

# Finding the Perfect Fit

BEGINNING BAND RECRUITMENT AND THE INSTRUMENT FITTING PROCESS

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**Recruitment is not an *event*. . . it is a *process*.**

## **Part One: Organizing and Streamlining Your Recruitment**

An organized recruitment process:

- Sets the stage for a successful program
- Makes a great first impression
- Makes the director's job easier
- Saves time in the long run

Steps to Success -- allow about 4 months to actively plan, prepare and carry out your recruitment. The rest of the year should be spent creating a positive public image of your program that will make families want their children to join!

1. Build a Timeline
  - Backward develop your timeline from the date students select courses
  - Don't forget to schedule meetings and/ or instrument rental nights
2. Determine Your Audience
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Other Stakeholders (administration, counselors, classroom teachers, etc.)
3. Develop Your Message
  - Specifics about your program
  - Important dates and events
  - How enrollment works
  - Benefits to joining/ advocacy materials
  - Other important information
4. Plan How to Communicate- different audiences require different methods

Students	Parents	Administration/ Others
Demonstration Concert	Letter/ Email	Face-to-Face
Class Visits	Website	Invitations to Events
Videos	Social Media	Data
Exposure to Instruments	Advocacy Materials	Advocacy Materials
Personal Invitations	Meetings	
Kid-to-kid interaction	Phone Calls	
Giveaways w/ purpose	Word of Mouth	

Scan the QR Code to learn  
how to do a Mail Merge!



5. Organize it all with these time saving (and free) tools!
  - Google Forms and Sheets
  - Sign-Up Genius
  - Mail Merge
6. Partner with your Local Music Store
7. Meet the kids and let the fun begin!

## Part Two: The Instrument Fitting Process



- **Getting kids on the “right” instrument jump starts their learning and puts them on a personal path to success.**
- **It is the Band Director’s responsibility to try to place each student on an instrument where he/ she has a strong chance of succeeding.**

Success on an instrument can be influenced by:

- Musical aptitude
- Shape and size of lips
- Formation of teeth and jaw
- Size of hands, fingers, arms and body

An Instrument fitting allows the teacher to evaluate:

- Embouchure issues related to the physical characteristics of the lips, teeth and jaw
- Whether the student has the potential to produce a characteristic sound after coaching/ instruction
- Size of hands, fingers, arms or body that might influence success on the instrument
- Potential on a variety of instruments to determine which are more likely to be a good fit.

**\*And it helps the student know what instrument feels most comfortable and natural to play.**

Organize your Instrument Fitting

- Current band kids and parents welcoming the guests, helping with non-musical tasks and getting the guests where they need to go
- Tables with instruments, sterilizing solution, paper towels, pencils
- Have enough testers and enough time to allow 5-10 minutes per instrument, per child
- Sign-in (pick up personalized packet)
- Work with tester to try instruments of choice (and others as needed)
- Sign-out (rate preferences)

Forms

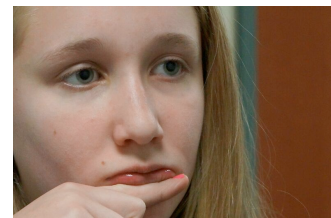
- Color Coded for easy sorting
- Pre-printed with student info collected via Google Forms and mail merged into document
- Download Wendy’s forms at [www.onandoffthepodium.com](http://www.onandoffthepodium.com) under the “Materials” tab

Making the First Sounds

- Brass Embouchures are “natural”
- Woodwind Embouchures must be “built”

- Don't get too technical at this point-- see Wendy's "tricks"

Flute: Have the student place his or her index finger horizontally below the bottom lip and "pout" over the finger. Have the student blow air as if saying the word "pooh." Remove the finger and replace it with the flute head joint and repeat the process. It is crucial that the tester place the head joint in position.



Double Reeds: Place the reed on the student's lower lip and then have them roll both lips in over the teeth. Have the student make a seal so air cannot escape, (but don't squeeze too hard) and blow. I recommend that you use a synthetic reed for oboe and bassoon fittings.



Clarinet: Have the student pretend they are putting chapstick on their bottom lip. Have the student remove their finger, but *keep the same shape to the lower lip and chin*. Tester should place the mouthpiece in the proper location on the bottom lip. Have the student put his or her top teeth directly on the mouthpiece. Ask the student to close the lips around the mouthpiece as if they are closing a drawstring bag (hug the mouthpiece with your lips) and blow a steady, fast air stream.

Saxophone: Have the student place their index finger on their bottom lip and push their finger toward their teeth. Have the student remove their finger, but keep the same shape to the lower lip and chin. Tester should place the mouthpiece in the proper location on the bottom lip. Have the student put his or her top teeth directly on the mouthpiece. Ask the student to close the lips around the mouthpiece as if they are closing a drawstring bag (hug the mouthpiece with your lips) and blow a steady, fast air stream.

*A word on sax fittings: I do not recommend using a very hard reed as a method of "discouraging" students from playing saxophone, as you will wind up with students prone to forcing the sound. Instead look for students who can maintain a relaxed but steady air stream on a 2 or 2 1/2 reed and you will find that your sax section can sound amazing! To further distinguish your potential sax "superstars," put the neck strap & instrument on the student and see if they can add a finger at a time and play from B all the way down to low D. Some won't like the weight of the instrument or will find this task too difficult and will gravitate to another choice.*

Brass: Ultimately, we don't want the lips buzzing against each other because that creates tension, but you might use this technique as a "training wheel" to get kids started on their first sounds. If a student has trouble creating a sound on a trumpet or horn mouthpiece, "move up" to a larger mouthpiece. Many students will have an easier time, and then you can go back to the smaller mouthpiece once they get a sound going. *(But you might gain a low brass player in the process!)*



**Don't be afraid to guide students to other instruments that might be a better fit or help your instrumentation.**

### Ideas for balancing your instrumentation

1. Trumpet buzz weak - try low brass
2. Great sound on trumpet/ motivated student- try French horn
3. Too many saxophones - try clarinet
4. Motivated student interested in woodwinds - try double reeds
5. Natural fit for everything/seems excited about everything- sell instruments that you need

### Percussion

- Educate families as to what percussion “is” and “is not”
- Cap percussion enrollment if necessary
- Develop well-rounded percussionists

### In my percussion fittings I look for:

- Coordination (Can the student use hands and feet together while keeping a steady pulse?)
- Rhythm Discrimination/ Echoing
- Melodic Echoing
- Ability to focus amid distractions
- IMMA Rhythm Test- available from GIA

### Finishing Up:



**You must take the time to find out what instruments the student prefers and feels most comfortable playing.**

**Student buy-in is essential if you want to retain them in your program**

- Sign-Out Card for determining child's preferences
- Some students will change their mind after trying instruments
- Recommend an instrument based on (in order of priority)
  - Child's preferences
  - Instruments that are a good fit
  - Needs of the ensemble

A highly organized recruitment and instrument fitting process can do wonders for your ensemble. I firmly believe that getting kids on the "right" instrument-- one they love AND can be successful playing-- will jumpstart their musical achievement. Through your expert guidance and care during this very important process, you can help your band to blossom!



## Where can I get more ideas?

- Be Part of the Music/ Be Part of the Band websites [bepartofthemusic.org](http://bepartofthemusic.org) [bepartoftheband.org](http://bepartoftheband.org)  
Tons of fantastic and free resources including videos, social media posts, advocacy materials, letters and forms
- *Teaching Music Through Performance in Middle School Band* (Chip De Stefano's chapter on Recruitment)
- NAMM Foundation Educator Resources  
<https://www.nammfoundation.org/educator-resources/mac-practical-guide-recruitment-and-retention>
- Wendy's articles in *The Instrumentalist* magazine on recruitment (February and March 2016 issues)
- Wendy's Website [www.onandoffthepodium.com](http://www.onandoffthepodium.com) (blog posts and downloadable materials)
- Talk to colleagues and share your best ideas - we all have something that works!

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*Wendy Higdon is the Director of Bands and Unified Arts Department Chair at Creekside Middle School in Carmel, IN. Under her direction, the Creekside Wind Symphony was honored to perform at The Midwest Clinic in December 2013. Mrs. Higdon has served as an adjudicator, clinician, and guest conductor around the country. In 2013, she received the "Fifty Directors Who Make a Difference" Award from School Band and Orchestra Magazine. She has had articles appear in The Instrumentalist magazine and Bandworld magazine. Her blogs have been reprinted by NAFME and Conn-Selmer, among others. She has been a frequent presenter at the Indiana Music Education Association Professional Development Conference. In 2016 she was a featured conductor for the Music for All Summer Symposium's inaugural Middle School Concert Band Camp.*

*Mrs. Higdon earned her degree in music education from Ball State University Honors College, graduating summa cum laude. She holds two masters degrees from Butler University, one in clarinet performance and the second in education administration. This is her 26th year of teaching middle school band.*

Special thanks to Paige's Music for sponsoring my presentation!  
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