

The Price Is Right

Veteran studio owners share their hard-earned secrets for determining class fees.

BY JEN JONES



IS there a science to setting class fees? To help you decide the right balance for your studio, *DT* approached several studio owners from around the country to discover there is a method to the madness: rates, payment schedules, methods of payment and more!



Suzanne Blake Gerety
Kathy Blake Dance Studios
Amherst, NH

With approximately 900 students enrolled, Kathy Blake Dance Studios has fashioned itself after a performing arts school format with a 10-month “school year” from September to June. Families make 10 monthly payments in cash, credit card or check, of \$52–\$58 based on the number of class hours dancers opt to take (from half-hour to one-and-a-half-hour increments). For instance, a student enrolled in a half-hour weekly jazz class pays \$52 monthly, whereas a student pays \$56 monthly for a one-hour weekly hip-hop class. A 10 percent discount is given for each additional class, and an unlimited “Dance Pass” is \$190/month. “Once you hit four classes, it makes more sense financially to flip into the Dance

Pass,” says Vice President Suzanne Blake Gerety.

Overall, the monthly system has been a big hit. “When you break your tuition down into smaller payments for people, it can feel more manageable and cut down on sticker shock,” she says. “Going to a 10-month model has also made a huge difference in our own consistency of cash flow.”

Another positive development has been the introduction of parent discounts for the studio’s adult classes. “We give 50 percent off tuition for parents to take any class they want, which has really helped enrollment and retention,” says Gerety. “When parents are excited about taking dance classes, they’re less likely to take their kids to another studio.”



Janet Gray
Janet Gray Studios
Salt Lake City, UT

With the Salt Lake City area populated with professional dancers who grace everything from the Disney screen to the stage, Janet Gray sets her rates on par with other major metropolitan studios. “I continually check the drop-in class rates at Chicago Human Rhythm Project, Ailey Extension and L.A.’s EDGE Performing Arts Center

and Debbie Reynolds Studio,” says Gray, who charges \$15/single class. “Instead of committing to a huge dance card that will expire in 30 days, students can pay as they go to accommodate their busy schedules.”

She also offers incentives for those of her 390 students who take multiple classes: \$12 each for 2 to 11 classes per month or \$10 each for 12 or more classes. To take advantage of the lower rates, fees must be paid by the seventh of each month. Only cash and personal checks are accepted, which helps Gray keep costs down.



Dalana Moore
Encore Performance Company
Vestavia Hills, AL

Owner Dalana Moore offers a multifamily member discount at Encore. The first dancer pays \$45 monthly per class hour, and each additional sibling receives half off tuition. Families can also take advantage of a five percent discount for paying the full year’s tuition in advance. And to be fair to all students, individual dancers who don’t have siblings taking classes pay \$30 per class hour rates when they enroll in three or more classes.

Moore charges first and last month’s

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tuition upon first enrollment. "Even though it is a chunk of money, parents usually prefer to pay it in the beginning than have to add it on top of recital fees at the end of the season," she says.

Moore uses Studio Director software for an online approach to billing and registration. Statements are e-mailed the first week of the month, and parents can check their balances online at any time. "It has saved us so much time in the office," she says.



Julia Bubalo
Ozark Dance
Academy
Ozark, MO

Julia Bubalo sets class fees by analyzing her expenses and dividing by the projected number of students. (She also charges a \$10 registration fee and a \$50 performance fee for those who dance in the annual recital.) With an enrollment of about 80 students, she also offers multiple-class and multifamily member discounts: "My structure is that the more you dance, the less per class," she says. "We want to encourage people to try other styles or go ahead and take that second class."

Like Gerety and Moore, Bubalo charges students a monthly fee based on how many class hours per week are spent at the studio. Fees range from \$30 to \$150, with increments from half-hour classes to six hours per week. Those on the competition team pay an extra \$20 monthly. When summer rolls around, Bubalo's approach to pricing changes, with dancers purchasing dance cards in increments of 5, 10 or 20 classes to be used over several months. "If kids are in the pool, their parents don't have to drag them out because they're missing dance class," says Bubalo. "It works well for us and adds an element of flexibility." **DT**

A former hip-hop, dance fitness and cheerleading instructor, Jen Jones is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.

Photo by Ruth Barnes, courtesy of Julia Bubalo