

Dear Cadet Band Parent,

Hello, I would like to welcome you and your child into the Conway band program. My name is Keith Nichols, director of bands at Conway Middle School. I am very excited about starting our next generation of band members. Participating in an instrumental ensemble is a wonderful experience; it gives a student a chance to learn how to play an instrument and to learn about music. Participation in a performing ensemble helps to build individual skills, cooperation, and self esteem. Band also offers a unique opportunity for students to learn, work, and interact with their classmates while striving for a common goal. Members of the band will perform in two public concerts this year.

Learning how to play an instrument is not a simple task. It involves many hours of group rehearsal (98% during their class period), individual practice, and dedication. An instrumental music program consists of two key elements, large group rehearsals and individual practice. The band rehearsals will occur during the school day and are programmed into your child's schedule. In these rehearsals your child will learn the skills needed to play an instrument as well as the music to be performed during concerts. This year we may have one after school rehearsal every 6 to 8 weeks. You will receive the dates and times for these rehearsals at least 3 weeks in advance.

There is not enough time during the school day to develop the skills for playing an instrument. Individual practice is crucial to any musician's development, especially at the beginning stages of learning. In order to be prepared for the ensemble rehearsals, students will need to practice their music at home. Practice at home is very important to the development of young musicians. At the beginning stages of learning an instrument it is recommended that students practice about two hours per week. At home there should be an area reserved for practice, and during practice time there should be no interruptions. Each student will need the following items every rehearsal. 1) Instrument 2) Music 3) Pencil. Each student will need to purchase the "Tradition of Excellence Book 1" band book by Bruce Pearson. These books may be purchased when you obtain your instrument.

In order to have a successful band program an ensemble needs the properly balanced, instrumentation. For example: A band made up of 20 flutes, 18 saxophones and 7 drummers will not be able to produce a proper sound and would not be enjoyable to listen to. Given the number of students in band this year, we have come up with the following instrumentation for this year's Cadet Band: 2-3 flutes, 5-6 clarinets, 1 oboe, 1 bassoon, 1 bass clarinet, 1-2 alto saxes, 1 tenor saxes, 1-2 French horns, 3-5 trumpets, 3-4 trombones, 1-2 euphoniums, 3 tubas, and 3 percussionists. This year we may combine the Cadet Band with the Beginning Band for the Winter Concert. The Cadet Band will definitely perform by themselves for the Spring Concert

Conway owns the larger more expensive instruments such as French horns, euphoniums, tubas and bassoons, for student use. All other instruments will need to be rented from one of our local music stores. We do have a set of school instruments for those who cannot rent an instrument at this time. Please note that the quantity & quality of school instruments will vary from year to year depending upon the needs of our school, and the condition of the instruments. Percussion students will need to learn both bells/xylophone and snare drum as part of the curriculum.

We are just of beginning our test drive process, and I hope to have the instrument selection forms sent home by September 2nd (or sooner if possible) By Wednesday the 7th your child should know what instrument he or she is playing this year. I will attach a letter to the flyers with more information about renting. **PLEASE** wait until we've completed the test drive process before going out to get your instrument! September 13th is the target for our 1st playing day!!!! Please note that this time-line is based on everything going according to plan. I will update everyone on our timeline via the band webpage.

A word of caution: There are several discount stores and department stores in the area that sell instruments for very low prices. These instruments are of a lesser quality, and will not last long before they break down. In addition, when they do break down you will not be able to get them repaired. I always recommend renting before you purchase an instrument. If a store does not rent instruments, then **DO NOT** buy your horn there! Another indication: if you can buy a package of underpants and an instrument in the same store – **DO NOT** buy your instrument there! If at any time you have questions about the rental process, instrument selection, or the proper brand of instrument, please do not hesitate to contact me.

How to Obtain Your Instrument

Beginning and Concert Band Students are in busy with the instrument test drive process and are one step closer to performing! I strongly encourage all students to rent an instrument. The music stores we use at Conway provide new instruments for a reasonable monthly cost in a “rent-to-own” program where the monthly rental payment builds equity toward the purchase of the instrument.

All instruments require repair at some point. Some repairs can be quite costly. Therefore, I also strongly encourage parents to purchase the insurance that covers the cost of the instrument repair and replacement. This insurance provides free repairs for the life of the rental agreement and provides a “loaner” instrument to use while the instrument is being repaired.

A brief word about music stores: I strongly encourage parents to rent an instrument from a reputable music store. Many stores in the Orlando area that sell instruments are NOT reputable music stores. Often, they sell instruments of inferior quality and provide little or no service. While these stores provide a low-cost alternative to the music stores I recommend, their inferior instruments break quickly, are impossible to repair, and are often impossible to play with a characteristic sound.

Option 1 – Rent from an approved vendor

Students will be given flyers from the Band Room and Music & Arts music stores. Avalon Music (Waterford Lakes) and Garden Music Center (Winter Garden) are also approved vendors. Please note that only the Band Room and Music & Arts visit Conway MS weekly to handle service needs.

The Band Room – 407-897-7080

Music & Arts – 407-332-7106

Option 2 – Pre-Owned Instrument

Some parents already own the instrument they want their student to play. Please have it thoroughly serviced by a qualified repair technician before bringing it to school for use. Students will need their own mouthpiece as outlined on the equipment list as well as the appropriate accessories for the individual instrument. I will happily check out any instrument you have to see what it may need.

Option 3 – Purchase an Instrument

I discourage most parents from purchasing an instrument for their student. Web sites, such as EBay or Craigslist, can be dangerous places full of people selling poor copies of high-quality instruments. Renting from one of our trusted stores provides the service on a brand-new instrument that cannot be offered when purchasing.

Obtaining an instrument is one of the most important steps in the life of the Beginning Band student. A proper instrument with the proper accessories will insure your student has great success right from the beginning. A poor instrument will cause a great deal of difficulty getting your student started and can result in disillusionment with the overall band activity. Please follow my recommendations for the best success with this process. If you have any questions – please do not hesitate to ask!

Musically,

Mr. Nichols