



Talent Education Suzuki School

Jim Himes
119 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Himes,

I am writing to you to express my concerns about the recent interference by the FTC with regards to ethics guidelines published by the Music Teachers National Association, or MTNA. They apparently object to the ban on soliciting students who currently study with another teacher, claiming that it restrains trade.

I am writing to ask you to speak up against this interference in business protocol. As the owner and CEO of the Talent Education Suzuki School, LLC in Norwalk, CT, I can attest to the fact that this ethical guideline is necessary not only to protect teachers, but to protect consumers as well. This particular guideline has been acknowledged by ethical music teachers for as long as teachers have been teaching - it is traditionally unethical to directly steal another teacher's student. This doesn't mean that it is unethical to accept transfer students, only to verify that the previous teacher is being treated fairly and that there are legitimate reasons for changing teachers. Legitimate reasons include personality conflicts, lack of teacher availability, poor teaching, or the inability of the current teacher to carry the student to a new level of study. This process is not different from an athlete seeking a new coach. It is fine for the athlete to desire new guidance, but it is not acceptable for a coach to recruit players at will from other coaches.

A musical teaching relationship is developed over a great deal of time, and it is not uncommon for a student to study with one teacher for the majority of their training. It takes a long time to develop musical skill, and consistency in lessons and home practice is required for progress. A relationship of deep trust and mutual affection is developed, and teachers generally plan out programs and opportunities for their students a year or more in advance. Musical study tends to take place in community, with string students participating in regional orchestras and chamber ensembles as one teacher will not have the critical mass necessary for these important training opportunities.

The trust becomes critical when a teacher chooses to send their students to community events. They need to know that other teachers won't be poaching their best students, or it becomes too risky to share their students and provide a well rounded music education. In this way, the risk limits trade by limiting the ability of supporting businesses such as the Norwalk Youth Orchestra to attract quality students. For instance, the Suzuki Music School of Westport will not send string students to the Youth Orchestra because one of the orchestra's string coaches was poaching students during rehearsals. While the orchestra terminated their relationship with that teacher

when they learned of the breach of ethics, the damage had been done and the school does not trust the orchestra or support it's admirable mission.

In Fairfield County, MTNA has not had a strong presence for decades. Therefore, many private teachers do not abide by this ethic, and it has posed great difficulty for my small business. Frankly, a good teacher does not need to steal other teacher's students; their reputation will recruit for them. There is one violin teacher in particular (who is not a good teacher) who loves our most advanced students (who wouldn't?!) and tells them she can help them get to Juilliard. But she only has one slot and they need to start studying with her immediately. This is not fair to me or to my client. This ethical guideline also protects a generally uneducated consumer.

This teacher who enjoys poaching my students has absolutely no idea why my student sounds as good as they do, and generally thinks that the student is highly talented. However, my teaching abilities, the dedication of the parent, and the amount of time and effort invested by the student are all variables. Talent actually is the smallest part of it. But the parent usually does not have any musical training themselves, and they are unaware of the specifics involved in bringing their child to the high level they have achieved. So they are swayed by the flattery and feel that in order to be "good parents," they must follow this new teacher's advice. So they violate the relationship their child has with the current teacher and suddenly change without any respect paid to the previous teacher or the opportunity for the child to transition their loyalty and trust to the new teacher, or even maintain a relationship with the previous teacher who meant so much to them. By the time they realize the mistake they have made, the damage has been done. They have disrupted their child's studies, harmed their learning process and personal relationships, and often threatened the child's relationship with music and their perception of their ability and resulting musical dreams.

In professional sports, the recruiting of athletes is highly regulated. From the NCAA website:

NCAA member schools have adopted rules to create an equitable recruiting environment that promotes student-athlete well-being. The rules define who may be involved in the recruiting process, when recruiting may occur and the conditions under which recruiting may be conducted. Recruiting rules seek, as much as possible, to control intrusions into the lives of student-athletes.

The NCAA defines recruiting as "any solicitation of prospective student-athletes or their parents by an institutional staff member or by a representative of the institution's athletics interests for the purpose of securing a prospective student-athlete's enrollment and ultimate participation in the institution's intercollegiate athletics program."

The point of this is obviously to protect students and their families from predatory coaches and educational institutions. Music teachers and their clients deserve the same protection and consideration. I am asking that the FTC devote their time and attention to other, more troubling matters, and leave the music education industry to regulate itself.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter and can be reached at 203.956.6708 or admin@musicattess.com.

Warm Regards,

Becki Christopherson, CEO
Talent Education Suzuki School
www.musicattess.com