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Celebrating First-year Musicians

The secret to retaining first-year band and orchestra students is to have them perform within the first 6–9 weeks of instruction, according to a session by George Quinlan Jr., president at Quinlan & Fabish, and Marcia Neel, president at Music Education Consultants.

During a breakfast session titled, “What exactly is FPNDoc?” Quinlan and Neel explained the benefits of participating in a revived initiative called First Performance National Day of Celebration, which is to be held on the third Thursday of November.

“It is a specific day set aside to recognize and celebrate the achievements of beginning instrumental music students,” Quinlan said. “We need a celebration day much like [NAMM’s] Make Music Day for this important part: This is the day beginning students become performers. The transition from just a student to an actual performer takes place.”

FPNDOC GOALS

The goal of the beginner demonstration concert is to reduce beginner drop-out, provide short-range incentive goals, encourage communication with parents, strengthen administrative support, and most importantly, celebrate the musical accomplishments of the students.

“The reluctance to have a polished performance overrides the importance of how important this is to mom and dad,” Quinlan

said. “That’s what this is all about.”

“The biggest thing is to encourage retention,” Neel added. “If you wait and wait until their good enough, they’ll never perform. There’s no such thing as a perfect performance at this age group.”

THE MIDWEST CLINIC

To get the initiative off the ground, two Chicago schools were invited to perform at The Midwest Clinic in December 2017.

“It was an awesome concert,” Quinlan said.

Following the performance, a panel consisting of Neel, teachers and one of the superintendents explored ideas and asked questions on how to implement this program in their schools.

“One of my favorite questions was when we asked Nyle [Taylor] — the young teacher — if he was nervous about putting on the performance,” Quinlan said. “[Taylor] responded, ‘At first I was very nervous, but at a certain point, I realized what’s the worst that can happen? It’s going to sound like a beginning band concert.’”

“Hopefully, a bunch of teachers will embrace this initiative and begin to celebrate this First Performance National Day of Celebration,” Quinlan said.

The program officially launches in fall of 2018. A free first performance National Day of Celebration materials kit is available at musicachievementcouncil.org. MI



George Quinlan Jr.



Marcia Neel

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