September 6, 2021

Dear Beginning Band Students and Parents,

Welcome to the Heatherwood Middle School Band Program! Learning to play an instrument is a new and exciting experience! It is my goal to provide your student with every opportunity to be successful in this new adventure!

During the first week we will use professional musicians and recordings to demonstrate and learn about the band instruments. Most students have never played an instrument and have not yet decided which instrument they would like to play. This will be an important choice; please urge your student to really concentrate on this while deciding. Also—you won’t need instruments the first week!

Many students come to band with a desire to play instruments which they are familiar with—primarily saxophone, flute, or drums. Please come to band with an open mind, ready to explore a variety of instruments. Students are often drawn to—and eventually choose and learn to love—instruments which they previously knew nothing about. Bands sound better, are musically more rewarding, and more fun for everyone-- when instruments from all the sections are represented!

Instruments you can choose from are trumpet, trombone, baritone, tuba, flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, or saxophone. Students who wish to play saxophone are encouraged to begin with the clarinet (more challenging, less expensive, great foundation) and switch to saxophone in April. Students wishing to play oboe or bassoon (difficult) may be advised to start on clarinet or flute. Those who wish to play French horn (also difficult) are sometimes encouraged to begin on trumpet.

Students who wish to play percussion (drums) will need to start on a brass or woodwind instrument. Those demonstrating success may audition for percussion in December or January. All students who are selected for percussion will learn to play mallet instruments in addition to drums.

**Students who choose bassoon, oboe, or French horn are expected to make a one-year commitment on their instrument**.

Bands at Heatherwood are grouped according to performance levels (Beginning Band, Concert (Intermediate) Band, and Symphonic (Advanced) Band). Students who play the most popular instruments (saxophone, flute, and percussion) may have less of a chance of being selected for Symphonic Band as eighth graders. The number of students chosen to fill each individual section are sometimes limited in order to balance the sections of the band (for example, 20 alto saxophones would over-balance the band; 6-8 would be acceptable). Students selected for Symphonic Band are chosen on a competitive basis and are evaluated on playing skills and classroom performance ( both musical and social/teamwork attributes apply).

Physical characteristics can be a consideration in choosing the right instrument; especially with flute and trumpet. If you have not yet rented an instrument I suggest that you wait. Your teacher and coaches can identify potential problems and recommend an instrument that will give you your best chance for success.

Once your child has been given the “go-ahead” you may rent or purchase an instrument. Most families rent clarinets, flutes, trumpets and trombones (which are the least expensive instruments) from a local music store; rental for these instruments start at about $20 per month. Saxophones, oboes, and baritones, which are more expensive, start at about $60 per month at music stores. Some instruments may be rented from Heatherwood; these mostly include the more-expensive instruments such as baritones, tubas, French horns, oboes, and bassoons. We also has a limited number of clarinets, flutes, trumpets, and trombones. Some of our instruments are very well-used, but all are maintained and kept in good playing condition. The price for renting any Heatherwood school instrument is $120 per year, or you can pay by the semester at $60 per half-year. Each student also needs to purchase a music stand for your home practice. Scholarships are available for students who may not be able to afford an instrument.

All Beginning Band Students will also need a copy of Essential Elements for Band, Book 1 for their instrument. These can be purchased at a music store like Kennelly Keys or online as well.

Be sure to rent or purchase a high quality instrument! If you are in doubt, have a music store check it out, or bring it in and show it to me. Purchasing low quality instruments is not recommended! These instruments often do not play in tune, are not durable, and are difficult to get parts for when they need repairs. Ordering instruments which take several weeks to arrive may result in your child falling behind—the first couple of weeks are critical to their development! Please have your instruments on time!

Students are advised to not play their instruments at home until we begin playing in class, unless they are already taking private lessons! Students who begin by teaching themselves often develop poor playing habits which are difficult to correct.

There are approximately 60 students enrolled in Beginning Band; they are divided into two different sections (class periods). Professional musicians will be coming in periodically to work with the students; their services are made possible by support from the Heatherwood Band Boosters. **Our first meeting will be scheduled soon.** Please attend and get involved in supporting our band students!

I am excited about getting to know your kids, and I will make every effort to support them in having a fun, rewarding, and challenging experience! If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Michael Lundquist

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