offer breakfast before school; this is an opportune time to offer a program where students can eat a quick breakfast and then practice for ten to fifteen minutes before classes start. Practicing can either be individual or with other students, and can be monitored by the music teacher, other teacher volunteers, or even a college student buddy. Sending out a flier (see Appendix D) to parents and posting it in the hallways will help remind students of this fun activity. This program might also work as a lunch bunch and recess practice time in some districts, depending upon how schedules correspond. The advantage of utilizing breakfast time is that there are no other ongoing academics to interfere with instrumental time, and students are just waiting for classes to start. This time is usually an unstructured mundane time for many students. Also, if students are using school owned instruments, offering practice time during the school day, may be a way to limit instruments being transported home and outside of the school, where they are more susceptible to being broken, lost or possibly even stolen.

Students in urban districts frequently come from home lives that are unorganized (Mixon, 2005); giving students detailed practice logs will keep students focused each week (Appendix E). Giving only two to four pieces to work on each week, depending on ability and selected music, will alleviate students getting overwhelmed with too much to

practice. Also, many music teachers ask students to practice for a specific amount of time, students are not great time keepers, so asking them to practice twenty minutes everyday is daunting to a fourth or fifth grader. Instead, ask students to check off what songs they practice on each specific day of the week. Set a goal of practicing each piece four to five times a week. If more specific data is desired for advanced students, have them write down how many times they practiced each piece per day in the boxes, instead of using check marks. Hewitt (2001) noted that teaching students to self assess is an important role in becoming a well rounded musician, he also found that children are not very accurate in their self-assessments. Giving students frequent opportunities to self assess can also assist in developing productive practice routines. By providing a welcoming environment in which to practice, and helping students find a good practice routine, it will give students admirable building blocks to becoming well-rounded musicians and foster an instrumental program students want to be a part of.

Increasing Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an important role in learning to play a musical instrument (Gamin, 2005; Trotman, 2001), but not always a reality in urban districts. Parent involvement can be very difficult to obtain in urban schools, yet an important factor not to forget. Many times parents are hard to make contact with; either they are working, or their phone number has changed multiple times. Many schools have a school paper or newsletter that goes home every month. This newsletter is a great way to inform parents of future events or a way to positively acknowledge students for their hard work. Many families in urban districts have close relationships with everyone in their neighborhoods and if one family reads good news, it will sometimes spread throughout the community.

Johnson (1997) encourages educators to work on activities to help educate parents on how to be involved, as a way to increase parental involvement. Another way to inform parents positively about their child's achievements is to have pre-made certificates (see Appendix F) to send home to parents. The 'high five' award is for students who can successfully play a song they have been working on, from beginning to end, without mistakes. This is a simple yet effective way to keep parents informed of their student's achievements in music. The award also encourages parents to listen to their student play the piece they have worked hard on, which can help create a healthy instrumental environment at home.

An additional way to promote parental involvement is to have mini recitals and concerts throughout the year. In most instrumental programs it is common to have a winter and spring concert. Depending on the urban district, these concerts are typically held during school hours. Due to a lack of transportation and parental work schedules, getting students to come back in the evening is difficult for urban schools, thus concerts are held during the day to allow all involved students to participate in the concert. Unfortunately, not all parents can come to these day concerts. Giving students the opportunity to perform in mini recitals can give parents that might not be able to attend the full concert another opportunity to see their child at a more convenient time. Mini recitals can be performed in the music room as opposed to the stage which is frequently also used as a gym or cafeteria, which can be a scheduling conflict. Due to the small size of a mini recital and not having to worry about rearranging schedules for the stage, finding times that work best for parents can help ensure that parents will attend and get to see their child perform. This also gives the teacher a chance to quickly update the parent

on goals and achievements for their child. Over time, the objective is to earn a reputation among the parents for having a strong and thriving program that they want their children to be associated with. Unfortunately, this may take years in an urban district.

Conclusion

With some extra effort and sensitivity to students' needs, teachers in urban schools can guide their students to success in instrumental music studies (Mixon, 2005). Funding, recruitment, retention, parent involvement and getting students to practice can be a daunting task for any instrumental music teacher, but it can be outright overwhelming and a huge undertaking for urban teachers. My hope in writing this paper was to give urban educators suggestions and recourses to help improve underperforming instrumental programs and to help create a realistic approach to recruitment and retention in an urban district.

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Appendix A
Year –Long Recruitment and Retention Schedule

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set-up instrument rental night and information night to be held during open house
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct instrument selection process with any new students and review with returning students • Send out information regarding instrumental sign-up and instrumental night • Hand out applications for school owned instruments • Sign-up returning students and inquire into any students not rejoining or changing instruments
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start lesson groups and make sure all students have instruments
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pizza lunch bunch to discuss music to be performed at winter concert
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Concert • Have advanced students with prepared holiday music perform for younger classes around the school (Instrumental Caroling)
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review any students who have dropped out or not coming to lessons • Have pizza lunch bunch to reflect on winter concert, review upcoming events, and discuss music selections • Contact middle school and high school teachers to start arranging a band get together
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start student lead instrumental demonstrations for younger classes
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold solo and small group recitals • Have the middle school band down to perform and play with students.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start identifying potential 3rd and 4th grade instrumental students
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start conducting instrumental selections for prospective students • Have middle school band directors over for a parent and student meet and greet.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Concert • Send out instrumental information to all prospective 3rd and 4th grade students for the next school year • Send list of continuing 5th grade students to middle school teachers.

Appendix B
Instrumental Selection Form

Name: _____ Classroom: _____

Instrument Selection

Please circle your top 3 choices.



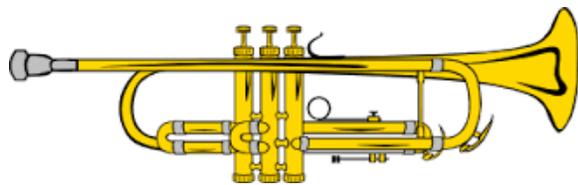
Clarinet



Flute



Alto
Saxophone



Trumpet



Percussion

Appendix C
Instrumental Selection Flier

Instrument Selection Night

For all 3rd and 4th Grade Students and Parents



There will be representatives from local music stores in the music room to allow perspective band students to touch and play the different instruments offered in the band program. Mrs. Kolan will be available to answer any questions.

Breakfast and Practice Time

Come and eat breakfast and get in some practicing before school with other band friends. Music room opens at 7:45 am on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays.

Rules

- Students are required to practice by themselves or with others.
- Students fooling around and not following school rules will be asked to leave.

	Assigned Music	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Total Checks
Week 3	1.								
	2.								
	3.								
	4.								

	Assigned Music	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Total Checks
Week 4	1.								
	2.								
	3.								
	4.								

KEEP UP THE GOOD

WORK!!

Appendix F
Parent Involvement Incentive Certificate



Your student earned a High Five for playing

_____ today in music.

This would be a great time to have them perform for you

at home!