

Dear Parents:

Welcome to the journey of learning a new instrument! Your family is about to experience sounds you may never imagined existed! I would like to help guide you in the best ways to support and encourage your young musician, as well as tips for keeping the peace in your home.

The first thing you need to know is that your child cannot learn to make beautiful sounds on their entire instrument until they are proficient at making consistent sounds on their mouthpiece. The first thing they must practice is simply making a tone. This is the hardest thing to listen to, so it will only get better! See the list below (by instrument) for specific tips for each instrument. If your child is having a hard time making a sound on their instrument read page 3 in their book together and work through the steps. Any sound is a good sound at this point! Encourage them to keep trying and to notice when they do something differently. Sometimes, it just takes time alone messing around on the instrument to find the right spot to get a sound. If you notice that your child is getting frustrated, have them put it away and come back again later. It's not worth being frustrated over.

Here are some phrases that are helpful and encouraging:

"What a great sound!"

"You work so hard, I am really proud of you."

"I can tell you are getting better."

"I know how hard this must be and you are doing really great!"

"Your mouth looks just like it should in this picture (point to picture on p. 3)"

Tell your friends and relatives about how proud you are of your child learning a new instrument, make sure your child overhears your praise.

Here are some phrases that you shouldn't say.

"What was THAT sound?"

"That sounds terrible, I think you need to practice some more."

"You sound like a \_\_\_\_\_"

While those phrases may be true, and your child may even say them first ("Mom, I sound like a duck!") you have the power to turn each encounter into a positive experience by reinforcing how well your child is doing.

It is ok to ask your child to practice on his or her own (in a room.... away from everyone else), but ask them to come out periodically and to play for you. They need to practice playing in front of others, even at this point, and they need the opportunity for you to give them praise.

At this point, your child should practice 5 minutes each day just making a sound on their mouthpiece. (Commercial breaks are a great way to get this in!) Following this should be notes and exercises from the book.

Another thing you can do to help encourage your child is to listen to recordings of professional players on their instrument together. You can pull them up on YouTube or you can borrow them from the library. This helps get a good sound in your child's ear, and helps you know what your child should be sounding like eventually. You can also attend concerts together.

Make sure your child has all the required materials for class. This includes the correct band book (Essential Elements, Book 1), a pencil, and a working instrument. Clarinets need to have at least 5 working reeds at all times. We will be talking about instrument care, maintenance and reed care in class over the next couple days. If you need to know that information now- it is on the first several pages of your student's band book.

It is an exciting journey learning to play an instrument! I am honored to be teaching your child and want to help make it as successful as possible. Please communicate with me right away if you sense your child is building frustration or if you need more ideas how to help.

Thank you for being on this journey with me!

Zachary Roberts  
Director of Bands  
Milton-Union Schools  
robertsz@milton-union.k12.oh.us

**Flute Tips:**

Practice in front of a mirror so you can see if the tone hole is in the right place as you experiment. Remember- the air should blow OVER the hole, not just into the hole. It works the same way making a sound on a bottle works. **DO NOT TRY TO PLAY THE ENTIRE INSTRUMENT IF YOU CANNOT MAKE A SOUND ON THE HEADJOINT!** That is much more difficult and will only result in more frustration. If the student is making a good sound she can close the end with her hand or stick her finger in the end of the headjoint to change the pitch. Experiment with making up songs on just the headjoint.

**Clarinet Tips:**

Make sure the reed is properly attached to the instrument. The flat part of the reed should be against the flat part of the mouthpiece, you should be able to see a small sliver of black along the top of the mouthpiece (between the reed and the mouthpiece) and the ligature should only be fingertip tight. The reed needs to be able to move and vibrate in order to produce a sound so if the ligature is too loose, too tight, too high or too low it won't work properly. If the reed is cracked or chipped (even just a little) it can have a big impact on its ability to vibrate. If in doubt, try a new reed! Read page two together to make sure your child is forming the correct embouchure.

**Trumpet and Trombone Tips:**

The buzzing of the lips is what produces the sound. If there is no sound, the lips are not buzzing together. Students should say "Oh-mmm" to keep teeth apart but lips closed. Then, apply pressure to the lips and force air through them to create the buzz. It is easiest to do this with the resistance provided by the mouthpiece. There should be no puffed cheeks and no air leaking out the sides of the mouth. Brass students should practice "sirens". Relaxing their lips for a low sound and gradually tightening for a higher sound. They should practice going up and down as far as they can.

**Percussion Tips:**

The biggest challenge with percussion at this point is setting up and tearing down equipment! Practice doing this with your child. Then read through the first pages of the book together.