

In a June group chat, members of the TAJE Executive Board and Regional Reps discussed best how they motivated and retained students. Their suggestions were so valuable, we decided they should be shared. Executive director Cindy Todd input all of their quotes into Google Gemini, asking for a concise list. Here – with a bit of editing – are the results.

Motivating Students

Offer Incentives:

- Provide academic credit (e.g., 5.0 credit for yearbook).
- Offer honor cords and letter jackets.
- Promote leadership opportunities, stressing that colleges value them.
- Emphasize that involvement looks good on college applications and resumes and can lead to personalized recommendation letters.
- Highlight that extracurricular involvement, like journalism, helps students stand out to college admissions, even more than just taking AP classes.
- Showcase where alumni go after high school (colleges, scholarships).
- Consider CTE certification and articulation agreements with local colleges.
- Mention Quill & Scroll membership and honors.

Showcase Impact & Belonging:

- Remind students they can shape the school's memory for future generations through yearbook.
- Emphasize that journalism offers a place for students who aren't naturally athletic, allowing them to be part of the action by reporting and taking photos and videos.
- Get students excited about seeing their work published.
- Provide a place of belonging for all. Help everyone find their niche.

Promote the Program:

- Actively recruit parents by discussing the value and how colleges weigh school involvement.
- Promote class achievements and awards.
- Recruit students who are genuinely interested in the content.
- Have current students recruit peers in other classes and friend groups; they can be excellent "salesmen."
- Recruit potential staffers at all sorts of venues.
- Set up recruitment booths at middle school fairs with examples of work, cameras, and even athlete members wearing team shirts to attract diverse interests.
- Use a "stalker" approach for talent, relentlessly pursuing students with potential.

Retaining Students

Manage Deadlines Effectively:

- Implement mini-deadlines and check-ins.
- Structure projects so students focus on one deadline for shorter periods (e.g., two-and-a-half weeks).
- Connect deadlines to grades directly. Consider a content grade and a separate, strict deadline grade.
- Implement a "three-strikes" system for missing major deadlines.
- Have an outside person, like a yearbook representative, explain the importance and consequences of deadlines.
- Foster editor buy-in and peer pressure regarding deadlines.
- Focus on getting students hyped up about getting published.
- Emphasize that meeting deadlines is a valuable skill for students.

Foster Engagement & Growth:

- Have high school staff work with junior high/middle school students to build interest early.
- Make the first day personable for new students and allow veteran members to demonstrate behind-the-scenes work.
- Allow new students to assist staff members with pages once they've mastered basic skills.
- Provide ample leadership roles, noting there isn't a limited amount in journalism compared to other programs.
- Recognize that students often feel a strong sense of belonging, which motivates them to work harder.

