

My Student is in Band. Now what??

Learning how to play an instrument is an exciting time in a child's life. It is a brand new experience and the possibilities of this endeavor are infinite. There are as many reasons why a student has an interest in starting as there are students! One aspect is the same for all: They need the support of those around them to help them succeed. Parents surely want to help their sons and daughters be successful in everything they do, but the idea of helping their children learn an instrument can be a bit unsettling, especially if they did not have music instruction themselves. We are aware that for many of you band is completely foreign and you may feel a bit lost. This information should give you some tools to help you understand what your student is learning and what he/she is trying to achieve, and also give you ways to be involved!

Remember this important point: Learning an instrument and learning to read music notation are skills. When practiced consistently, these skills can lead to a lifetime of enjoyment. The topic of talent comes up frequently when talking to parents and students. As in anything, skills learned can lead to amazing accomplishments: Michael Jordan in basketball for example. He had the skills and that extra something. His accomplishments don't take away from me having fun shooting some "hoops". Likewise, don't set expectations too low either. With consistent practice of the proper skills, students will start sounding great in a short period of time. This is an amazing activity and with your support, every student can flourish!

First, understand that the process of learning music is very similar to learning language. Right now they are in their musical "babble" stage, like when they were first learning to talk. They are making sounds and noises and some of them sound like the right notes, like when they first said "mama" and "dada". And some of them sound like odd noises and screeches, like when they wailed and screamed just to experiment with their voices. Things will only get better from here and you'll be amazed at how fast they progress, especially with encouragement and support from you!

Second, remember that the words you speak are very powerful and can influence their attitude greatly. Please make sure you are encouraging to your student, even if the sounds they're making aren't always beautiful. If playing an instrument were easy, everyone would do it. Show an interest in your child's music study and offer encouragement. Just as you ask your child questions about the school day, include band. Try "What did you learn?" "Show me what you learned." "Teach me how to get the sound on the instrument.". Even if the sounds your hear are not pleasant, be encouraging. How many times have you heard this at a sporting event: "Good try. You will get it next time." Same goes for music, it's just noisier!

Lastly, know that we will teach your student everything he/she needs to know. If you feel like your student needs some extra help because they are practicing at home regularly but just aren't getting it, please contact a director and we'll be happy to set up a time to help out.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What is my student expected to do during home practice?

At first students should sing their songs while tapping their foot and then play while tapping their foot. We will be focusing on making good sounds and getting comfortable with the instrument before we add the element of reading music. Later when books come home, students should listen daily to their Home CD, count and sing their songs before playing them, and play songs by ear daily. Students will always have an assignment to be working on at home. If your student tells you regularly that there is no band assignment, please contact us so we can decide how best to communicate the daily assignment with you.

What can I do to help my student practice at home?

The most important thing you can do is be encouraging! Help your child establish a daily, uninterrupted practice time (15-20 minutes, 5 days a week) and a dedicated space for practicing.

Understand that correct practice involves a high level of concentration. Practice should be done daily, just like other homework. It is particularly important to practice on the days we have band so your student can work on everything while it is fresh in his/her mind. Regular practice at home is vital to your student's success. The amount of time may vary and the practice schedule need not be rigid, but your child has little chance of success if he/she does not play their instrument 5 days a week. The quality of practice time is much more important than the amount of practice time. Have home concerts every so often. Holidays can be a great time for this. Let all the family members celebrate in this endeavor and make it a family affair! Make a video recording of the budding star.

Once books come home, make sure your student has access to the recordings on the CD. Sit down and listen to some of the recordings with your student and go over the lines in the book. Have your student teach you what we do in class, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you can learn too! Don't write down note names or try and write things to help your student "remember". While this gets quick results, it delays the musical development. And be sure your child understands that it is alright to make mistakes. Mistakes are to be expected as your student develops as a musician.

My student wants to quit. What should I do?

When learning something new, almost every child goes through a period of time when she feels like quitting. Be prepared for this, as it is normal! You have invested time, effort, and money because you believe this is worthwhile for your child. Encouragement and perseverance are needed. After all, you taught your child through perseverance to brush his/her teeth each night, even when he/she didn't feel like it, because you knew that someday he/she would recognize the value of it and appreciate your efforts. Please contact a band director if your student expresses negative feelings about their instrument. We are more than happy to discuss what is happening at school, talk about home practice, and come together to find a plan to ensure your student's success! Band is a commitment and we want to make sure it is the best year possible! Establish an attitude of perseverance. We all have "ups and downs." It's a marathon, not a sprint.

What if my child wants to switch instruments?

We have tried to match each student with his/her preferred instrument combined with their personal preference. Because of our limited time in 5th grade band, switching during the year isn't an option, but please let us know about the situation as there are options for switching at the end of the year for students with legitimate issues.

Something is wrong or broken on the instrument. Should I fix it?

Absolutely not!! Parents who are trying to be helpful can unintentionally make things worse. Just send the instrument back to school and have a band director look at it. Mouthpieces get stuck on brass instruments, screws should not be completely tightened on woodwind or percussion instruments, and occasionally keys, corks, felts, etc. fall off. Often there is an easy fix, but if not, we can help you get the appropriate repairs you need from a qualified music repair shop.

Thank you for investing your time and energy into your student's musical endeavors! Please feel free to contact us at anytime if you have questions or would like more information on anything we're doing. There is a lot of information on the band website, www.blanchardbands.com, as well.

Jenn Kauffman
kauffmanjc@gmail.com

Lynzi Carlson
lynzicarlson@gmail.com