

Band and Orchestra **Fact Sheet**

“My child wants to play an instrument at school.

What do I do now?”

Visalia Unified School District offers a comprehensive music program in the 4th – 12th grades to help your child discover and develop their musical gifts. **This Fact Sheet is designed to help you understand the process and answer most of your basic questions so your child has the greatest chance of success.** If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact your music teacher.

One of the easiest ways to communicate with the music teacher is for your child to deliver a written note from you. You may ask your question, give information, or simply give them your phone number and the best time to reach you, and ask them to call. While most calls are returned within 24 hours, please understand that it may take longer, as your music teacher will likely have well over 300 students to help.

First, we must tell you that the good news *and* bad news associated with playing an instrument is ***your child's success is 99% predictable.*** If your child 1) follows instructions, 2) brings their materials to class, and then 3) goes home and practices everyday, their **success** is 99% guaranteed. If they do not do these things, their **failure** is 99% guaranteed.



Choices of Instruments

In Visalia Unified, the standard instruments that your child may learn are: violin, viola, cello, string bass, flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, French horn, trumpet, trombone, baritone, bells, and snare drum. If your child is interested in any other instrument, please contact the teacher to see if it is possible. Please note that we do not teach piano or guitar at the elementary level. Also note that **Visalia Unified does not have any snare drums or saxophones for student use.**



5 Step Process

Your child has already begun the procedure to play a band or orchestra instrument by expressing an interest. However, in order to **stay** in band or orchestra for the entire year, there is a 5 step process, and not every child who attempts to play an instrument will be able to stay class.

Step 1. **For the Child** There will be tests to pass, paperwork to return, a need to make sufficient progress, and, of course, the necessity of appropriate behavior and work ethic. If all tasks are not performed at an appropriate level, your student will likely be returned to classroom music for the remainder of the year.

Step 2. **For the Parent** If your child makes it past the first few classes, the first thing that **you** will do is fill out and sign a blue enrollment form. **Please do not go get an instrument at this time.**

If you have a family instrument already, please send it to school so that the teacher can check it over to make sure it works properly.

Step 3. **For the Teacher-** While this is going on, the music teacher will be working with all the students to help them find a good choice of instrument, as some instruments are easier to play than others, based on the child's physical characteristics. After student and teacher have come to an agreement, another paper will come home with 1) the approved instrument listed, 2) what will be needed, and 3) how to get an instrument.

Step 4. **For the Parent** After the **teacher's approval**, your next step is to help the child obtain an instrument. The new paper will explain what is needed and how to get a book and instrument- whether through borrowing, renting, buying, or using one of the limited school instruments that may be available.

Step 5. **For the Child** At this point, the child must bring their materials (instrument, book, pencil, and accessories) to school, and then go home and practice. If your child can play at, or are approaching, grade level by the end of the first trimester, they will be in band or

orchestra for the remainder of the year. If not, they will be in classroom music for the remainder of the year.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

If your question is not listed, please contact your music teacher.

Question: When does my child need to have an instrument?

Answer: Please wait for the music teacher's approval before getting an instrument.

After receiving the teacher's approval, it is best if your child can have an instrument by Sept. 15. When necessary, it is possible to wait until the end of September.

Q: What if my child tries it and can't do it, or doesn't like it- can they quit?

A: During the first trimester (the first 12 weeks of school), it is possible to change classes- either by the child's choice or the teacher's choice due to lack of progress or behavioral issues. After that, each child must remain in the same music class for the remainder of the year. If after the 5th grade year your child decides not to continue their instrument, they may return to a classroom music class.

Q: Can my child play any instrument they wish?

A: While that would be nice, it simply isn't that easy. Within the previously mentioned list of instruments available, we ask each student to have a "first" and "second" choice of instrument in mind. Based on these initial choices and your child's physical characteristics, the music teacher will use all of their training and experience to find a good choice for your child. Additionally, just like a baseball team where everyone cannot play first base, we need students on different instruments. Because of this, there may be limits on numbers of certain instruments allowed at each school site (i.e. there can't be 20 drummers, 20 saxophones, etc.).

Q: Where do we buy/rent an instrument?

A: After the music teacher approves your child's choice of an instrument, you will receive written confirmation of the instrument, accompanied by information about what will be needed and where to get it.

Q: What if I can't afford to buy or rent an instrument?

A: There are two additional ways to obtain an instrument: 1) Borrow from a friend, neighbor, or relative. Anyone you know who has older children may have an instrument in their house that they would be happy to loan you. 2) Visalia Unified does have a limited number of instruments available for students to use. However, because of the limited number, we cannot guarantee that your child will **get their choice of instrument nor can we guarantee the quality of instrument** your child may be given to use. **Please note: 1) Visalia Unified has no saxophones or drums; and 2) Your child's instrument will not be new.**

Q: After getting an instrument, are there any additional expenses?

A: Yes. Although they are usually inexpensive, most instruments need something for basic maintenance. This could be a \$2 reed, \$5 string, or \$3 valve or slide oil. But without these small, and seemingly insignificant items, your child cannot progress.

Q: Will my child miss any core/classroom work?

A: In most cases, no. While your child is in band/orchestra, other students will be in the classroom with *classroom music*. In rare situations, usually with "combo" classes (combining 2 grades in a single classroom), your child may be missing classroom time. However, with the help of the classroom teacher, it is typically not a problem for your child to make up any missed work during other school time.

Q: What are the most important things I can do to help my child?

A: Other than helping your child get an instrument, by far the most important thing you can do to help them succeed is to help your child find a comfortable place and a regular time to practice. While it seems simple enough to an adult, your child will likely need reminders to practice.

Other important things that will help:

1. help your student maintain their instrument (purchase needed reeds, oil, strings, etc.)
2. encourage them, and don't let them quit- give it one full year.
3. contact the director at the first sign of a problem/attitude change. (We're here to help.)

Q: Can my child play an instrument and be in sports, dance, gym, etc.?

A: Yes and no. Many of our music students have found it possible to be in several organizations (including sports teams, dance classes, etc.). However, if the obligations of other groups will not allow a minimum of 20 minutes of practice on at least five days a week, your child should not start band or orchestra.

Q: What if my child has, or is going to get, braces?

A: In most cases, braces are simply a mild inconvenience for a limited time, and do not adversely affect playing. However, if your child's choice of instrument involves the mouth, you should always check with your child's dentist or orthodontist. Don't forget that there are several choices that have nothing to do with the mouth, and therefore, are not affected by braces (violin, viola, cello, string bass, bells, and snare drum)

Q: Can I fix my child's instrument?

A: **Please do not try to fix any instrument by yourself.** For simple issues (keys stop working, string breaks, mouthpiece stuck, etc.), it is likely that your music teacher can fix the problem. **Please have you child take it to school.** If the teacher can't fix it, they will give instructions about what to do with it. Many well-intentioned family members have turned a simple problem into a \$75 (or higher) major repair.

Q: What if no one in our family has any musical training- can my child still learn an instrument?

A: Yes. No prior knowledge is necessary. Professionally trained, credentialed music teachers teach all classes. As mentioned earlier, if your child will 1) follow instructions, 2) bring their materials to class, and then 3) go home and practice everyday, their **success** is 99% guaranteed. If not, they will not succeed. It has little to do with prior knowledge or being from a "musical" family.

Q: What kind of commitment will this require of my child?

A: As with any "discipline" (sports, art, dance, etc.), regular practice is required to develop the "muscle-memory" necessary to be a good musician. Ask your child if they are willing to do the following:

1. Choose what they will give up for 20 minutes a day, so they can practice.
"Are you willing to have extra homework/tests every day?"
 - a. **You may learn at school, but you get good by playing at home** (it's homework- but it's fun homework)
2. Be "ready" (prepared) for every class- with book, pencil, instrument, and accessories.
3. Listen to the teacher- do your best to do everything exactly like the teacher asks.
4. Not quit- If you want to succeed, commit for the entire year.

If they are not willing to do these things, they should not join band or orchestra, as they are 99% guaranteed that they will NOT succeed.

Q: With all the new educational requirements, will my child be able to play throughout middle and high school?

A: Yes. Sometimes it takes a bit of juggling to be able to continue playing throughout high school. Some students take a pre-first or summer school class to free up room in their schedule. Students do it every year and colleges look very favorably upon those students who have participated in performing groups all through high school.

Q: What are some of the benefits to playing an instrument?

A: Although playing an instrument can be fun, here is a partial list of other benefits:

- ❖ Significantly higher test scores for those with more than 4 years of participation
- ❖ Travel- trips around California begin at the middle school level, while high school students can travel to other states or even countries
- ❖ Scholarship monies are available to students in music throughout high school, as well as grants and stipends for those who play in college (i.e. VUSD Music gives thousands of dollars a year in scholarships, while Fresno State band gives out \$100,000 a year in scholarships to its members.)
- ❖ Lifetime hobby
- ❖ Reduces stress and makes one healthier
- ❖ High school students can earn money by teaching private lessons and playing for local events, such as musicals and weddings
- ❖ Improved social skills, and fulfillment of being a contributing member of a successful organization

**We hope you found this fact sheet helpful as you explore your child's musical interest. Please contact us if we can help.
Visalia Unified's Music Staff**