



the director's guide to  
recruitment +  
instrument selection

smartmusic.

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*Recruitment doesn't happen once a year, it happens all year round. We've compiled tips from experienced band and orchestra directors to help you step up your recruitment efforts, make your instrument fitting/sizing day more productive, and position your program for more success in the coming year.*



# successful recruitment is a process, not an event

This time of year many of us are gearing up for recruitment of our new beginner musicians. Running recruitment can be time-consuming and a little overwhelming amidst everything else the busy director has to do. But of all the non-teaching responsibilities required of the band or orchestra director, recruitment is most worthy of every ounce of energy we put into it.

Why? Because music has the power to transform students' lives for the better. We owe it to our young people to make sure they have every opportunity to join the band or orchestra and learn to play an instrument.

Before I share my suggestions for making the process a success, I encourage you to not consider recruitment an event that happens on a specific day or during a specific week. It is a process: one that you should be engaged in throughout your school year, either directly through planning and scheduled activities, or indirectly through marketing of your program and working on retention of your current students.

## Planning

When embarking on your recruitment, particularly if you are in a new position or if you are significantly changing what you do, allow about four months to plan, prepare and carry out the process. During the planning phase you will:

- Build a timeline of events
- Determine your audience
- Develop your message and materials
- Plan how to communicate

## Build a Timeline

Starting with the date when students select courses for the upcoming school year, work backward to schedule your events for maximum impact. All schools are different in this regard. If you have a pull-out program, your timeline might look different than one where band and orchestra are regularly scheduled classes.

I typically schedule instrument fittings one week or so before course selection so that the excitement level about learning an instrument is still high and fresh in everyone's minds. Schedule any demonstration concerts and classroom visits just prior to your instrument fittings to drum up interest, and don't forget to send information home to parents during this time.

In addition, you may also want to hold parent meetings or instrument rental nights around the same time, or shortly after the students have completed course requests.

## Identifying and Marketing to Your Audience

Most band and orchestra directors do a great job getting prospective students excited about instrumental music. It's also important that you remember to recruit their parents. Don't overlook the importance of also garnering support of administration, guidance counselors, and anyone else who might have influence over students as they make the decision whether or not to begin playing an instrument.

You will also need to form a plan for sharing information with your prospective students and their families. Promote your program to the public in a way that makes families want their children to join. Depending on the method of communication and the specific audience, you may wish to include important



dates and events, an overview of the enrollment process, benefits to joining, and any other information that you think is important.

In order for your message to have maximum impact, tap into a variety of communication methods and be certain to adjust your message for specific audiences.

### **Prospective Students**

When connecting with prospective students, your message needs to be engaging and kid-friendly. If you are able to present a demonstration concert, make sure that you choose music that is fun, familiar, and no more than a few minutes in length. A demonstration concert is also an opportunity to perform short, engaging excerpts on each of the instruments that you offer to your beginners.

In addition to the concert, classroom visits and videos can also be effective. You also will want to plan time for your prospective students to get “hands-on” with the instruments.

### **Parents**

As you communicate with mom and dad, remember that they are busy and are often overwhelmed with all they have to do. Keep your message brief, clear, and consistent; and make sure to communicate more than once, in multiple formats.

Email may work well for some families, while others appreciate a letter in the mail, a personal phone call, or just being able to browse a website or social media for information. Know your community and use those methods that have shown to be successful in your school district.

### **Administration**

It is also especially important to educate your administration, guidance counselors, and classroom teachers as to the value of your program. These people often have a lot of influence on whether or not students sign up for your program. Keep these important partners informed of the good that is happening in your instrumental music program and the benefits of joining.

Administrators live in the world of data-driven decisions, so take advantage of that and provide hard numbers when speaking to them. Face-to-face meetings and invitations to your concerts and events are also crucial to developing these relationships.

### **Coda**

Preparing for your recruitment in an organized and methodical way may take a little more time at the outset, however, all that work can pay off with increased enrollment, informed families and stronger administrative support.

Best wishes to you as you welcome a new group of students into the world of instrumental music!



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Learn more on the [On and Off the Podium](#) website and the [SmartMusic blog](#).

# beginning instrumental music recruitment checklist

## Six to Twelve Months Prior to Enrollment

- Schedule demonstration concert on master calendar
- Schedule instrument fitting dates on master calendar
- Schedule parent meeting date on master calendar
- Check for potential conflicts with desired dates
- Reserve needed rooms/facilities for all events

## Three Months Prior to Enrollment

- Communicate with your music dealer about instrument and accessory preferences
- Confirm your instrument fitting and meeting dates with music dealer
- Order needed materials

## Two Months Prior to Enrollment

- Update your website with new information and current dates
- Set up Google form for online sign-up
- Update or create introductory letter to send out to families
- Submit bus/ transportation requests for demonstration concert

## One Month Prior to Enrollment

- Contact guidance/administration to get contact information for incoming students
- Contact feeder music teachers/schools to share recruitment schedule and other information
- Hold demonstration concert
- Send out introductory letter/email to all prospective families with link to online sign-up form for instrument fittings
- Monitor online sign-ups to close out time slots as they fill up

- Contact music dealer and/or colleagues to arrange for helpers for instrument fittings
- Recruit student and parent volunteers for non-musical tasks at instrument fittings

## Three Weeks Before Enrollment

- Send reminder email to families who have not responded on online form
- Send reminder/update of sign-ups to feeder music teachers so they can continue to encourage students to join
- Print testing forms and other documents
- Organize all materials for testing dates (signs, forms, sign-out cards, pencils, binders, etc.)
- Send reminder/appointment confirmation emails to families. Include information about parking, process, etc.

## One to Two Weeks Before Enrollment

- Hold instrument fitting nights
- Make instrument recommendations for students based on preferences, instrument fitting notes and instrumentation needs
- Follow up with students who were "no shows" for instrument fitting appointments
- Schedule make-up date for no shows
- Contact music dealer to get updated pricing for accessories and instrument rentals
- Update recommendation letter and fact sheet
- Send recommendation letter and beginning band/orchestra fact sheet to all families



#### After Enrollment Occurs

- Cross reference course requests with those attending instrument fittings and follow up with any discrepancies
- Update administration on possible instrument inventory needs based on new enrollment figures
- Respond to parent questions, requests for instrument switches, etc.
- Update or create parent meeting presentation slides
- Send reminder email to families about parent meeting
- Hold parent meeting/ instrument rental night
- Follow up with families who did not attend meeting to confirm interest and send materials



Used with permission from the [On and Off the Podium](#) website.

# matching students to instruments: the instrument selection process

One of the most exciting and important events in the life of a prospective band student is when he or she selects the instrument they are going to play. There are many factors that influence a student's decision such as the availability of an instrument. These include the popularity of an instrument, parental preference, peer pressure, perceived musical opportunities, and band director needs and suggestions.

A half century ago, many prospective band students wanted to play the trombone like Glenn Miller or the clarinet like Benny Goodman. The flute became extremely popular in the seventies when the rock band Jethro Tull's lead performer, Ian Anderson, played the flute. The soprano saxophone once grew in favor due, in part, to Kenny G's popularity.

Popular tastes aside, it is critical that each child's musical potential and individual differences be identified and that the information be utilized in the recruiting process, the instrument selection process, and later in the teaching process. Due to the importance of the student's instrument selection, every effort should be made by the teacher to identify and communicate the student's unique characteristics to the student and his or her parents/guardians to assist them in the instrument selection process.

Besides embouchure formation, little information has been provided to the prospective band student to assist them in making their instrument selection. Informal research, gained by surveying former and current band members, has revealed that there are numerous factors and principles that will assist the student in the instrument selection process. To give each prospective student the best and most helpful information, consider developing a recruitment program based on the following eight principles.

## 1. Test for Musical Aptitude

Ideally, we base recommendations and decisions on data. Having knowledge and understanding of each student's musical aptitude provides such data. Some musical aptitude tests are:

- *Intermediate Measures of Musical Audiation* (Gordon, 1982)
- *Measure of Musical Abilities* (Bentley, 1966)
- *Musical Aptitude Profile* (Gordon, 1965)
- *Seashore Measures of Musical Talents* (Seashore et al., 1960)
- *Standardized Tests of Musical Intelligence* (Wing, 1961)

A description of these tests and their suitability can be found in *Measurement and Evaluation of Musical Experiences* by Boyle and Radocy, published by Schirmer Books.

While high marks on an aptitude test are an asset for any instrument, certain instruments require that a student receive high marks in order to be successful on that instrument.

### Pitch Sensitivity

Instruments requiring a high degree of pitch sensitivity:

Oboe, bassoon, French horn, trombone, tuba, timpani

Instruments requiring a moderate degree of pitch sensitivity:

All other wind instruments

### Meter/Rhythm Sensitivity

Instruments requiring a high degree of meter/rhythm sensitivity:

Percussion and tuba



Instruments requiring a moderate degree of meter/rhythm sensitivity:  
All other wind instruments

Steadiness of Beat

Instruments requiring a high degree of beat steadiness:  
Percussion and tuba

Instruments requiring a moderate degree of beat steadiness:  
All other wind instruments

## 2. Test for Instrument Timbre Preference

Students preferences for specific timbres can easily be determined. To do so, demonstrate the band instruments (out of view) and ask students to identify their favorite sounds.

## 3. Utilize Academic Achievement Results

There is a substantial correlation between a student's past academic achievement and successful performance on the more difficult band instruments.

To assist the band director in obtaining this information distribute the form found on page 538 of the *Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score*

and ask the classroom teacher to fill out the form for each student. This form asks other classroom teachers to evaluate students on a variety of criteria including scholastic capabilities, discipline, cooperation, and others.

## 4. Evaluate and Utilize the Student's Physical Characteristics

Some pertinent physical characteristics include arm and finger size, lip and teeth structure, and stature.

Students who want to play either flute or trombone should have an arm length of at least 19 inches (measured from armpit to first knuckle on their fingers.) Students whose arm length is shorter than 19" may still play either the flute or the trombone if they use a curved headjoint flute or a trombone with an F attachment.

Finger size is similarly important. Clarinet players must have finger pads large enough to completely cover the tone holes and rings. To test for this, draw a circle  $\frac{7}{16}$  inch in diameter and ask the students press their fingers on the circle to determine if their fingers can completely cover the hole. Another way to assess this is to have the prospective clarinet player firmly press their fingers on the tone holes of the clarinet and see if there is a complete circle of indentation on their finger pads.

The form provided on page 535 of the *Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score* offers more details and provides band directors with a means to obtain this information as well as other data that can assist in the consideration of instrument selection.

#### **5. Evaluate and Utilize Student's Eye-Hand Coordination Skills**

Instruments requiring high degree of eye-hand coordination:

Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and percussion

Instruments requiring moderate degree of eye-hand coordination:

All other wind instruments

#### **6. Evaluate and Utilize Parental/Guardian Support**

Knowing parental and family preferences is a crucial consideration in the selection of a child's musical instrument. Having families complete a short survey at a parent meeting is a great way to learn their preferences, what instruments they own, as well as give you an idea of the kind of support family members can provide. Such a form can be found on page 539 of the *Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score*.

#### **7. Evaluate and Utilize Student Musical Listening Experiences**

The type of music that a student hears at school and at home is also a consideration. This information can also be gathered in the same parent meeting survey described in #6 above.

#### **8. Evaluate and Utilize Student Personality Type**

Some instruments require a student to have a more confident or outgoing personality. Those instruments include oboe, trumpet, and percussion.

Obtaining the information identified in these principles and communicating them to the student's parents/guardians, preferably in a private meeting, will assist each family in making a wise instrument choice. Taking this extra time now can help each child to become successful, enjoy music-making, and remain a committed band member. You will enjoy the benefits for years, and the student may benefit for a lifetime.

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# a basic approach to sizing string instruments

Proper sizing of string instruments can at first seem mysterious. Much of this mystery comes from the different sizing terms and sizing needs used for each member of the string family. Below is a discussion of each instrument's terminology and sizing considerations, intended as a resource for educators and parents. This is not intended to replace the knowledge of an expert in sizing string instruments, however; who should always be physically present to assist in measuring.

## **Violins**

Violins are available in quarter increments from 4/4 down to 1/4<sup>th</sup>; as well as smaller 1/8<sup>th</sup>, 1/10<sup>th</sup>, 1/16<sup>th</sup>, and 1/32<sup>nd</sup> sizes. A large majority of teen-aged

students should be able to play on a full-sized instrument. Generally speaking, students should expect to move to a larger-sized instrument every other year, with 8-year-olds often playing on 1/2 size, and 10-year-olds often playing on 3/4 size instruments. These are rough guides though; and much depends on the size of the player, and especially the length of the student's arms and shoulders.

Because of variations in each student's size at a given age, there are more accurate ways of sizing violins, which require the student to be present during sizing. One is to hold the violin in playing position, and have the student cup the palm around the very tip of the scroll. If the student has a natural 95-degree bend at the elbow in this position, then the violin is likely a playable size. Another

sizing method is to measure the arm length from the base of the player's neck to the cup of the palm. Generally, there is a two-inch arm length range for each fractional size: 18.5" will require a 1/4 size, 20.5" will be in the range of 1/2 size, 22.5" will require 3/4 size, and a student over 23.5" can be ready for a full-sized instrument.

### Violas

Violas, unlike violins, are sized by the length of the instrument's body. The "junior" size viola is sized between a 3/4 and a full sized violin, with a 12-13" length. This size is often used by students who would otherwise be playing on a 3/4 violin, which means that a viola may be sized larger than a violin would be for the same player. This in turn means that the teacher needs to use caution not to have the student overstrain the hand and arm while playing.

The "intermediate" viola is an additional inch or two longer in body size, and often lasts the player up until the teenage years, once their arm length is generally over 23.5." When the student has a playing arm length of 25," then a 15" instrument theoretically becomes usable. For each inch that the player's arm grows, an additional 1/2" of instrument body size can generally be added in the equation, at the teacher's discretion and of course considering the student's comfort.

### Cellos

Cellos, like violins, come in fractional sizes. But where the size of the violin is often based on arm length, on the cello the student's finger span is a primary consideration. Generally, a cellist who can comfortably extend 6" or more

between the tips of the index and pinkie fingers should be able to play on a 4/4 instrument. Some adults still play on a 7/8 instrument, so not every student will play a full-sized instrument. For each inch less in playing span between the two outer fingertips, a smaller fraction should be assigned. So a 5" span generally means a 3/4 sized instrument, and a 4" span a 1/2 sized one. The arm length is also a consideration though, as students with long fingers but shorter arms may not be able to place the bow in a good sounding place on a larger instrument's string.

### Basses

Double basses are also listed in fractional sizes, but in their case the fraction refers to string length and does not refer to instrument size. Basses labeled as 4/4 are very rarely used, and should never be used by students: Most professional players play on a 3/4 sized instrument. Students in middle school generally play on a 1/2 sized instrument, whereas beginning players in 4th or 5th grade should generally play on a 1/4 size. With sizing bassists, a combination of finger span, arm length, and body size should be considered. To assess finger span, have the student make their hand into a comfortable playing position. More than a 5" span between the tips of the outer fingers will be needed to comfortably play the lowest notes on the E string of a 3/4 sized bass. The bow arm should be long enough to touch the bridge while in playing position, and physically the student should be able to span the entire range of the instrument without strain.

### Conclusion

The chart below summarizes the information presented above.

	15 years - adult 25" or greater arm length Min. 6" finger span	13 - 15 years old 23.5" - 25" arm length 5.5" finger span	9 - 12 years old 22.5" - 23.5" arm length 5" finger span	7 - 9 years old 20.5" - 22.5" arm length 4" finger span	Younger 18.5" - 20.5" arm length
<b>Violin</b>	4/4	4/4	3/4	1/2	1/4
<b>Viola</b>	15" and above	Intermediate 14" - 15"	Junior 12" - 13"		
<b>Cello</b>	4/4	3/4	1/2 or 3/4	1/2	1/4
<b>Bass</b>	3/4	1/2 - 3/4	1/2	1/4	1/8 or 1/10

In general, do not size a student with a larger instrument and expect that he or she will grow into it. This makes playing very difficult, and is certainly more dangerous physically. In fact, the student may not even be able to reach all notes if the instrument is too large. As mentioned before, work with a capable string instrument specialist, and consider and confirm that any string rental program allows the student to move in size as part the rental agreement. Each student grows differently, and therefore the teacher needs to evaluate the needs of each student individually on a consistent basis – including instrument size, shoulder rest needs with upper strings, and endpin length with lower strings. Finally, be sure to match the bow size to the instrument size, and be sure that the bow is balanced, well weighted, and matched to the instrument.

Numerous print and digital resources exist to assist with proper sizing. Any resource, including this one, is meant to be a guide, and authors of this or any guide are never responsible for problems, including injury, from following the information contained herein. With proper sizing however, the risk of discomfort and injury is lessened; and the teacher's work can be focused on making great music, because of—not in spite of—each student's instrumental setup.



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Read his other posts and full bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).

# partner with a local music retailer for instrument fitting + recruitment

As music educators, we all understand the importance of successful instrument fitting and recruitment events. The challenge is in finding the needed instruments, supplies, resources, and time when both budget and free minutes are in such short supply. Often, the perfect solution can be a local educational representative from a reliable music retailer.

## Educational Representatives

A strong music retailer will have representatives who specialize in working directly with you and your program to educate students about the different instruments in a fun and exciting atmosphere right in your school or at the local music store. This can free you to tell students and parents about the nuts and bolts of being in band or orchestra. Once their interest is peaked, your retailer can provide tools to follow up with each student, further encouraging them to join the ensemble.

Educational representatives often work with dozens of schools and have experience with a variety of recruitment and instrument testing methods. They can offer samples of parent letters, instrument testing sheets, and can recommend instrumental specialists in your area. (Some instrumentalists may be willing to assist with your demonstrations in exchange for adding them to your school's private teacher list!)

Using your educational representative as a resource for this kind of event is free as it is mutually beneficial. They get to offer up their program benefits to your parents, while you get access to all these free tools. Best of all, the kids get an exciting hands-on introduction to music.



## The Instrument Fitting and Recruitment Process

In general, a recruitment event takes place in the three segments, all of which can be greatly enhanced by your educational representative:

### 1. Discuss Your Program

Tell the students about your program. This is your chance to shine! Here is where you will introduce yourself and your program and describe both the fun and the hard work. Good topics to discuss are:

- What kind of student can be in band/orchestra?
- Can students play sports and be in band/orchestra?
- What kinds of fun trips does the band/orchestra take?
- Will there be familiar faces in the band/orchestra? (Mention siblings and friends.)

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## 2. Instrument Demonstration

This is where the fun happens! You should talk about – and demonstrate – all of the instruments that your students will be able to choose from. At [Music & Arts](#), we emphasize the importance of signing up and trying beginning band or orchestra, as this is usually the only opportunity they will have to try either.

## 3. Music Instrument Testing

This provides an opportunity for students to check off instruments as they try them. This also allows you to collect the vital contact information needed to follow up with each student. An experienced educational representative has access to testing sheets and tracking information to help you keep track of which students had an aptitude towards which instruments and help ensure a balanced ensemble in your future!

Here is a sample [instrument testing sheet](#) used by many educational representatives at Music & Arts.

## Top Tips for Your Event

The following are some best practices to help ensure the success of any instrument testing and recruitment event.

## Be Early

This one is easy to do! Show up to the school or store where the meeting is to be held no later than 30 minutes before the start time. This way you will have plenty of time to set up and get ready. An hour early is even better!

## Be Prepared

Use a checklist to make sure that you have everything you will need. Your educational representative can help with this list of instruments and accessories, cleaning supplies, reeds etc. to keep things running both quickly and cleanly! Delegate to your rep, they are the experts!

## Bring Student and Professional Performers

While watching you perform on the instruments is always exciting for the prospective students, having local area professionals can elevate it to the next level. Of course, your educational representative can help with this, too.

It's also a great idea to have students demonstrate the instruments for you. Some may even write and perform their own compositions or play popular tunes. Not only does it offer them a unique performance opportunity, it also strikes a chord with your prospective students because they will see their peers performing, making it all seem possible.

## Relax and Have Fun

While this may sound cliché, it is very important. If the prospective students see you having a blast making music and loving every minute of it, they will want to be part of it. Excitement is contagious!

## Great Music Retailers Make Great Partners

An experienced educational representative will work closely with you to handle instrument rentals, but they also do so much more. Whether they're helping with recruitment or classroom repairs, they're with you every step of the way. They can provide you with everything from a single reed to a classroom full of low brass, and everything in between. Many representatives are musicians themselves. Some are educators. They perform in bands, quartets, orchestras, and ensembles. They teach. They understand instruments and music education. They support you.

To learn more about how the school services team at Music and Arts can help with instrument testing and growing your program, visit:

[musicarts.com/schoolservices](https://musicarts.com/schoolservices).



Kathleen Bellamy is a former music educator and the national school services marketing manager at [Music & Arts](https://musicarts.com). Based in Frederick, MD, Music & Arts is a company of trained musicians that offers friendly service and everything musical for students, parents, and educators. They are proud to be your neighborhood choice for music.

# smartmusic at instrument fitting day

Instrument fitting days are exciting events for your incoming students. They also represent a perfect opportunity to get logistical details out of the way early, freeing you and students to focus on music when school starts. Many educators also use fitting day (or another mandatory parent meeting) to perform administrative tasks including signing everyone up for Remind, CHARMS, and their LMS. Use this time to get everyone signed up for SmartMusic, too.

## Take Advantage of This Time

Instrument fitting days are the ideal opportunity to get student SmartMusic accounts set up. Instead of spending valuable rehearsal time at the beginning of the year, you'll take advantage of a meeting where parents (and students) are in "logistics mode" and ready to listen – or at least follow instructions. Instead of requiring students to act as a go-between to parents, you'll have access to a household decision-maker. Every middle school teacher knows 12-year-olds aren't always dependable messengers.

What's more, you'll be able to make sure everything is working properly before the school year starts.

## Additional Benefits

You'll also set some great expectations for incoming students. By establishing that SmartMusic assignments are "normal," students won't be surprised to learn that they're being assessed throughout the term (yes, even electives have assessments). You can even create basic assignments with SmartMusic's free library so students can get used to using the program over the summer. Try assigning a simple rhythm exercise and have students clap along with it so that instruments won't be needed (and beginning players won't learn bad habits over the summer). This will give them a chance to get comfortable with the interface and submission process, and you can use the analytics tool to

see which students practiced between instrument fitting day and the first day of school.

The entire approach demonstrates to parents that your program has a culture of practice and feedback, and they should expect students to invest time at home working on music skills.

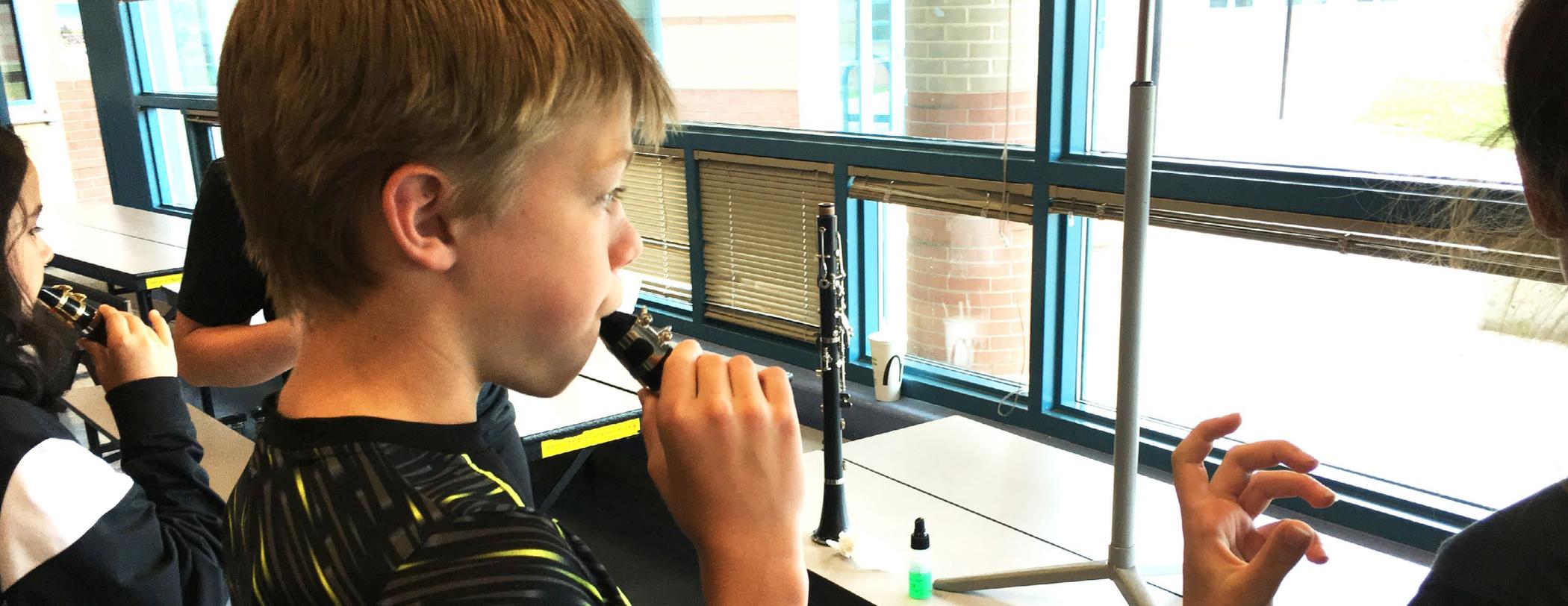
Not sure which access level your class will need next year? You can set up a free class, get student accounts ready and connected, and upgrade the access level over the summer to meet your students' needs.

## How to Get Started

Once you're [signed up for SmartMusic](#), set up your [educator account](#) and [create a class](#) for the group of students you plan to enroll. Then have students go to [admin.smartmusic.com/join](https://admin.smartmusic.com/join) and enter your [class code](#) and their school email.

Parents and students will see on-screen instructions to sign up for SmartMusic. We highly recommend that students use their school email and choose a consistent username and password combo. This will make it easier for you to identify student accounts – and any accounts created by mistake (we can help delete those mistakes). A combination of student initials, last name, and student ID number works well.

During the sign up process, students will be prompted to [set a backup email](#) in case they lose their password. If you're willing, you can have students set your email as the backup. Then when students inevitably forget a password you'll be able to help them recover it.



If students (or parents) are having trouble, remind them that they can [contact our support team](#) any time and we can help. There's no need for you to be a technical support representative in addition to all your other jobs!

You can also refer parents to our [Help Center](#). They'll find instructions for every step of the process and some tips as well. If students get stuck, they can search these articles using the Help icon within SmartMusic itself.

Once students are enrolled in your class, you can start [sending assignments](#)!

### Your Turn

Taking care of this process at instrument fitting day can help streamline your SmartMusic implementation. You'll set expectations about student practice from day one, make sure that student passwords and usernames are consistent and easy to access, and get tasks out of the way early.

If you aren't using SmartMusic, you can get started for free! [Sign up for a free trial](#) and get your students practicing!



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Read additional articles and his full bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).



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