

Choosing a Band Instrument

Signing up for band class in school is a very exciting event for a student. One of the toughest decisions will be helping your child pick an instrument to play in band class. To those who are new to playing in band, it can be an overwhelming process. In this article, I'll explain the process and outline what goes into making the leap to starting your musical journey.

Many factors go into selecting an instrument to play in band class. Everything from the size of your hands, the length of your arms, the thickness of your lips to whether you have an underbite or overbite and how it will affect how easily it will be to play a specific instrument. In addition to this list, does your child have any musical experience prior to band class? Piano players, for example, will have an easier time learning mallet percussion, and singers, often times, will do better on instruments such as trombone and French horn. When approaching the selection of an instrument, it's important to keep an open mind and be willing to try a couple of instruments before you select the instrument your child will learn.

One of the first factors that goes into the selection of an instrument is something called "instrumentation." Playing a band instrument means that you are now part of a larger musical group. Just as a rock band needs a guitarist, bass guitarist, drummer, and keyboard player, Band programs need a certain number of players on each instrument to sound like a quality group when they played together. An important part of the experience of playing in band is sounding great as a group. The band Director may recommend a specific instrument to help the band program have all the instruments in the band. A typical band class has everything from flute to tuba, and a certain ratio of each instruments. A student's band Director will enroll students on a particular instrument understanding how many students will be able to play on each instrument type and help to balance the ensemble. Just because "Aunt Jane" has a 75-year-old clarinet up in the attic she will give you doesn't mean your child will be a good fit for the clarinet. The experienced Director can examine a student and tell if they will or will not be good for a certain instrument within 30 seconds. Instruments that we will begin students on at AIS are the Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet, Trumpet, Trombone, and Percussion. Other instruments such as the saxophone, horn, and tuba will be chosen after the Christmas concert.

It's about you

The next thing to consider are your physical features. While most people can play most instruments, some instruments will be easier or harder to play based on you! For example, if you have short arms, it could be challenging to play the trombone. Kids with an overbite tend to do better on Bassoon than those with an underbite. If your upper lip is thin, then trumpet or French horn will be easier, and if your upper lip is thicker, then trombone, euphonium, or tuba could be easier to play. You need bigger hands for the saxophone, and clarinet players need big enough fingertips to easily cover the tone holes on the instrument. For the flute, if you have a cleft lip or teardrop shaped lip, you'll have a challenging time directing the airstream to play the flute well. Some instruments have tons of buttons to push, and others require the students to be able to hear a note and be able to produce that note for a combination of airspeed, focus, and a good ear. Most importantly, the band Director will place your child on an instrument that he or she feels, in their professional opinion, will be successful and have fun with that instrument. That is our goal. For each and every student to have fun playing music. That is how we keep so many kids in our band program for all seven years of their secondary school years. We want band to be a class that each child looks forward to going to and be proud of what they accomplish in band! And definitely do not let a lack of funds be the cause for your child to not be able to join band. Talk with a band Director, we will work something out. Every child should have the experience of being in band if they choose to.