



Pennfield Bands

Beginning Band 2008-2009

BEGINNING BAND AT PENNFIELD

A Guide For Parents

Each year, as fifth grade band begins at Pennfield, we are flooded with questions from parents concerning every aspect of the beginning band program. Although this booklet is not in any way intended as a replacement for in-person contact with parents, we hope that it answers some of the questions that are asked most often. Please feel free to contact one of the band directors in person if you have questions that are not covered here-- we would be more than happy to assist you.

Testing and Fitting for Instruments

The decision concerning which student should play which instrument depends on four factors:

1. The physical suitability of the student for the specific instrument. (Structure of mouth and teeth, lip size, hand size, etc.)
2. The student's natural abilities in pitch discrimination and rhythmic recognition.
3. The wishes of the student and his/her family.
4. The balanced instrumentation of the band as a whole.

The process of choosing individual instruments, which takes place during the first three weeks of school, consists of three steps:

Step One—Last year we visited each 4th grade class and administered a short test designed to measure each student's level of musical "hearing ability." This is not a test that your student can study for or fail, and it is used only as a guide for instrument selection. At this time we also give the students some basic information on the different instruments and ask them to think about three instruments (besides percussion) that they might like to try. The instruments they may choose from are the *flute, clarinet, cornet (trumpet), trombone, baritone, and tuba*.

Step Two-- We meet with each student individually to allow him/her to try any of the wind instruments used in the band. We begin with the three instruments that the student has chosen (as discussed in Step One above). If one of these is not satisfactory, the student may try any of the others as well. At this point we discuss the student's success with each instrument and recommend the wind instrument that we feel would be most appropriate.

Step Three-- We allow all students interested in playing percussion to take a short test in which rhythms are clapped back to the teacher. Piano experience is also very helpful in playing percussion. The students selected (usually six or seven) play percussion; the others play their previously-chosen wind instrument.

After instrument fitting and percussion testing are completed, we send home a letter which indicates the instrument that we recommend for your student. An enclosed response form allows you to indicate whether or not you wish for your child to participate, and which option you wish to pursue for purchasing an instrument.

IMPORTANT: We require every student (with his/her parents) who chooses to participate in band to commit to staying in the class through the first concert on January 29. At that point, the parent and student will be given one week to make a decision regarding continued participation. *After the one-week "window" students will continue with band for the remainder of the school year.*

Instrument Purchase / Rental

1. New Instruments - - Purchase or rental of a new instrument from a music store is the most popular option for obtaining an instrument. Most of the local music stores sell band instruments on a "rent-to-own" basis to beginning students. If you choose not to have your student continue with band after the first concert in January, you may return the instrument without incurring any further cost. If you are not sure whether your student will continue with band, it may be wise to choose this option at the start.

Please consult the list included later in this booklet for the brands and models of instrument that we recommend. Our recommendations balance quality with price. There are a number of inexpensive instruments available that are of poor quality and will not last. It is important that you purchase a quality instrument-- the extra money spent now will save on repairs later, and it is difficult for your student to make satisfactory progress if the instrument is away for repairs.

2. Used Instruments - - The purchase of a used instrument can be the least expensive option for obtaining an instrument for your student. This option can also be the least risky from a financial standpoint, because value has already depreciated considerably from when the instrument was new. Used instruments are available from a number of sources. Friends and relatives, rummage sales, newspaper ads, and pawn shops are all common sources for used instruments. Whatever the source for your used instrument, we ask that you arrange for one of the band directors to inspect the instrument before you buy it. We can help you to determine if you are getting a good value, and the approximate cost of any repairs or additional parts needed.

3. School Instruments - - Baritones and tubas are very expensive instruments and we do not require the student to purchase them. If your student is selected to play the baritone or tuba we will supply the instrument and he or she will only need to supply a mouthpiece and valve oil. Baritone players will need to purchase a **Bach 6 1/2 AL mouthpiece**. Tuba players will need to purchase a **Conn Helleberg 7B**. The student will be responsible for keeping the school instrument clean and well-maintained. The student and parents assume responsibility for any damage to the instrument beyond normal wear.

Band Books

We will be using one band book for the entire year, entitled **Essential Elements 2000 (Book One)**. These books are available at Masteller Music in Battle Creek, or at most other music stores, or on-line. The cost is around \$8.00. Separate books are published for each instrument, so be sure to buy the proper book for the instrument your student will be playing.

Band Schedule

Band classes for students who choose to participate will begin on Monday, October 8. Classes are held from 2:15 pm to 3 pm Monday thru Friday. Although all band students attend class on the same days, students will normally be divided into groups of similar instruments. Special full band rehearsals may be scheduled just prior to each concert.

Band Concert Information

This year the fifth grade band will perform concerts on **January 29** and **May 21**. These concerts represent a goal that the students work toward and can be a tremendous source of pride and positive motivation. Concerts are required as a part of participation in the band program--students are required to attend. **Unexcused absence from a band concert will result in a grade reduction of two full letter grades.** Decisions concerning excused absences will be made at the discretion of the directors, in consultation with administrators if necessary. Please realize that the further ahead of the concert that we are informed of a possible attendance conflict, the easier it is for us to minimize the impact of the absence on the performance of the rest of the band.

Both of the concerts will be at 7:00 p.m. in the Pennfield Auditorium (students are generally asked to come to the school thirty minutes before the concert). Please look at your family calendar now and try to ensure that scheduling conflicts can be resolved well in advance of the scheduled concert date. Sports practices are not an excused absence. We are willing to help arrange transportation for the student if there is any difficulty. Students are required, as part of their performance grade, to stay for the entire concert, which will be about an hour.

In keeping with the pride and self-respect we are seeking to promote among the band students, concert dress should be very nice. Students should **not** wear jeans, shorts, tennis shoes, or tops with printed messages or logos if at all possible. In general, it helps to think about dressing as if the student were going to church or attending a wedding.

Grading Information for Parents

Students are given letter grades for band during the second, third, and fourth marking periods. Our grading system is designed mainly to reward students for effort and self-improvement. Any student, regardless of talent or musical background, should be able to earn a satisfactory grade.

The grading system is based on a point system. Point totals are updated weekly, and printouts of your student's grade are available at any point in the marking period from the Parent Connect portion of Zangle. The overall grade is divided into three categories:

Weekly Practice Average (15 percent)

Each week your student will be required to turn in a practice card, signed by a parent, that states the amount of time spent practicing at home that week. Blank cards are available in both the band room and each fifth grade classroom, and the cards are due each Friday. There is a three-day grace period to turn in the cards after they are due- cards turned in later than Wednesday after the due date will not be accepted.

The minimum practice requirement per week is 75 minutes, and the practice portion of the grade is simply the average of all of the weekly practice cards. If a student averages more than 75 minutes per week, the extra points are still recorded as part of the grade and can make up for points lost in other categories.

A NOTE ABOUT PRACTICE

We believe that consistent practice is the most important aspect of participation in band, and it is therefore the most important part of the grading policy. A good practice average not only earns more points, but helps a student to be more prepared for class and perform better on quizzes (positive factors in the other two grading categories). Practice is the key to becoming a better musician... and to earning a better grade!

Quiz Scores (15 percent)

This grading category is an average of the grades your student earns on quizzes given during the marking period. A quiz may consist of written material or a short excerpt to be performed during class. Quizzes will be assigned at least one class day in advance- there are no “pop” quizzes.

Daily Participation (50 percent)

This portion of the grade is based on your student’s participation during class and includes preparation of the material assigned and having a pencil and music for each rehearsal. Other factors include starting and stopping with the conductor and responsiveness to musical direction.

Concert Performance (20 percent)

The student is graded on the overall aspects of the concert, including dress, promptness, stage behavior, and their behavior as an audience member.

Commonly Asked Questions . . .

Here are some of the questions that we hear many times each year as we begin with 5th graders:

1. *Will my student run into conflicts between band and sports?*

In the fifth and sixth grades, band is mostly an in-school activity, and conflicts are few. At the middle school and high school levels, we do all that we can in our scheduling to avoid conflicts. If conflicts do occur, we try to be accommodating in helping to resolve them. Many of our best band students are also some of the best athletes in the school.

2. *How much will my student have to practice each day?*

The consistency and frequency of practice are much more important than the total time spent each day. We require 75 minutes per week, which breaks down to 15 minutes per school day. However, it is most important that the student practice **every day**, even if that only means five or ten minutes on some busy days. Learning to play an instrument involves training delicate muscles to do new things, and this is best achieved with consistent daily practice.

3. *What is the difference between a trumpet and a cornet?*

The cornet and the trumpet are very much the same, with some subtle differences in sound and playing technique. They are very commonly referred to as the same instrument. We strongly recommend that beginners start with the cornet, but we permit students to use either instrument in the fifth grade band.

4. *How will I be informed of my student's progress?*

Your student will receive a grade for band on his/her report card each marking period. In addition, we recommend the Parent Connect feature of Pennfield Schools Zangle site.

5. *Can my student play an instrument that is not listed here?*

The instruments included in the fifth grade band are the flute, clarinet, cornet, trombone, baritone, tuba, and percussion. The oboe, bassoon, saxophone, and F horn are all instruments that we use in bands at higher grade levels. We select students to switch to these special instruments in the spring of the fifth grade year based on performance ability, effort, and responsibility shown during the first year. Saxophone, bassoon, and oboe players are usually selected from the clarinet and flute sections.

Recommended Instruments

Although we do not require band students to buy any specific brand or model of instrument, the instruments listed below are those that we feel offer the best value for the money. In most cases they are not the least expensive instruments available, but offer a better long-term value when repair costs are taken into account.

<u>Instrument</u>	<u>Brand / Model</u>	<u>Mouthpiece</u>	<u>Accessories</u>
Flute	Armstrong 103	NA	NA
	Flute players please note: This is an "open-hole" model flute. We prefer that you purchase an "open-hole" model if possible.		
Clarinet	Yamaha 34 (wood) Selmer 301 (plastic)	Vandoren B45 (or equiv.)	Swab, Cork Grease
Cornet	Yamaha YCR2330	Bach 11E4 or 7C	Valve Oil

Cornet players please note: The Yamaha 2330 is a "shepherd's crook" model instrument that is more compact and has what we believe to be a more pleasing sound. If the 2330 is not available, the 2320 "standard" model is also acceptable.

Trombone	Yamaha YSL354	Bach 6 1/2 AL (or equiv.)	Liquid Slide Cream or Oil
Percussion	Ludwig (Soft Case) Beginning Perc. Kit	BELL MALLETS, DRUM STICKS Please Note: Drum sticks must be either Vic Firth SD1 or a size 2B in another quality brand.	

BAND STAFF

Mr. Blake Driver.....Director of Bands
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IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

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