RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR THE SECONDARY
INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAM

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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

This project explored research and pedagogical literature related to the recruitment and retention of students involved in school music ensembles at the secondary level. Additionally, literature regarding advocacy for school instrumental programs was reviewed. Although music courses serve an important purpose in a well-rounded education and should be made easily available to all students, there are cases in which policymakers or administrators do not prioritize the need for music education. To facilitate strong student participation in school music programs, the literature points to the benefits of music educators implementing a year round recruitment, retention, and advocacy plan. As part of this capstone project, a twelve-month plan for recruitment, retention, and advocacy was created, grounded in the research and pedagogical literature in music education. The plan outlines strategies such as frequent contact with new recruits and their parents, positive student-teacher relationships with current students, and providing culturally relevant performances that meet the community’s expectations. All of the findings are applicable to strategically improving the quality and quantity of the band program in the Valley Park, Missouri school district.

Keywords: recruitment, retention, music advocacy, socioeconomic status (SES)
Recruitment and Retention Strategies for the Secondary Instrumental Music Program

Music education, although recently included as part of the new legislative definition of a well-rounded education in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), is not required in most secondary schools. In the state of Missouri, students are obligated to complete only one fine arts credit in order to be eligible for graduation. Even further, students are sometimes directed away from secondary music education classes, such as band, to focus on other extracurricular activities or other academic courses. Because instrumental music instruction is begun at a young age, effective recruitment and retention methods are as important to a band director’s duties as proper lesson planning and classroom management.

Recruitment

Recruiting students into a band program can be a challenging, but necessary task music educators must undertake. Student decisions to join beginning band can be influenced by many factors such as student and community perception of the program, support from administration, starting grade of instruction, socioeconomic status, student academic achievement, parental involvement, and personalized teacher recruitment efforts. Researchers have investigated a variety of these recruitment topics.

Several researchers have found it to be crucial for secondary band programs to provide a positive image to younger students in order to have success in recruiting. In a recruitment survey of 192 high school band directors, Kerstetter (2011) found the strong majority of teachers felt a successful high school band program was the most powerful way to recruit young students. Sussman (2012) emphasized the importance of determining what is considered necessary for a successful band program through the eyes of the school and the community. For example, a highly competitive marching band program might work well in some areas, but could be
detrimental to the existence of the program in other areas. Lastly, Albert (2006) found high school programs bolstered their recruitment of young students by performing culturally relevant music. Culturally relevant music is defined as music that links to students’ past experiences and motivates connections between the student and the ensemble (Mixon, 2009). Additionally, culture is not limited to ethnicity, but also includes affiliations based on age, geography, economic class, and religion (Mixon, 2009).

Gaining a positive community perspective can be accomplished by utilizing social media and local media news outlets. Melsha (2015) and Neel (2015) noted the implementation of a band Facebook page, coupled with a video of high school band members detailing positive experiences they have had through the program, to be a great recruiting tool. Additionally, Albert (2006) found publicizing student accomplishments through local newspapers and news stations to be an influential way to advertise the band program to the community and potential recruits.

Like student and community support, positive administrative backing is imperative to successful band program recruiting. Bruenger (2009) studied an elementary school that consistently recorded high levels of middle school music ensemble participation from their 5th grade students. Upon analysis, Bruenger noted evidence of great support from building administrators regarding music studies in general, as well as support for the music teacher’s approach to assessment strategies based on effort and improvement. Sussman (2014) also found administrative support to be key in building strong recruitment numbers and recommended band directors develop a positive relationship with their administration by attending all faculty meetings as well as many extracurricular events.

Starting grade and academic achievement have been studied to determine their effects on instrumental music recruitment numbers. In a 2009 study on the influence of starting grade on
string student enrollment and retention, Hartley and Porter found no statistically significant difference in the percentage of initial enrollment numbers between the starting grades of 4th, 5th, and 6th grade. However, in an analysis of students in grades 6 and 8 in a Midwestern metropolitan area, Kinney (2010) found academic achievement to be a significant predictor of initial enrollment in middle school band programs, noting that his findings were consistent with previous research that suggested higher achieving students may be more attracted to band programs from the start. Even further, Johnson and Memmott (2006) reviewed scores from 4,739 elementary and middle school students and noted higher standardized test scores were achieved by students in schools with quality music programs. However, through a 2013 study that controlled a series of covariates including socioeconomic status, Elpus found that United States music students in the graduating class of 2004 did not outperform their nonmusical classmates on college entrance exams or on standardized math tests.

Several researchers have uncovered common, successful band recruitment strategies. Albert (2006), and Fischer and Hamburg (2001), concluded that early parent contact, demonstrative performances by upperclassmen, and events such as instrumental petting zoo nights were all important to the recruiting process. Although only Albert’s study was specific to lower socioeconomic areas, both studies recorded that affordable instruments provided by the school were a key component in achieving high recruiting numbers.

Hayes (2005), a rural Midwest band director, published strategies that proved successful for increasing the Roanoke-Benson High School band from 24 members in 1991 to 92 members in 2005. Suggestions included getting to know the students being recruited and allowing them to get to know you, creating performance opportunities for young students to play with upperclassmen, and making recruiting an ongoing part of your job. Branding the program
through apparel (Melsha, 2015) and providing giveaways to young students (Kerstetter, 2011) have also served as strong recruiting strategies.

The recruiting efforts put forth by music educators are often the first contact between the teacher and the young student. These efforts, including early parental contact, should be implemented over a long period of time to help cultivate a relationship with the student and their family. Additionally, while there are many different strategies of recruitment for instrumental music courses, it is best for educators to select the methods that are most appropriate for the needs of their school community. While the suggested recruiting methods may require a lengthy amount of startup effort from music educators, the results will likely be worth the investment.

**Retention**

Successful band programs must have an equal balance between the recruitment of new band students and the retention of current band students. As students change grade levels and enter new buildings, factors pulling them away from music classes can increase. Researchers have analyzed how student and teacher perceptions, scheduling conflicts, socioeconomic status, starting grade and frequency of instruction can affect attrition rates in secondary instrumental classes.

Corenblum and Marshall (1998) found student perception of teacher evaluations of student performance to be a strong predictor of student intentions to continue music instruction. The more favorably band teachers evaluated a student’s musical competency, the more likely the student would be to enroll in band for the following year. Gamin (2005) studied teacher perceptions concerning attrition rates in beginning instrumental music classes. The most common factor teachers listed that contributed to attrition was student unwillingness to practice. Albert (2006) found that strong teacher-student relationships led to stronger retention rates.
These findings suggest that a positive and encouraging classroom environment could lead to more students choosing to stay enrolled in band classes.

Gamin (2005) noted that scheduling conflicts ranked much higher as an attrition factor among urban schools compared to rural schools. Based on these results, Gamin suggested “because school funding and public opinion frequently hinge upon students’ performance on these (standardized) tests, teachers may be less willing to allow students out of class for activities such as instrumental music” (p. 53). However, if teachers do worry about students not doing well on tests due to missing class for instrumental music, their concern may be misplaced. Corral (1998) studied 223 elementary students to determine if those that were pulled out of other classes to receive instrumental music instruction would score similarly compared to the other students on the California Test of Basic Skills. The test scores of the 46 students receiving instrumental music instruction 30 minutes twice a week was not significantly different from the other group of students. However, Gamin (2005) found beginning band classes that utilized a pull out structure had significantly higher attrition rates than those that included band as a daily class.

While scheduling conflicts are often beyond the control of the band director, several suggestions have been made to help alleviate their consequences. Hayes (2005) and Sussman (2014) noted benefits from developing a positive relationship with the counselor(s) that handles student scheduling. Neel (2015) recommended providing a plan and flow chart to all incoming freshmen band members to demonstrate how participating in band all four years of high school is possible while earning all other graduation requirements. Lastly, working with administration and counselors to offer students online options for required courses has been documented as relieving student schedules and encouraging higher band enrollment (Sussman, 2014).
Hartley and Porter (2009) found retention rates to be higher among groups that started beginning string instruction in 7th grade, compared to those that started in 4th grade. Respondents were also surveyed regarding the frequency and number of weekly instructional minutes; it was found that 4th grade beginning classes met less frequently than 6th grade beginning classes. While starting age could be a factor affecting retention in this study, it could also be that the structure of the schedule, with limited instructional minutes, or the developmental level of the younger students, could have an impact on retention. Additionally, building changes that students typically navigate, for instance when moving from elementary to middle school, could affect retention. Hartley (1991) found students that began instrumental instruction in 6th grade had a slightly more positive attitude toward instrumental music compared to students that began instruction in 5th grade. Regardless of starting grade, the instrument selection process appears to have the potential to increase retention. Cannava (1994) noted an 11% increase in retention when students were guided through the instrument selection process by a professional.

Kinney (2010) found socioeconomic status (SES) to have little influence on initial enrollment of students in band programs, but did note that lower SES students were less likely to be retained. This could be tied to the recurring costs of band such as supplies (reeds, books, concert dress) or expensive trips. In contrast, large band trips have been mentioned as the top reason why students choose to continue band instruction (Stewart, 2005). School owned instrumentals that can be rented for a small fee (Kinney, 2010) and college scholarships for students that participate in band throughout high school (Melsha, 2015) are strategies that may help to reduce attrition related to socioeconomic struggles. Other factors that encourage students
to continue in secondary band classes include maintaining friendships with peers and having fun (Stewart, 2005).

While there is little research on ways a Band Boosters organization can contribute to the recruitment and retention of students, many authors have mentioned the Band Booster organization’s role in helping with tasks such as fundraising (Sussman, 2014) as an important part of the overall success of the band program. This indicates the potential benefit of a Band Boosters organization that could assist the teacher and students in appropriate ways. Related to this, Gamin (2005) noted a link between lack of parental involvement and higher attrition rates during the first year of instruction.

Several strategies have been found to be dually beneficial to recruiting and retention efforts. Personalized postcards mailed to new recruits, as well as current students, have been effective in encouraging students to sign up for and continue in band (Cole, 2010). Creating a mentoring program for upperclassmen to work with new students as well as inviting elementary students to perform on their recorders with the high school band at a performance, have also been beneficial to all students involved (Sussman, 2012).

Secondary music educators cannot simply rely on “letting the program speak for itself”, as a respondent from a 2013 study on retention reported just before experiencing a 45% decline in their high school band (Harris, 2014). Rather, retention efforts need to be constant and intentional. To create a workable recruitment and retention plan, Bazan and Bayley (2009) recommended a three step approach: define goals, create a plan, and evaluate the plan. Obtaining feedback from students and parents is crucial to the evaluation part of the process. Bazan and Bayley suggested providing surveys to students that discontinue participation in band (and their
parents) every September and January. Reflection, through the evaluation portion of the plan provides opportunity for change that may lead to better recruitment and retention strategies.

There are a variety of reasons that lead to discontinued student participation in secondary music ensembles. A number of these reasons, including scheduling conflicts with other courses, are sometimes beyond the control of the band director. However, with proper focus on positive teacher-student relationships, music educators can work to overcome many retention obstacles. Strategies that recognize student success in the program, such as mailing positive notes home and featuring student achievements on social media, can be powerful tools when implemented consistently.

**Advocacy**

To be successful in recruiting and retaining students in their programs, band directors must be well versed on resources for music advocacy. Often music educators turn to the studies on the importance of music education in regards to academic gains. Canterall and Dumais (2012) found that 71% of students highly involved in the arts enrolled in college after high school while only 48% of students involved in the arts on a low level enrolled in post high school studies. Additionally, the researchers concluded that socially and economically disadvantaged children and teenagers who have high levels of arts engagement showed more positive outcomes than their low arts involved peers, in a variety of areas. Music education has also been shown to benefit students beyond academic achievement. O’Neill (2005) emphasized the importance for children studying music (and all arts) because arts education provides a way for them to express themselves creatively.
The federal government has recently acknowledged the importance of music education by placing it alongside other subjects such as math in the definition of a well-rounded education in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015:

(52) **WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION.**—The term ‘well-rounded education’ means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience. (p. 298)

This legislation ensured that arts education programs and teachers are eligible to receive federal funds through provisions such as Title 1 and Title II (Zubrzycki, 2015).

Despite studies showing the importance and value of instrumental music programs and support from the federal government, some schools make it difficult for students to participate in performance ensembles without consequence. High school senior Channell (2016) presented a TED conference speech outlining how being in choir throughout high school made it impossible to earn a valedictorian or salutatorian achievement. The presentation included examples of students earning a higher grade point average and higher class rank by enrolling in a study hall class rather than a fine arts class.

A study of administrators, faculty, and staff in Illinois found that while people have predetermined opinions of music education, it is possible for their opinions to change (Vermillion, 2009). Based on these findings, the author suggested a three-part plan to music education advocacy that is to be completed by music educators: acquisition of information,
organization and unification of human resources through a professional organization, and information dissemination to influence policy makers (Vermillion, 2009). The first stage requires music educators to develop a large knowledge base on the benefits of music education. In the second stage, music educators are tasked to combine and organize information with each other through a professional organization, such as the National Association for Music Education. Finally, the information can be presented to policy makers to attempt to influence their decisions in ways that protect music education in schools.

Another way to increase advocacy for music education may be to get more students involved. Williams (2007) determined, through a four state survey, that an average of 82% of high school students were not enrolled in music courses. In the study, Williams recognized that the traditional performance ensemble classes may not be for all students, and suggested computer programs like Garage-Band to increase overall student involvement with music.

Music education advocate Lautzenheiser (2005) stated that the lack of student recruitment and retention in music programs is caused by parents not understanding the positive benefits music education can offer to their children. Lautzenheiser felt that it is the music educator's job to thoroughly explain the way involvement in band programs may increase test scores and positively influence character traits such as ethics. After a strong local parent base has been created, Elpus (2007) suggested that the next step to improved music advocacy is a grassroots effort by several booster groups working with school boards and state legislators to make music education classes a requirement for high school graduation.

Strategies to help advocacy at the classroom and community level include identifying local musicians and educators and inviting them to the classrooms as guest directors (Melsha, 2015). Using public performances as good publicity and advocacy for the band program has been
suggested by Neel (2015). The Bettendorf Community Public Schools instrumental music
department scheduled an ensemble to perform at the opening of every monthly school board
meeting (Neel, 2015). Public performances help earn the program a positive image in the
community and can lead to support as well as other benefits such as donations from individuals
or businesses.

Secondary music educators may view advocating for their programs as another task
added on to an already long list of job requirements, however it can be accomplished in creative
ways by supplementing responsibilities that are already being executed. Specifically, a
preexisting parent booster group that works to support the band and students through fundraising
efforts could also advocate for the program at their fundraising events. This level of advocacy
could be as simple as a handout about the skills or attributes their children have gained through
the music program. Additionally, promoting student music achievements through social media
can be coupled with short videos about what music means to the students. No matter what the
advocacy effort, music educators should strive to cultivate a positive image of their program and
music education in general since predetermined opinions about the topic can be changed.

Need and Purpose of the Study

The Valley Park, Missouri school district has a limited history of rich band program
experiences for students. While there has consistently been a concert band at the middle school
and high school levels, both have traditionally had few participants. The middle school band has
never obtained better participation than 21% of the total student population and the high school
band has only reached 7%. A national study of music performance class participation found
21% of high school students participated in band, choir, or orchestra in 2004 (Elpus & Abril,
2011). The Valley Park school district does not have an orchestra program and enrollment
numbers in the choir classes are similar to the band enrollment numbers. I believe the low number of participants has made it difficult for the program to become well rounded and has resulted in a lack of ensembles such as jazz band, marching band, and pep band. This capstone project was needed to explore options for growth in both recruitment and retention of Valley Park students in the band program. Additionally, it is necessary to determine effective ways to advocate for the band program at the school and community levels. Specific questions addressed in this project included:

1. What strategies encourage students to initially sign up for beginning band?
2. What strategies can be used to retain students in secondary band classes?
3. How can music educators promote the importance of their program to administrators and the community?
4. How can these strategies and information be applied to increase the quality and size of the Valley Park bands?

**Method**

Upon reviewing the research and pedagogical literature related to recruitment and retention strategies for instrumental music classes, as well as approaches for music education advocacy, I developed a recruitment, retention, and advocacy plan for the Valley Park School District band program to help facilitate the goals outlined in Table 1. The plan is based on the research and best practices that have been documented in the literature, with alignment of specific strategies outlined in Table 2. Various materials specific to the Valley Park band recruiting and retention goals, including a year round recruitment and retention calendar, can be found in the appendices. While many recruiting, retention, and advocacy strategies exist, I
believe the following plan is best suited for the specific needs of the Valley Park School District band program.

**Current Status**

Over the last six academic years, the Valley Park band program has seen a 6.75% growth in total enrollment. Band enrollment for the upcoming school year is predicted to reach 19% of total school population. These estimations are conservative and the hope is that the actual number will be 20%, making overall growth for the past seven years 12.72%.

![Figure 1](image1.png)  
*Figure 1. Total Number of Students Enrolled in Valley Park Bands*

![Figure 2](image2.png)  
*Figure 2. Percentage of Total School Population Enrolled in Valley Park Bands*
The last three years have brought about several changes to the high school band program including the addition of a marching band, an after school jazz band, and a pep band. All of the new ensembles have provided musical and leadership opportunities for students that were not previously available. Other innovative opportunities at the high school level include a newly formed conference honor band. This conference band was developed by myself and three band directors from other schools several years ago with the intention of offering students the opportunity to play in an honor band experience that is more attainable than the very competitive district level honor band. All participating schools have seen positive results from the ensemble and surveys have noted it as a reason students continue to enroll in high school band.

Because Valley Park middle school students are only allowed to enroll in one elective course during each year of middle school (6th, 7th, and 8th grades), I approached the elementary administration when I was hired about creating a 5th grade exploratory instrumental music class. This course is structured like all other grade school specials courses (art, general music, and physical education) and allows for all 5th grade students to receive instrumental music instruction one day a week for 50 minutes. Students do not take instruments home, however, time is spent in class exploring flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and percussion throughout the year. The last two years have included a 5th grade portion on the annual spring band concert, giving parents a chance to see their young child making music as well as view what the middle school and high school bands have to offer.

Lastly, efforts have been made to establish a better reputation of the Valley Park band program in the community. The marching band participates in the annual summer community parade, the middle school bands perform traditional holiday carols in December to raise money for a local food pantry, and all student achievements through contests and honor bands are
documented and sent to the local news outlets. Photos and videos of events are shared with parents through emailed links to Dropbox folders and thank you cards are written to all parent volunteers. Despite the efforts throughout the past three years, the size and quality of the program has improved at rates slower than desired. A detailed and thorough recruitment and retention plan is necessary for further growth of the Valley Park band program.

**Action Plan**

My analysis of the review of literature suggests that successful band programs recruit and retain students through an efficient, detail oriented, and thorough plan of practiced strategies. The main goal of implementing the recruitment, retention, and advocacy strategies listed in Table 2 is to increase enrollment in all of the Valley Park bands. There is a projected 17% increase in numbers from the 2015-2016 school year to the upcoming 2016-2017 school year. Specific yearly goals are to achieve another 17% increase for the 2017-2018 year, a 20% increase in the 2018-2019 school year, and finally to maintain enrollment numbers for every year thereafter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>6th grade</th>
<th>7th &amp; 8th grade</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual numbers</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>32/30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Current) Actual numbers</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected numbers</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected numbers</td>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After goals have been set and a plan is created, the plan will need to be evaluated (Bazan & Bayley, 2009). It will be important to analyze the plan every winter and summer break to make sure it is working effectively for the changing needs of the program. Student and parent
evaluations in the form of surveys as well as self-reflection and number analysis will be evaluated by the director at least twice a year.

Increased enrollment in all Valley Park Bands will be the result of the following goals:

- Cultivate a more positive classroom environment with stronger student-teacher relationships through increased communication with students and band families.
  - Use social media to reach more students and parents
  - Provide a voice to students in music selection process to ensure music is culturally relevant
- Provide frequent advocacy resources to school and community members.
  - Use school district public relations office to provide more exposure of student achievements in band
- Engage in early and frequent contact with potential recruits and their parents.
### Table 2
Strategies for recruitment and retention founded in literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early parent contact and sign up opportunities</td>
<td>Albert (2006), Sussman (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument petting zoo night</td>
<td>Albert (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the band program with upperclassmen performances</td>
<td>Fischer &amp; Hamburg (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform culturally relevant music</td>
<td>Albert (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide school owned instruments</td>
<td>Fischer &amp; Hamburg (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate face to face meetings with parents</td>
<td>Fischer &amp; Hamburg (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop relationship that adds support for the program from administration</td>
<td>Bruenger (2009), Sussman (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow younger students to perform with upperclassmen</td>
<td>Hayes (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuously recruit students year round</td>
<td>Hayes (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize social media to promote organization</td>
<td>Melsha (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giveaways for middle school students</td>
<td>Kerstetter (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop strong student-teacher relationships</td>
<td>Albert (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a good relationship with counselors that do scheduling</td>
<td>Hayes (2005), Sussman (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to eliminate pullout schedules for band</td>
<td>Gamin (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide school owned instruments</td>
<td>Kinney (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer scholarships for seniors that have participated in the group consistently</td>
<td>Melsha (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer classes for other 80% of students (music technology)</td>
<td>Williams (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize large band trips</td>
<td>Stewart (2005), Sussman (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize ways for students to take online options for required courses</td>
<td>Sussman (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate high levels of perceived teacher evaluations of student ability</td>
<td>Corenblum &amp; Marshall (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide parents opportunity to contribute through a Boosters</td>
<td>Bounds (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate a “Big Brother/Big Sister” program between HS and MS</td>
<td>Neel (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize high school tutors for middle school students</td>
<td>Nell (2015), Sussman (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a plan/flow chart detailing how to take band throughout high school</td>
<td>Neel (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail postcards to students and families throughout year</td>
<td>Cole (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform at school board meetings</td>
<td>Neel (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement music technology music class for non-ensemble students</td>
<td>Williams (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research options for receiving Title I or Title II funds</td>
<td>Zubrzycki (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post music advocacy materials on band webpage and Facebook page.</td>
<td>Melsha (2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To utilize these findings, a twelve-month comprehensive recruiting and retention framework for the Valley Park band program has been created. The outline that follows is specific to the 2016 - 2017 school year; however, the intention is to use the general structure every year. Items that are planned to be one time only occurrences for the 2016 -2017 school year will be marked with an asterisk symbol (*).

**Twelve Month Plan**

**July 2016**

A. Perform in the local community parade.

B. Meet with the school district Public Relations Coordinator to learn rules and regulations regarding a Facebook page for the Valley Park Bands. *

C. Set up a Valley Park Band Facebook page. *

D. Schedule weekly “6th grade summer sessions” that allow incoming 6th grade band students several hours of open door practice in the band room to get extra help. 

(Appendix A)

E. Seek administrator approval to organize a Band Boosters organization. *

F. Invite all band parents to create the first Valley Park Band Boosters. (Appendix B)

G. Invite all high school band families to a performance and BBQ lunch on the last day of band camp. (Appendix C)

H. Invite all middle school band members to the last day of summer band camp for “big brother/big sister” day. (Appendix D)

I. Assign high school band students as “Big Brothers” or “Big Sisters” to middle school band students. (Appendix E)

J. Meet with high school principal about online courses available for students.
K. Promote summer band camp with photos and videos on the Facebook page.

L. Order post cards for thank you notes and student notes.

M. Meet with new middle school principal to begin discussing ways to offer middle school students two electives.

August 2016

A. Encourage the high school guidance counselor to promote the music technology course to non-band students (buy her lunch).

B. Schedule first Band Boosters meeting and meeting dates for the entire year.

C. Invite students to submit designs for this year’s band t-shirt. Have students vote on the design and order the shirts.

D. Meet with district PR office to set up a Buscher Band Scholarship in the amount of $500.

E. Provide surveys to students and parents of band members that did not re-enroll in band for the current year. (Appendix F)

N. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle school students two electives.

September

A. Prepare and mail first round of hand written postcards to existing ensemble members (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students).

(Appendix G)

B. Promote marching band events on the band Facebook page.

October
A. Prepare and mail second round of hand written postcards to existing ensemble members
   (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students).
   (Appendix G)

B. Contact Current Newspaper, school district PR office, and post on Facebook results from
   marching competitions.

C. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle
   school students two electives. *

November

A. Prepare and mail third round of hand written postcards to existing ensemble members
   (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students).
   (Appendix G)

B. Invite 5th graders to come watch the Winter concert in December (Appendix H)

C. Provide a list and photo of students that made the district honor band to the Current
   Newspaper and school district PR office, and post it on Facebook.

D. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle
   school students two electives. *

E. Coordinate with the district public relations office and perform the districts first
   Veteran’s day concert assembly.

December

A. Middle school band students “carol” for local food pantry.

B. Prepare and mail fourth round of hand written postcards to existing ensemble members
   (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students).
   (Appendix G)
C. Have high school students write an encouraging letter to their 6th grade “Little Brother” or “Little Sister” for the winter concert.

D. Evaluate enrollment numbers for upcoming semester and make notes of what recruiting and retention efforts worked well and what needs to be changed for the following year.

January

A. Prepare and mail fifth round of handwritten postcards to existing ensemble members (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students). (Appendix G)

B. Provide a list and photo of students that made the conference honor band to the Current Newspaper and school district PR office, and post it on Facebook.

C. Provide surveys to students and parents of band members that did not re-enroll in band for the current semester. (Appendix F)

D. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle school students two electives.

February

A. Prepare and mail sixth (and final) round of handwritten postcards to existing ensemble members (four high school students, seven 7th and 8th grade students, and six 6th grade students). (Appendix G)

B. Begin writing individual specific retention letters to current band members grades 6th - 12th to be distributed in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix I)

C. Begin writing individual specific recruitment letters to the incoming 6th graders to be handed out in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix L)
D. Create music for the all district pep assembly that incorporates middle school band
   students in part of the high school performance.
E. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle
   school students two electives. *
F. Communicate with middle school and high school administration to get on scheduling
   committee. Advocate for the elimination of block scheduling at the high school so that
   the two buildings can be on the same bell schedule. *

March
A. Invite 5th grade band students to perform at the Spring Concert. (Appendix J)
B. Continue writing individual specific recruitment letters to the incoming 6th graders to be
   handed out in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix K)
C. Have a group of students perform at the March school board meeting for Music in Our
   Schools Month
D. Continue writing individual specific retention letters to current band members grades 6th
   - 12th to be distributed in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix I)
E. Provide the results of solo and small ensemble contest and a photo of participating
   students to the Current Newspaper and school district PR office, and post it on Facebook.
F. Provide the results of large ensemble contest to the Current Newspaper and school
   district PR office, and post it on Facebook.
G. Schedule follow up meeting with new middle school principal about ways to offer middle
   school students two electives and contact higher level administration if no progress has
   been made. *
G. Attend scheduling meetings and advocate for the elimination of block scheduling at the high school so that the two buildings can be on the same bell schedule. *

April

A. Schedule 7th and 8th grade band students to give a demonstration concert for the 5th graders.

B. Continue writing individual specific recruitment letters to the incoming 6th graders to be handed out in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix K)

C. Continue writing individual specific retention letters to current band members grades 6th - 12th to be distributed in April (approximately 30 notes). (Appendix I)

D. Scan in all recruitment and retention letters as PDF documents. Email and send home all letters.

E. Have high school students vote on marching band music for upcoming year.

F. Attend scheduling meetings and advocate for the elimination of block scheduling at the high school so that the two buildings can be on the same bell schedule. *

May

A. Invite local music store to set up an instrument booth at the incoming 6th grade informational meeting night.

B. Invite local music store to set up an instrument booth at the 5th grade talent show performance.

C. Assign “Big Brothers and Big Sisters” for incoming 6th graders. Have “bigs” write a summer welcome letter to “smalls”. 
D. Call and mail correspondence to incoming freshmen. Provide plan/flow chart detailing ways to take band through all four years of high school and why it is important. (Appendix M)

June

A. Develop a recruitment video that highlights activities and achievements of middle school and high school band students from the previous school year.

B. Order recruitment and retention posters for the next school year. (Appendix N)

C. Evaluate enrollment numbers for upcoming semester and make notes of what recruiting and retention efforts worked well and what needs to be changed for the following year.

Non-timeline Specific Items

A. Write thank you card for any instrumental or monetary donations. (Appendix O)

B. Continuously post photos and videos to the band Facebook page throughout the year.

C. Continuously give ensembles choices for performance music and allow them to vote on selections.

D. Attend all faculty meetings and other extracurricular activities to build good rapport with administration.

E. Encourage students to come to the weekly afterschool practice sessions and work with their Big/Little Brother/Sister.

Conclusion

Recruitment, retention, and music education advocacy may not seem like pertinent tasks to a novice band director, however, they are all three extremely important to the overall success of secondary instrumental music programs. Because secondary music courses are not typically considered required parts of school curriculum, or even important in the opinions of some
education personnel, finding ways to keep students involved in music is primarily the responsibility of music educators. While some of the challenges in the Valley Park school district, such as limited elective blocks in the middle school schedule and singleton honors courses competing against band at the high school schedule, have led to low enrollment and retention rates in the past, the hope is that the twelve-month plan developed in this capstone project will lead to a positive band environment that will result in more students making the choice for music education.
References


Harris, S. (2014). *Factors contributing to recruitment and retention of high school music students: A study of four large music programs* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). York University, Toronto, Canada


Appendix A

July Letter to Incoming 6th Grade Band Students

Dear 6th grade VP band families,

I am so excited for the opportunity to get to work with your child in 6th grade band in the upcoming school year! If your child already has their instrument, I hope they are finding great enjoyment from playing this summer! If your child still needs to locate an instrument, please reply to this email and I will be happy offer assistance. If you have already spoken with Palen Music Company at one of the instrumental nights in May and are ready to use their services, their phone number is (636) 229-1904.

Regardless of having an instrument, all students are invited to come to 6th Grade Summer Band Sessions. On the following dates students are encouraged to come to the Valley Park band room to practice with Mrs. Buscher and other upperclassmen band students. These are not required practices and your child can attend as many or as few as they would like. Also, I recommend attending for no more than an hour of the two-hour session.

Thursday June 2nd 2 pm to 4 pm        Tuesday June 7th 9 am to 11 am
Thursday June 16th 2 pm to 4 pm       Thursday June 30th 2 pm to 4 pm
Tuesday July 5th 9 am to 11 am         Thursday July 14th 2 pm to 4 pm
Tuesday July 19th 9 am to 11 am        Tuesday August 2nd 9 am to 11 am

Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your support of the 6th grade Valley Park Band!

Stefanie
Stefanie Buscher
Valley Park Bands
636-923-3688
Dear VP Band families,

I am looking forward to beginning my 4th year of working with the Valley Park bands this fall! There have been many changes over the last few years and I appreciate all of the support that’s been offered! From moving equipment after concerts to participating in the fundraising efforts that lower student trip costs, your assistance has not gone unnoticed! While many of the changes, like the marching band and the jazz band, are becoming more “normal” every year, I am writing today to ask for help in the form of a Band Boosters organization.

As some of you probably already know, my husband Will and I are expecting our first child. Over the last few years I have been very happy to offer and organize 3 to 4 fundraisers per academic year for students to raise money for their trip accounts. The high school band takes a “big trip” every other year with a cost of around $350/student and the middle school bands sometimes take a small trip with a cost of around $50/student. The Cardinal Calendar fundraiser in November, the concession stand shifts from November through February, the toilet paper and paper towel sale in April, and the seat cushion sales have raised thousands of dollars for students trip accounts. While the trips are educational and a vital part of the band program, the fundraisers take quite a bit of organization and time. Many schools have a Band Boosters organization of parent volunteers to help with fundraising efforts. In fact, I know that we have some outstanding parents that could organize even better and more creative fundraisers for our students! If you would be interested in being a part of Band Boosters organization that would meet once a month please reply to this email. Thanks in advance for your help in keeping the Valley Park Bands strong!

Stefanie

Stefanie Buscher
Valley Park Bands
636-923-3688
Dear VPHS Band families,

I hope your child’s summer is off to a great start! I am writing to remind you about the summer band events. **Saturday July 16th** is the Valley Days Parade. New this year we will meet at the high school band room and load a bus to take to the starting point. Here is a link **with the parade route**.

Also, VPHS band camp is **July 27th through Friday July 29th** from 7 am to noon. On the last day of camp, Friday July 29th, the band will put on a performance for parents at 11:00 am followed by a BBQ and awards presentation. All high school band families are encouraged to join!

Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your support of Valley Park Bands!

Stefanie

Stefanie Buscher
Valley Park Bands
636-923-3688
Dear 7th and 8th grade band families,
I hope your child’s summer is off to a great start! I am writing to remind you about the summer band events.

**Saturday July 16th** is the Valley Days Parade. New this year we will meet at the high school band room and load a bus to take to the starting point. Here is a [link with the parade route](#).

Also, 7th and 8th grade band members are invited to attend the last day of VPHS band camp on **Friday July 29th** from 7 am to noon. VPMS band students will get to work with a high school “buddy” on learning marching techniques, watch a performance by the high school band at 11:00 am, and partake in the BBQ lunch. All 7th and 8th grade band students are encouraged to join! Please respond to this email to RSVP so that we have enough food for everyone.

Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your support of Valley Park Bands!

Stefanie

Stefanie Buscher
Valley Park Bands
636-923-3688

PS – Please encourage your child to practice the school fight school for the parade as well as the audition music for the Fall honor band auditions. And if they need more music, tell them to check out

[www.musescore.com](http://www.musescore.com)!
Valley Park Big Brothers/Big Sisters Assignments and Tasks

Valley Park Bands Big Brothers/Big Sisters 2016-2017

Dear High School Band Member,

New this year, we will have a Valley Park Bands Big Brother/Big Sister program. You, being an older and wiser band member, will provide encouragement and guidance to your Little band Brother(s) or Sister(s) throughout the year. This will include tasks such as writing letters before and after concerts, providing guidance for honor band auditions or solo and small ensemble contest, and individual teaching during the Big Brother/Big Sister day at summer band camp. Feel free to reach out to your “Little” more frequently than the recommended tasks. I know you will take this opportunity to help influence your “Littles” in a positive manner and make a difference in their lives and band experience.

You will be reminded of tasks throughout the school year. Have fun with this opportunity!

High School Member: _______________________________

Middle School Member(s) and instrument(s): ____________________________________________

___________________________________________________
Appendix F

Retention Survey

Valley Park Bands Exit Survey     Date: _____________

Thank you for the time you committed to the Valley Park Bands Program! We hope your time was filled with wonderful music making memories. Please take a moment to complete the following questions so that we can better improve the VP Bands Program. Completed surveys can be returned to Mrs. Buscher at 1 Main Street, Valley Park, MO 63088 or faxed to 636-225-0542 or emailed to sbuscher@vp.k12.mo.us or it can be taken online with the link here. Thank you for your time!

1. How many years did you participate in Valley Park Bands (starting with 6th grade)? _____

2. I had a lot of fun in band.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

3. I learned more about music by taking band.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

4. I made friends in band.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

5. I practiced my instrument at home on a regular basis.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

6. I felt I always had help when I needed it.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

7. I had to quit band because I'm too busy with other activities and sports.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

8. I quit band because it was too hard and I couldn't keep up.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

9. Band is not interesting to me.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

10. Please indicate anything you would like the director to know about your band experience in the space below:

____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix G

Handwritten Postcards for Current Band Students

Front

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith,
Johnny has shown great effort recently in 6th grade band class. His hard work is paying off and he is now able to play the Hot Cross Buns exceptionally well! Thank you for encouraging him to practice at home!

Musically,
Mrs. Buscher

Back

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
2 Main Street
Valley Park, MO 63088
Appendix H

5th Grade Invitation to the Winter Concert

Dear 5th grade families,

The 5th grade classes have been working very hard so far this year during their instrumental music specials time. We have learned many note reading skills and have had a chance to explore the trumpet, trombone, and clarinet. I would like to invite you to the Winter Band Concert on **Wednesday December 7th, 2016 at 6:30 pm** in the field house. This concert will be a great opportunity for students and parents to see the possibilities that come with middle school and high school band. There will be a section of the bleachers (near the weight room side) reserved specifically for 5th grade students and families.

I hope to see you there!

Musically,

Stefanie Buscher
Valley Park Bands
636-923-3688

Appendix I

Individual Retention Letters to Current Band Members

Sean,
I really appreciate all the extra practice time you have been putting into the alto saxophone! I am so impressed by how far you have come since August! I can't believe you're only in 6th grade! Keep up the great work. - Mrs. B.

Kelly,
Thank you for all the hard work you have put into marching band recently! Your leadership and guidance for the younger clarinetists is really showing! Keep up the great work!

- Mrs. B

8-27-16
Appendix J

Invitation for 5th Graders to Perform at Spring Concert

You're cordially invited to the

Spring Band Concert
Tuesday April 12th, 2016
VPMS Gym 6:30 pm

Presented by 5th grade through 12th grade
Valley Park Band Students

This year the Valley Park 5th graders are invited to play on the Spring Band Concert.

The concert is on Tuesday April 12th at 6:30 pm in the middle school gym. Students should dress nice and report to the middle school cafeteria at 6:00 pm.

Because we have a limited amount of school instruments be sure to RSVP with the form below. RSVPs are due back by Tuesday March 29th, 2016. Instruments will be provided in the order that the RSVPs are returned to school.

Questions? Contact Stefanie Buscher at sbuscher@vp.k12.me.us
or 636-923-3088

__ will be playing __________
in the 2016 Spring concert.

Parent signature
Appendix K

5th Grade Recruitment Letters

Wednesday May 11th, 2016

Hello 5th grade families,

The time has come to choose an elective class for your child’s 6th grade school year. At VPMS, students have the option to take band as their elective. Students not enrolled in band will be placed in an elective wheel (family and consumer science, general music, art, and industrial technology) that provides one quarter in each class. While all electives at VPMS are fun and exciting, please know that the elective courses in the wheel can be taken at any time during middle school or high school without prerequisite. Band, however, is a compounding class and it is necessary to enroll at the 6th grade level. My advice is for students to enroll in band if they have any desire at all because they can always take the other classes later. You should also consider how band can benefit your child. Studies have shown academic advantages for students who study music, and there are many ways for high school musicians to earn collegiate scholarship money.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. Please return the form below by Monday May, 23rd.

Musically,
Stefanie Buscher
sbuscher@vp.k12.mo.us
636-923-3688

2016-2017 VPMS 6th Grade Elective Course Selection

Student name: ________________________________

Elective Selection:
______ Band (please indicate if you have an instrument)
     _____ Students is using an instrument from Palen Music Company
     _____ Student owns an instrument
     _____ We would like for Mrs. Buscher to help locate an instrument

***OR***

______ Elective Wheel

Parent Name: ________________________________

Parent Phone or email: ________________________________
Appendix L

Reminder Postcard for 5th Grade Families to Attend 6th Grade Orientation

REMEMBER
6TH GRADE ORIENTATION NIGHT
TUESDAY, MAY 9TH, 2017 6:30PM
DON’T FORGET TO STOP BY THE PLEN MUSIC BOOTH TO CHECK OUT ALL THE BAND INSTRUMENTS!

Front

Valley Park Bands
1 Main Street
Valley Park, MO 63088
www.facebook.com/valleyparkbands

Hello 5th grade families,
I am looking forward to seeing you at the upcoming 6th grade orientation night! Please feel free to contact me ahead time with any questions regarding 6th grade band at sbuscher@vp.k12.mo.us or 636-923-3688.

Musically,
Stefanie Buscher

Back

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
2 Main Street
Valley Park, MO 63088
Appendix M

High School Plan/Flow Course Chart

---

### English (Required)
- 4 Credits Needed
  - 1: English 9 for honors
  - 1: English 10 for honors
  - 1: American Literature or honors
  - 0.5: Speech

### Social Studies (Required)
- 3 Credits Needed
  - 1: World History or honors
  - 0.5: American History or honors or
  - 0.5: American Government

### Math (Required)
- 3 Credits Needed
  - 1: Algebra I or honors
  - 1: Algebra II or honors
  - 1: Math (Non-required)

### Science (Required)
- 3 Credits Needed
  - 1: Physical Science or honors
  - 1: Biology or honors
  - 0.5: Oceanography

### Fine Art
- 1 Credit Needed
  - Band
  - Mixed Chorus
  - Show Choir
  - Drumlines
  - Guitar
  - Art I
  - Art II
  - Printmaking
  - Masks
  - Sculpture
  - Watercolor
  - Ceramics

### Physical Education
- 1 Credit Needed
  - Fitness and Wellness
  - Team activities

### Graduation Requirements
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### Sample Schedule Plan with Band 4 Years - 28 credits total

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Appendix N

Recruitment and Retention Posters
Appendix O

Thank You Post Card

**Front**

Dear Mr. Smith,
Thank you so very much for your generous donation to Valley Park Bands! The Yamaha flute has already been put to good use and we have a student that is thrilled to have the opportunity to play on such a great instrument!

Musically,
Stefanie Buscher

**Back**

Mr. Smith
2 Main Street
Valley Park, MO 63088
## VP Bands Recruitment and Retention Plan July 2016

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### Notes:
- Work on development of Music Technology Curriculum
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Notes:
- Finish music technology course curriculum
- Promote band events on Facebook Page
### VP Bands Recruitment and Retention Plan September 2016

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**Notes:**
- Promote band events on Facebook Page
- Allow HS students to vote on pep music
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<td>Contact Current Newspaper and district PR director with marching band contest results</td>
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<td>Allow HS and MS students to vote on winter concert music.</td>
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**Notes:**
- Promote band events on Facebook Page
### VP Bands Recruitment and Retention Plan December 2016

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<td>Provide names and a photo of conference honor band students to Current Newspaper and district PR director</td>
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**Notes:**
- Promote band events on Facebook Page
- Create music for middle school band students to participate in homecoming assembly.
- Get on committee for scheduling
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<td>Continue writing individual recruiting notes for 5th graders and retention notes for 6th – 11th grades</td>
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<td>Invite 5th graders to perform at Spring concert</td>
<td>Band Boosters Meeting</td>
<td>Provide large ensemble results to Current Newspaper and district PR director</td>
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<td>Provide names and a photo of solo and small ensemble students to Current Newspaper and district PR director</td>
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<td>Contact higher level administration if not conclusion is made from meetings with MS principal regarding amount of electives</td>
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<td>High school students vote on marching show music for following year</td>
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<td>Palen’s Music company at 6th grade orientation night</td>
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<td>Provide Plan/Flow chart to incoming freshmen as they make their schedules</td>
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<td>Palen’s Music booth at 5th grade talent show</td>
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<td>Assign Big Brothers/Big Sisters for next school year</td>
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# VP Bands Recruitment and Retention Plan June 2017

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<td>Order recruitment posters and post cards for following school year</td>
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- **Evaluate enrollment numbers for next semester and reflect on recruit/retention plan**
- **Develop recruitment video**
- **Order recruitment posters and post cards for following school year**
- **Band Boosters Meeting**
- **Notes:** Promote band events on Facebook Page