**Auditions**

Casting is one of the key responsibilities of a director. Good casting decisions can reward you with a motivated company who works as a team through rehearsals to deliver a wonderful performance. Bad casting decisions can make rehearsals difficult. There's a fine line between challenging a student with a role that is slightly beyond his/her current skill level and overwhelming a child who is not ready for such a growth opportunity. The practices below will help you determine that line and ensure a successful audition and rehearsal process.

**Audition Committee:** An audition committee usually consists of the show's director and assistant director (a music director and choreographer will be needed for a musical), who will evaluate acting (singing and dancing abilities in a musical). To broaden support for your production, consider including an additional colleague, such as a physical education teacher, an assistant principal, a board member or a donor. Having a committee projects a fair and transparent audition process to your community, which is important for the success of your production. Share your artistic vision and production expectations with your committee and supply them with copies of the script, cast descriptions and audition forms (see resources section) in advance of auditions. Listen carefully to your colleagues throughout the process, and take their insights and opinions into consideration as you prepare to make the final casting decisions for your production.

**Schedule Auditions:** Coordinate your auditions with school and community calendars to maximize access for potential performers. You'll want to schedule enough sessions to see all the kids once and some kids again (callbacks). Once you settle on dates and times, advertise auditions via flyers, homeroom announcements, ads in the local paper, and radio public service announcements. Putting effort into audition publicity gets more students to show up, offers you more casting choices, improves the quality of your production, and creates excitement about the show far in advance of performances!

**RECRUTING ACTORS**

Get the word out: there's a role for everyone in the theater! Take time to build your theater program through active recruitment. Here are a few ideas:

• Have your students perform a scene from last year's production at an assembly, at the mall, or any place kids gather with their parents. Then hand out flyers announcing your auditions for this year's show.

• Hold a pre-audition workshop where you teach everyone a scene. This is a great way to introduce kids to the audition process without all the pressure of an actual audition.

• Offer a backstage tour and a technical theater workshop, then recruit your stage crew from the kids who light up!

• There's nothing like a personal invitation. Simply approaching a student and saying "I really think you'd have a great time in our upcoming play — won't you audition?" can really make a difference.

**Prepare for Auditions:** Audition sides are excerpts of dialogue from the show that you can use to gauge an auditionee's personality and reading/performing abilities. You may provide these in advance or have students read "cold."

**For a musical:** Select two or three songs from the show that hopefuls can sing for their audition. Have the show's CDs and a player at hand or a tuned piano so your music director (or a pianist) can play from the Piano/Vocal Score. Depending on their experience, you may also ask auditionees to prepare 16 measures (about 45 seconds) from an upbeat Broadway song of their choice. Be sure your accompanist has "Happy Birthday" on hand for kids who may not have had the opportunity to prepare a song.

Prepare a small section of choreography to teach to your auditionees so that you can assess their movement skills.

**Keep Auditions Positive:** Ensure that your audition space is clean, calm and organized. A relaxed atmosphere is vital because auditioning can be scary at any age, and you want this to be a positive experience for young performers especially. Your stage manager should help to keep things moving on schedule. Make sure every child has the same amount of time to sing, act and dance. Fairness is key. After auditions, use the audition forms to evaluate each performer. Compare notes with your committee and identify at least two candidates for each role.

**Hold Group Callbacks:** Invite promising actors to a second round of auditions, known as "callbacks." Encourage students to research potential roles to improve the quality of their auditions. If auditionees do not read (and sing) for specific characters at your initial auditions, they can do so at callbacks.

It is helpful at this stage to audition those called back as a group so you can get a sense of how everyone works together. (Group chemistry is just as important as individual talent!) This also allows kids to experience more of the process, witness their peers, and self-evaluate along the way. The actors capable of performing the principal roles will usually be clear - not only to you but to the other kids auditioning as well.

**Cast Your Show with Confidence:** The first step to successfully casting your production is presenting a positive attitude to your potential cast during the audition process. Emphasize the importance of each role in the production; downplay the importance of "principals" or "leads." This show is designed for an ensemble - so every part is essential. Make it a goal to find a role or activity for everyone who is interested in participating. After callbacks, spend time with your committee ( to make sure you cast students in the best roles for them and for the production as a whole. Once you have made your casting decisions, be confident sharing your choices. Encourage your students to take full ownership of whichever role they play, on stage or off.