

Student Retention Report

Rapport Building, New-Student Onboarding, and the Goals-Driven Renewal Process

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Executive Summary

Every retention system in this call collapses into two components: relationship (rapport) and goals (goal-setting toward a long-term outcome). Members without a long-term commitment treat enrollment like a trial season — any small friction (confusion, a scheduling conflict, a personality clash) becomes a reason to quit. Members with both a strong personal bond to the school and a clearly visualized long-term goal absorb that same friction without dropping out.

The single highest-leverage principle in the call is this: retention is won or lost in the first two months, not at the six-month or one-year mark. Waiting to renew a student until they are a purple or green belt does not protect against dropout — it manufactures it. Schools that renew early (at or before the first belt) see dropout rates a full order of magnitude lower than schools that wait.

Three systems have to run in parallel and never break: (1) a scheduled, no-exceptions two-week progress check booked the moment someone enrolls; (2) a rotating weekly curriculum block dedicated to goal-setting and visualization that every basic student cycles through regardless of enrollment date; and (3) an ID-card-driven attendance and triage system that guarantees no student's disengagement goes unnoticed.

1. The Two-Pillar Retention Framework

Before any tactic, the call anchors on a simple diagnostic model for why students actually stay or leave.

Pillar One: Relationship / Rapport

If a student and their family don't have a real relationship with the instructor and the school community, they are essentially "dropping in" the way someone drops into a fitness class — no loyalty, no bond, easy to stop attending at any time. Rapport has to be built deliberately, the same way you'd build it with any new acquaintance.

Pillar Two: Goals / Goal-Setting

A student without a long-term goal ("train to black belt and beyond") is mentally enrolled the way someone signs up for a soccer season — a temporary trial, not a commitment. The moment something gets difficult or confusing, there's no larger goal holding them in place, so they leave. A student who has visualized the outcome, written it down, and repeated that goal-setting process regularly will absorb the same friction without it threatening their enrollment.

"If somebody is enrolled in the school... and they don't set a long-term goal to be a black belt and beyond, then they're going to drop out. Because guess what — somewhere along the line, something's going to be difficult." — Stephen Oliver

2. The Value of Rapport Building

Rapport isn't a soft add-on to retention — it is one of exactly two variables that determine whether a student stays. The call treats it as a deliberate, repeatable process, not a personality trait some instructors happen to have.

Build rapport the way you'd build it with any new acquaintance

The model given is meeting someone in line or at a social event: ask open-ended questions, find out where they're from, where they went to school, what they do for work, what they like and don't like about it. The more of those questions asked of both the parent and the child, the more genuine detail is gathered — and the more that detail is remembered and acted on.

- Ask open-ended questions of both parent and child, not just enrollment logistics.
- Find out what the parents do for a living, their background, and their interests.
- Remember specific personal details (a pending promotion, a graduation date) and follow up at the right time — a card, flowers, a celebratory banner in the school.
- Share those details with the rest of the staff so the whole team, not just one instructor, can reference them.

Introduce students and families to each other deliberately

The strongest analogy in the call: onboarding a new student should feel like welcoming a new in-law into an extended family. They don't know anyone yet, so the school has to actively introduce them — pointing out that two families live in the same neighborhood, work in the same field, or have kids at the same school, and using those commonalities to spark real friendships.

“Imagine you have a son or daughter that's getting married and it's a new member of the family and they don't know anybody in the extended family. So you're explaining who people are and you're introducing them. That's the way a new student should be onboarded.” — Stephen Oliver

Manufacture the two feelings that already exist naturally in advanced classes

Watch any black-belt or brown-belt class: students show up largely because they don't want to disappoint the

"You always want to make every step proactive. Never make it reactive. Never be waiting for them to do something before you move to the next step." — Stephen Oliver

- 1 Not excited/engaged yet — an instructor-side gap. The instructor's job is to build enough excitement that the family wants to renew; this is never blamed on the student's enthusiasm level.
- 2 A defined logistical issue (e.g., relocating) — if open-ended, find a way to keep them committed and moving forward; if it has a firm end date, acknowledge it and don't force a renewal conversation.
- 3 A financial constraint — get to the specific number or timing issue and solve it directly: split payments, a temporary adjustment, or a lower-tier fallback program (never a routinely offered scholarship).

In every case, the student leaves the conversation with a new follow-up appointment already booked — the two-week cycle simply continues until they either renew or genuinely exit.

Renew early — the biggest single retention lever in the whole call

The clearest, most quantified point in the discussion: renewing students as early as possible (ideally at or before the first belt) has a dramatically bigger impact on dropout than any save-the-sale conversation held later. Waiting until purple or green belt to worry about a renewal doesn't protect the student from leaving — it has already made them likely to leave.

Renewal Milestone	Minimum Acceptable Rate
Renewed before 1st belt test	50% of all enrollments
Renewed before 2nd belt test (cumulative)	75% of all enrollments
Not renewed by 2nd belt test	Assume they will not renew — re-engage aggressively or accept the loss

“They’re going to drop out because you didn’t renew them when they were white belts. You created a dropout yourself by not renewing them at white belt.” — Stephen Oliver

A pricing mechanism reinforces the urgency without manufacturing false pressure: tuition at the entry/white-belt level is discounted relative to the standard ongoing renewal rate, and that discount window closes at the first belt test. Staff are coached to frame this honestly as protecting the family from an unnecessary cost increase, not as a countdown gimmick.

Sell outcomes and transformation, never features or a pitch

Describing curriculum content is close to irrelevant to a renewal decision. What actually moves families is the visible transformation — changes in the child's attitude, discipline, manners, and behavior at home — because that's the only “quality” a parent can actually judge. The renewal conversation should be framed the same way a school counselor discusses a multi-year academic commitment: is this a process you're genuinely committed to following through on, not a limited-time offer.

“You’re selling from the floor. You’re not selling from the office... The parent doesn’t know ‘oh, he can be a good black belt, he has a good sidekick.’ What they look at is: how has it changed his attitude? How has it changed his character?” — Jeff Smith

5. Supporting Systems That Make the Process Reliable

None of the above works as a one-time initiative — it depends on a small set of always-on operational habits.

Dated ID cards

Every attendance mark must include the actual date, not just a checkmark — otherwise ten check marks could represent one focused month or a scattered three months, and staff can't tell the difference at a glance.

Monday/Tuesday missed-class follow-up

Every student who misses their scheduled class is contacted (by a real person, not only text/email) by the following Tuesday, with a makeup class offered on the spot. This is framed explicitly as an emotional signal — a human noticing and caring — not just a scheduling fix.

Per-class staff triage

Before each class, whoever is running retention should identify, out loud, three groups for that session: (1) students at risk of not returning without extra attention today, (2) students due for recognition/stripes, and (3) students who should be spotlighted because they're being moved toward renewal. This turns retention into an active, class-by-class discipline rather than a monthly report review.

Weekly reporting

The percentage of basic students with a booked future appointment is tracked and reported twice weekly (Monday and Thursday) as a hard operational number, the same way lead and enrollment counts are tracked — because an unscheduled student is the leading indicator of a future dropout.

6. Implementation Checklist

A practical starting sequence for a school implementing (or tightening) this system:

- 1 Audit current basics: what percentage have a future appointment on the books right now? Fix any gaps immediately.
- 2 Add the two-week progress check as a mandatory, no-exception step at the end of every enrollment conference — booked before the student leaves the building.
- 3 Move to a signed/initialed Policies & Procedures sheet that includes the appointment as one of the initialed line items.
- 4 Build or confirm a rotating weekly curriculum block dedicated to goal-setting and visualization for all basic students.
- 5 Introduce (or reintroduce) vision sheets and goal-setting sheets as a standard part of the enrollment and renewal-prep process.
- 6 Reschedule progress-check appointments away from peak enrollment/renewal class times.
- 7 Switch ID cards to dated attendance tracking if they aren't already.
- 8 Build the per-class staff triage habit: at-risk students, stripe-ready students, renewal-spotlight students — identified before every class.
- 9 Train staff on the three-objection framework (excitement, logistics, finances) so “not right now” always gets diagnosed, never accepted at face value.
- 10 Add the 100%-appointments-booked stat to your existing Monday/Thursday numbers reporting.