

Why Students Really Quit Their Musical Instrument (and How Parents Can Prevent It)

By Tony Mazzochi - Posted on Feb 17, 2015 (www.musicparentsguide.com)



Every year almost 100% of public school students begin an instrument through their school's music program (if a program exists). One or two years later, more than 50% of students quit; unable to enjoy all that music education has to offer for the rest of their K-12 schooling, if not beyond.

During my time as an educator and administrator, parents and students have shared with me several reasons why the child quit their musical

instrument, including:

- The student is not musically talented (or at least thought they weren't).
- The student is too busy with other activities.
- The student hates practicing (or the parents grow weary of begging the child to practice).
- The student doesn't like their teacher.

...and there's more...

But the real reasons that students quit is often beyond their own understanding. It is up to teachers and parents to create "magical moments" during the year for students to want to continue on their instrument, especially during the early years of study, in order for the child to be successful and stay with their craft.

Here are reasons students quit, and ways to combat them:

1. **Parents don't treat music as important as other subjects.** The sad truth is that many non-music teachers and administrators do not find music equally as important as math or English language-arts — but parents must. Besides, you wouldn't let your child quit math, would you? Many kids would jump at that opportunity! Music is a core subject...period. The more parents treat it as such, the less students will quit.
2. **Students don't know how to get better.** Without the proper tools and practice habits to get better at *anything*, students will become frustrated and want to quit. It is the role of music

educators *and* parents to give students ownership over their learning. Teachers must teach students *why, how, where, and when* to practice, and parents must obtain *minimal* knowledge about how students learn music in order to properly support them at home.

3. **Parents and students think they aren't musically talented.** Sure, there are some kids who pick up an instrument and sound decent immediately, but they will hit a wall later and have to work hard to overcome it. Most everyone else won't sound that great at first. Playing a musical instrument is a craft that, if practiced correctly, is something that all children can find success in. As long as students know how to practice and that it needs to be done regularly, they will get better. Many parents who speak to me and claim that they aren't "musically talented" simply had bad teachers and little home support with music practice.
4. **Students discontinue playing over the summer.** Statistics show that students who do not read over the summer find themselves extremely behind once school starts — the same goes for playing an instrument! A year of musical instruction can quickly go down the tubes over the summer vacation if students do not find small ways to play once in a while. Picking up an instrument for the first time after a long layoff can be so frustrating that a student will not want to continue into the next school year.
5. **The instrument is in disrepair.** A worn down cork, poor working reed, or small dent can wreak havoc on a child's playing ability. Sometimes the malfunction is so subtle that the student thinks they are doing something wrong, and frustration mounts. Students, parents and teachers need to be aware of the basics of instrument maintenance and be on top of repairs when needed.
6. **Teachers don't create enough performing opportunities during the year.** The best way to motivate students musically is through performance. Weeks or even months on end of practicing without performing for an audience gets old very quick, and students will definitely quit. Teachers should schedule performances every six weeks or so in order for students to stay engaged and practicing. Parents can help by creating small performance opportunities at home — a Friday night dinner concert or a planned performance for visiting family members are great ideas.
7. **There is not enough "fun" music to practice.** It's very important for parents to be aware of music that interests their child, because it exists in sheet music form for download or purchase. It's important that all students play music that is aligned to their interests in addition to other pieces that are worked on in school.
8. **Other activities are pulling at the child.** Between art lessons, sports, karate, and other activities, parents grow weary of having "one more thing" to be on top of schedule-wise. Parents need to understand that the enduring social and psychological benefits of music are as enormous as those of sports — in the same and different ways. Also, if music is a class in school, then school obligations should be priorities. Budget time accordingly and children will have 10 minutes a day to practice an instrument, for sure.

Much like any worthwhile venture, practicing a musical instrument has its ups and downs. Kids need to be reminded to practice, of course — but they should not be constantly pushed, and they should not be completely left alone, either. It's a balancing act where sometimes the parents will need to give their child a break for a few days and other times will need to bribe them to practice — every child is different. Either way, *all* children are capable of thriving with a musical education, and students will indeed thank their parents *now and* later for not letting them quit.