

Evaluation and Planning

Asberry School of Music's mission statement reads as follows:

“I believe that music study is an essential component of a well-rounded education; my goals are to nurture the innate love for music that exists in students of all ages and all levels of ability, and to help every student with the desire to learn to develop musical proficiency.”

To make sure that I am meeting these goals, I ask several questions of the parents of continuing students on my *Registration Form* each year:

1. *Regarding your child's experience with piano lessons this year, in what areas were you most pleased?*
2. *What are your goals concerning your child's music education overall? How can I help you meet those goals?*
3. *Any other comments or concerns?*

I read the answers to these questions carefully and consider the answers thoughtfully. In this month's column, I am going to share a few of the insights I have received

Most parents responded favorably about their children's overall experience with piano lessons. Remarks such as “[my daughter] loves coming to piano lessons and “[my son] LOVES PIANO!!” were common. Perhaps my enthusiasm for music in general and the piano specifically is contagious! But arguably more important than what happens *during* the piano lesson is what happens *outside* the piano lesson. So I also appreciated comments like “[my daughter] seems to be playing more in her spare time; I don't have to ‘beg’ her to practice” and “[both of my children] have gone from dreading practice to loving it.” As I often tell my students, the more they practice, the easier it will be to play the piano; the easier it is to play the piano, the more fun it will be to practice; the more fun it is to practice, the more they will practice...and so the cycle goes.

Naturally, students are more inclined to practice when they have music that is fun to play, so one important aspect of my job is finding the right teaching pieces for everyone. Therefore, I was happy to hear from one parent who believes “[her daughter] is getting music that pushes her ability just enough without being too difficult to get her frustrated.” Students also tend to practice more when they have deadlines to meet, so I make sure to provide numerous goals for my students throughout the year. Another parent showed appreciation for this when said that I “challenged [her daughter] and provided many opportunities that ‘stretched’ her such as Festival, Ensemble Concert, Workshops, etc.” I point this out to encourage those of you who have been hesitant to involve your children in these events to consider them in the academic year ahead, as they generally prove to be both stimulating and rewarding for students. Similarly, the parent of a child in one of my

beginner groups expressed gratitude for “opportunities to participate in the music world,” and “giving [her son] the opportunity to perform in front of a group (strangers, too).” I hope that in the months ahead, many of you will seek out experiences in which your children can be both audience *and* performer. And if your child is involved in other performing arts, such as dance or drama, or he sings or plays another instrument, please let me know about any recitals or performances open to the public, and I will add the information to the *Events* page on the *Asberry School of Music* website.

Several parents asked if I felt their child was ready for a 45-minute private lesson. For most elementary and early intermediate students, a 30-minute lesson, well-spent, is sufficient. Later intermediate and advanced students, however, benefit from additional time as their pieces grow longer and their need to work on developing technique and music theory increases. For these students, I recommend 45-minute or even 60-minute lessons. I will be sure to let you know when I feel that it is time for your child to move into a longer lesson.

Finally, those of you who have more than one child enrolled in piano lessons will recognize the special challenges created by these situations. Sometimes, when an older child is more advanced because he has taken lessons for a longer time, a younger sibling feels that he will never be able to catch up. Other times, children of different ages begin lessons at the same time, and inevitably, one child (but not always the older child) progresses faster than the other. In either scenario, it can be difficult to encourage one sibling without discouraging the other. So I was pleased when a parent of three *Asberry School of Music* students said that she was grateful for “patient attention to individual needs and different style of each child.”

The feedback reveals that, in order for piano lessons to be positive experience, two things must happen. First, the teacher must provide a stimulating, supportive learning environment, specific goals and directions, and the very best teaching materials. But it doesn't end there. The student must then practice faithfully, complete extra work when it is assigned, and, as often as possible, take advantage of performance opportunities recommended by the teacher. Student success is the result of consistent industry on the part of both the teacher *and* the student. It is not easy to learn to play the piano. But the results are worth the effort!