

NORTHWESTERN MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I would like to welcome you and your son/daughter to the Northwestern Band program. I am very excited about this coming school year. There are many talented students in our school, and I am confident that with hard work our band will once again sound amazing and live up to the Northwestern band tradition that has lasted for more than 50 years.

This packet has quite a bit of information for your review – please go through it carefully.

One of the big changes between elementary and middle school band is the use of the computer program SmartMusic. SmartMusic is a practice/assessment program for all instruments that gives instant feedback on a student's performance, thus allowing for more growth at home during practice. You will have the option of either purchasing a subscription to this program so your son/daughter can complete assignments at home, or having your son/daughter complete their SmartMusic assignments after school/during study hall time using the music department computers. We will also have a laptop with SmartMusic on it that can be signed out as needed. If at all possible, I would highly recommend purchasing the subscription for your home, as this will give your son/daughter more time and freedom to complete their assignments, as opposed to trying to sneak in a few minutes at school when the music department computers are not being used by other students or competing to sign out the laptop. Information about how to subscribe to, install, and use SmartMusic will be discussed at the Open House in September as well as posted up on Haiku, and I will also be demonstrating the program at the Open House. In the meantime, feel free to go to their website, www.smartmusic.com to learn more or to order.

Instruments/Mouthpieces/Reeds

It is at this time that many parents consider upgrading instruments. Please feel free to call me for suggestions, as some brands are better than others, and a higher price doesn't always mean a better instrument. Clarinet and saxophone players should consider upgrading to a better mouthpiece and reeds. For around \$100, an excellent mouthpiece can be purchased that would improve a player's tone quality and range. These mouthpieces will be required in High School, so investing in one a year or two early gives your child the advantage of an earlier adjustment period and more chance for improvement. Clarinet players should consider purchasing a VanDoren 5RV Lyre with a Rovner dark ligature (the thing which holds the reed onto the mouthpiece). Saxophone players should consider purchasing a Selmer S80 C* (pronounced "C star") mouthpiece with a Rovner dark ligature. If these are too expensive a good, cheaper alternative would be for both clarinet and saxophone players to purchase a JD Hite Premier mouthpiece. Although not as good as the ones listed above, they are still good and will be SO much better than what came with your instrument. They generally cost between \$20-\$30 depending on the instrument.

Also, all clarinet players should buy either VanDoren reeds (good, medium priced), Rico Royal (good, medium priced), or Mitchell Lurie reeds (decent, inexpensive), All saxophone players should be playing on VanDoren reeds. These are of much better quality than the Rico reeds most beginners use, and make it easier to play the instrument with a better sound and improved range. The best the thing to do, however, would be to go to a music store and try some different combinations of mouthpieces and reeds. Many music stores will allow you to do this. Please note the attached list of music stores to find one that is close to you.

Private Lessons

Although not required, we strongly encourage each student to take private lessons. Each student needs the individual attention with a specialist who plays their instrument to reach his/her full potential. Also, working with a specialist on that instrument will help your child make faster improvements, make it easier for him/her to earn higher grades in class, and give him/her more opportunities for special things like solos and successful auditioning into the Northern Region Music Festival. Almost 50% of our students study privately, either over the summer, during the school year, or both. Here is a partial list of a few of the private instructors some of our students study with (you are obviously free to find people not on this list or call me for more suggestions). Flute – Bridget Gilchrist (651-4048) or Chelsea O'Brien (chelseaobrien38@gmail.com)); Oboe – Alison Wilson (985-8115) or Tamar Wells (485-1077); Bassoon – Ashley Bianchi (605-0430); Clarinet/Saxophone – Will Minton (379-3151); Trumpet – Louise Baranger (860-824-7349 or Louise@TrumpetDiva.com); French Horn – Jamie Marci (860-666-6444) or Allison Zalneraitis (860-489-4169); Trombone/Euphonium – Will Minton (379-3151) or Stephen Zimmerman (379-8525) or David Gaedeke (860-379-7888); Percussion – Dave Reid (860-496-0874) or Jonathan Lichtig (836-1944) or Bob Rush (203-470-4203).

If private lessons are something you would like your child to be involved with, but are unable to due to financial concerns, we might be able to arrange to have a high school student mentor your child with lessons. Although it is not as beneficial as working with a professional, it can certainly help your child's musical progress. Please call or e-mail me at the beginning of the school year for more information.

Practice

Practice is the key to a successful band experience. One cannot develop and grow as a musician only through band rehearsals. Just as homework in math, science, etc., is vital to fully understand and retain information in these subjects, practice on an instrument is the only way to make meaningful progress in music. The average middle school band student should be practicing 20-30 minutes/day, 5-6 days/week. Many of our most successful students practice more than this.

With busy lives, many middle school students have trouble finding the time to practice regularly. However, time management is one of the keys to a successful school experience, and if learned well, can help one become more successful in life. There are two strategies in particular that students/parents have passed on to me over the years that seem to work with busy lives. First, make practicing a routine by scheduling it into the day, such as either before dinner, after dinner, during homework time, as soon as you get home from school, etc. Second, if a half hour is not possible all at once, try practicing twice a day for 10-15 minutes each time. Almost everyone can squeeze in 10 minutes twice a day, and breaking up the practicing like this can be very beneficial for some children's attention spans. Also, keep in mind that quality practice time is more important than quantity. 20-30 minutes of playing through familiar music you already know how to play can be enjoyable, but really does not help a student make much improvement. Having a goal to accomplish, and staying focused on making improvements on one or two specific aspects of a song/piece/scale/etc, will result in much higher levels of growth and progress.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at school (379-7243 x2627), or e-mail me at jlesieur@nwr7.org. I check my e-mail frequently over the summer. I am looking forward to seeing you at the Open House in September. Together, we can make this a great year!

Musically Yours,

Jim Lesieur