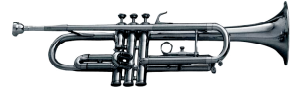


Fort Calhoun Pioneer Band



A Tradition of Quality, Class and Pride

TO: Incoming 7th Grade Band Members and their Parents
FROM: Band Office
RE: Welcome

Welcome to Junior High Band! During the next two years we will undertake a variety of learning exercises--both written and playing--which will vastly expand your musical knowledge, technical skills, and overall musicianship. We will learn and perform a great deal more music than in Elementary Band class. We will begin learning marching techniques. We will discuss and practice aspects and procedures of a quality performance. Good concert manners for audiences will be learned and practiced. Our goal is to be as well-prepared as possible as a musician before the step at ninth grade to the performance-oriented Senior High Band.

This letter is intended to provide for the new Junior High Band members and their parents as much information as possible so that they can be informed and understand the program. If there are questions at any time during the year, please feel free to contact the Band Office.

Since this gets fairly involved in some areas, I have handled the information in this manner: The remainder of this cover letter will hit very briefly some highlights of the full text that you will want to note. The next page or two will be specific schedule information for this school year. Finally, the more complete text and explanations will follow.

Highlights: (See corresponding sections for full discussions.)

- I. The annual permission form needs to be returned.
- II. Students are required to have their horn every day for class.
- IV. Students are required to be present for all major performances.
- IV. Students should dress up for concerts.
- V. Students are urged to participate in solo and ensemble work.
- VII. Parents are needed as sponsors when the band travels.
- VIII. All parents of band students are considered members of the Band Parents Organization and are encouraged to attend our very infrequent meetings.
- IX. The Junior High help with one annual fund-raiser.
- XII. Rental Fees/ School Horns

In order that I know that all parents have received a copy of this report, I would ask you to tear off the form on the last page and return it to my office. Thank You.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Jones
Director of Instrumental Music

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I. ANNUAL PERMISSION FORM

Each year throughout Junior High and Senior High Band, the students will receive at the beginning of the school year a "Parental Permission Form" which needs to be filled out and signed by the parents and then returned to the Band Office. This form grants permission for the student to travel to any event connected with the Instrumental Music Department--you will not have to sign any other permission forms during the year. It also contains some brief emergency telephone information and emergency medical information. Please fill these forms out and return them immediately. If a form does not show up at home, please ask your student about it. We must have these forms. Thank You.

II. CLASS REQUIREMENTS

Instrumental music at the Junior and Senior High levels is a full-credit subject which meets on a daily basis. Since it is a "hands-on" learning situation, it is necessary that students have their horns and materials there every day for class. The Fort Calhoun Student Handbook suggests that students should receive a zero for days they do not bring the required equipment for "hands-on" courses.

The primary requirement for the course is simply that each student participate and do the best they are capable of doing. Since no two students have the same amount of "natural" ability or aptitude for the art, there is basically no grade given on their actual overall playing ability on the instrument.

Actual assignments vary from quarter to quarter and from year to year. Assignments **will** include varying amounts of written work. These are usually involved with the area of music theory. Some students tend to have difficulty grasping this area, but they should still **attempt** to do the assignment--it will eventually (even if very gradually) begin to make sense. Since there are not large numbers of these written assignments, missing assignments can weigh heavily on this part of the grade.

Students are expected to behave in an orderly fashion while in the classroom. When class is in session they are to be quiet. Students are expected at all times to respect other members of the class and to deal with all equipment in a very careful manner.

A copy of the general "Expectations and Class Standards" is attached at the end of this report.

III. GRADING See also the Document: “Your Junior High Grade at a Glance”

Grading is based on the following categories, which are discussed below: 1) Written Homework Assignments; 2) Test Grades; 3) Practice Time Reported; 4) Performance Objectives; 5) Scales; 6) Points from Attending Lessons; 7) Attitude-Cooperation; 8) Responsibility.

1) Written Homework Assignments -- This is fairly self-explanatory.

2) Test Grades -- These include quizzes, written tests, and also grades for PERFORMANCE PROJECTS--which we consider major evaluation tools. The student does not receive a subjective individual performance grade; rather, they are graded on “contributing to and experiencing the performance.” We then do written and oral analysis of the performance experience (which is impossible without having been present) and learn from the performance “what worked and what didn’t work.” Through this learning process, we can then improve both our individual and group performance in the future. (See the section on Performances.)

3) Practice Time Reported -- Students are requested to turn in a record, signed by a parent, or their home practice time. The grade is based on a formula, but, briefly, a minimum of eight hours per quarter is required for a minimum of a "C+" in this area. (This is less than one hour per week--this is indeed "minimal" effort.) It is felt that the practice time is one good indicator of the amount of effort being put into this subject by the student. It is a matter of responsibility on the part of the student to turn in their weekly practice report at the proper time.

4) Performance Objectives (Quarters 3, 4) -- A set of performance objectives has been set up tailored specifically to each of the grade levels in junior high band. These are described, along with the evaluation method, on a separate sheet attached at the end of this letter.

5) Scales -- Five specific scales are assigned each quarter (Quarters 2-4) -- These are to be learned, memorized, and performed for the instructor. Scales are a very fundamental element in good proficiency on an instrument--there is an old saying that "You don't know your horn until you know your scales." Each scale is worth 10 points, based on an evaluation system similar to that for the performance objectives. Total points from the five scales for the quarter will be added to a base grade of “50” to form the “Scales” section of your quarter grade.

6) Starting with a base of 65 points, 5 points are earned for each lesson attended.

7) Attitude/Cooperation and 8) Responsible Participation -- Self-explanatory sections. Students are expected to be cooperative in class and to display a positive attitude and good effort. Students are to show up and responsibly participate in projects assigned to the entire class AND in any extra projects for which they volunteer or in which they agree to participate. They are subjective grades given by the instructor. Quite frankly, about 98% of all these grades given are "A"s.

Extra credit -- Some extra credit is given for solo and ensemble participation, for being selected to an honor band, and for playing in Jazz Band or doing extra projects.

As noted above, not all of these categories are utilized in determining grades for the first quarter of the school year.

IV. PERFORMANCES

The performance experience is a vital part of the music education process. (All music instruction is ultimately for the purpose of improving musical performance.) Much time is spent preparing for each specific musical performance. It is then vital for everyone to take part in that performance, to experience it, and then, afterwards, to analyze the performance through tape analysis and constructive critical review by the director, the participants, the judges, the spectators, etc.

For this reason, it is absolutely required for all students to be present at all performances that are projects of the entire class. This includes all home performances and appearances of the concert and marching bands at festivals, etc.

In almost every situation, many weeks or months notice is given for these required performances. This allows everyone time to plan accordingly. In the rare event of a serious, legitimate conflict with a date, it should be discussed with the director many months before the performance (as soon as the performance schedule is released.)

DRESS FOR PERFORMANCES -- There is no specific uniform for the Fort Calhoun Junior High Band. Students should simply dress up, with the following general guidelines: **Boys**--Dress slacks and shirts. (No blue jeans or T-shirts.) Ties are certainly appropriate (but not necessarily required.) Wear dress shoes, if at all possible. **Girls**--Dresses or skirt/blouse are required, with appropriate footwear. This specific guideline for both men and women should be noted: **SHORTS ARE ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE DRESS FOR ANY PERFORMANCE.**

V. SOLO/ENSEMBLE OPTIONS

Students are encouraged to participate in solo and/or ensemble work. We take part in at least two festivals each spring where the students have the opportunity to perform a solo or ensemble. This extra project can allow students to prepare and perform music that is a challenge to them at their own individual ability level. This activity increases their self-confidence level (and not just as a musician), it gives them personal recognition (and responsibility) for their work, it provides additional opportunity for adjudication by a professional on their own instrument, and probably as much as anything, it requires them (actually they "require" themselves out of personal pride) to practice more and thereby they develop at a much faster rate.

PLEASE NOTE: Students are highly encouraged to participate in every possible Solo/Ensemble Contest. *Students who do not have the gained confidence and experience that comes with contest solo performance are greatly reducing their chances of:* a) competing successfully against their own classmates for section leader positions, solo opportunities, and positions in select ensembles; b) performing well at future contests they may decide to enter; and c) competing against students from other schools for positions in State and regional honor bands and for scholarship opportunities as they head for college. (Many of the students from other schools at these high levels of competition are taking private lessons from a specialist on their horn.) Quite frankly, solo and ensemble participation is one of the principle driving forces behind the overall success of our band program. **The outstanding individual successes many of our high school students have achieved were also created out of their continual participation in Solo/Ensemble contests and the individual lessons necessary to perform well at these events.**

STUDENTS PLAYING SCHOOL-OWNED SPECIALTY INSTRUMENTS (e.g., baritones, tubas, French horns, bass clarinets, oboes, etc.) ARE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN ALL SOLO/ENSEMBLE EVENTS. The District owns a limited number of these horns. It is critical to the overall Band's success that these horns (and their parts) are played very well. Since we only have a few of these instruments, each student using one of them must develop themselves to the absolute best of their ability (since no one else can be learning to play the horn while they have it.) If the student is unwilling to do this work, the horn needs to be turned in so someone else can learn to play it well.

PERCUSSIONISTS all belong to this category of students playing school instruments, and to the category of those expected to participate actively in all of our SOLO/ENSEMBLE EVENTS. All PERCUSSIONISTS ARE SOLOISTS on nearly every part they play, and the entire Band is dependent on their level of development in performance skills. They MUST have the experience to be a competent soloist. If the student does not wish to do this, they need to move to a different section of the Band in which solos are not absolutely required.

Presently the school pays the fee for all solo and ensemble entries at the festivals. However, if the student does not carry through after being entered in a festival, and does not perform, they will be charged the cost of the entry plus a processing fee—barring uncontrollable circumstances. This is referred to as a “scratch fee.” (Wasting of school funds is not responsible and is not allowed.)

VI. INDIVIDUAL LESSONS

As a part of the Band Department, Fort Calhoun Schools attempts to provide a 15-minute individual lesson each week for the Junior High band students. This is a very vital part of the overall program. There is just no way to teach all the specific details of every different instrument in the midst of a general band class. Likewise, there is no way to deal with each student's own individual and unique problems they are having in playing their horn. While these lessons are not extremely long, they provide just a short time of 1-to-1 instruction (as opposed to 50:1 or 75:1 that is normal in a band class), a lot of valuable in-depth work gets done, almost all solo and ensemble work at the junior high level is taught during these lessons, and many folks cannot afford any other private lessons. This is a valuable service from your school: 30-minute private lessons run anywhere from \$7.50 up to \$15.00 and even higher in Omaha.

Lessons are held during one of their other class periods (once a week.) Students are asked to help get themselves scheduled in a time slot that will work for them. It is the student's responsibility to remember their lesson time. Lessons are generally not given during first quarter.

Students not attending lessons are at a great disadvantage to the majority of their classmates who are receiving individual help. 1) There is no way to solve some individual technique problems other than to work on them one on one with the student. 2) Some of the theory and counting problems seem to clear up much easier when the student can focus on the exercise individually. 3) **As significant as anything, the student cannot prepare for any Solo or Ensemble work without individual lesson time.** There is no other time allotted for Junior High lessons—the high school and elementary programs absorb most of the before/after school. **This basically means the student is unable to participate in the Solo/Ensemble contests. PLEASE**

REFER TO SECTION V, "Solo/Ensemble Options," on Page 4 for discussion of the importance of this factor.

Students and Parents need to understand that, without individual lessons, a student's chances of being competitive are vastly reduced. It in no way means they can't participate in the class. It just greatly reduces their opportunities. For example, students don't rise to section leader positions simply by getting older. The best players will hold these positions regardless of their age.

Again, many of the competitive students in other band programs are going to be taking private lessons from specialists. Hard working students in our program have been quite successful competing against these "private lesson" students mostly by doing extensive work in solo and ensemble events.

VII. SPONSORS

In almost every situation, whenever the band members are taken away from the school for a performance situation, band parents (mothers and/or fathers) are needed to travel with the group as sponsors. In most situations the parents have very little responsibility other than to simply be present and to be a presence. They do, however, get to "be involved" in the whole "process" of the performance; they get to be right with the students to share in the "experience," the joys--and sometimes the disappointments--of the performance; they get to learn first-hand what their students are trying to accomplish in their musical studies; and generally, the parents just have a lot of fun.

On some occasions we have a large number of parents we know would like to sponsor an event; other times we are hunting. We generally get sponsors either from people volunteering or from asking students in class if any of their parents would be willing to be called and asked. Obviously sponsors should like to be around students and should like talking to them. No other experience is necessary. You will be asked to enforce school policies, band rules, and rules of common sense and courtesy--however, as mentioned earlier, you may likely go an entire day and never have to correct a single student. **DO NOT BE CONCERNED** if a Band Parent officer--rather than the Band Director--calls you and asks you to sponsor. This is not an uncommon procedure--this is one way in which the officers assist the band program.

VIII. BAND PARENTS ORGANIZATION

We have a very loosely-structured organization, known simply as the Band Parents Organization, which serves as a support group for the Instrumental Music Department. The Band Parents help with raising funds necessary 1) for the major trips taken by the Senior High Band, 2) for help with uniform requirements of the band, 3) for some of the awards given in the band program, 4) for miscellaneous activities and expenses incurred in operating the band program, and 5) for additional equipment the school cannot always provide.

The group, and the officers especially, frequently help in organizing the man-power for an event or even run an entire project through its completion. The Band Parents Organization has been an extremely valuable asset to the Band Department, to the band students, and to the Director of Bands. Very few, if any, of the accomplishments of the past ten years could have been brought to a successful completion without this organization.

All parents of all band students are automatically considered members of the Band Parents Organization. There are no dues. Meetings are few and far between--held only when there is vital business which needs attention. While much of the business concerns the Senior High Band, all band parents are encouraged to attend to keep apprised of what is happening in the Band Department of the school. Parents are not expected to help with projects that do not involve their students, although, they are certainly welcome to help. There are from time to time, however, projects and issues (such as uniforms) which affect the band for many years to come. [Incidentally, we do not run a continuous raft of small, pesky, door-to-door sale fund-raisers. We fund all our projects with just a limited number of annual projects--most of which are food/entertainment - oriented functions.] **Our annual meeting takes place in August during Senior High Band Camp (on Tuesday evening.)**

IX. FUND RAISING

Some of the miscellaneous band expenses each year are incurred by the Junior High Band. They also use the equipment we purchase each year. For this reason, the Junior High Band annually participates in one fund-raiser with the Senior High. This is the Salad Safari, held each spring, usually in late April. Without explaining the whole project here, in short, you will be called and asked to donate either some type of salad (the number of servings will be indicated) or \$7.00 to help with supplies which must be purchased. All band students are then issued an appointed number of tickets to the event and are asked to sell as many as possible. PLEASE NOTE: Tickets stubs with corresponding cash AND ALL UN-USED TICKETS must be returned after the project is over. Students are responsible for the full value of all tickets they were issued until they return the aforementioned. We have had some problems understanding this at the Junior High level.

X. PRIVATE LESSONS (OUTSIDE SCHOOL)

Students are obviously encouraged to take private lessons on their instrument from a professional outside school--if they are interested and if it is financially a possibility. It goes without saying that the extra work and preparation necessary for the lessons will cause the student to become a better player. It is generally our suggestion that the private teacher be a specialist on the instrument the student wants to learn. Make sure the teacher is reputable. Check around--don't waste your money!

The amount of progress made and the benefits received from private lessons are just like that made in the regular band class and in any other endeavor: The progress and benefits are directly proportional to the amount of effort expended on the project.

XI. FALL PEP BAND AND MARCHING PERFORMANCES

Several years ago the Junior High Band began functioning as a pep band for the high school Varsity Football games. I believe it has been a beneficial, as well as enjoyable, project for the junior high class. There are either four or five home games each season and students should check the school calendar for those dates. In order to prepare for the pregame events, students should be **at the band room and tuned no later than one half hour before game time. This generally means reporting by 6:20 p.m. for most games.** FIRST games of the season generally require additional lead time.

The Junior High band also begins learning the fundamentals of marching band. In order to give the fall unit a "goal" and get a bit of performance time in, we often try to perform at the half-time of a high school football game, usually sometime in October. However, due to beginning-of-the-year "uncertainties" with each new group, varying speeds at which different classes progress, and the need to coordinate with other high school half-time activities, it is frequently later in September before we are sure of the exact date of this performance. Weather factors also play a role in the fate of this particular performance.

XII. RENTAL FEES / SCHOOL HORNS / PERCUSSION SECTION FEES

Most of the students who play our larger and more expensive school-owned instruments usually switch to these instruments sometime during seventh or eighth grade. If your student should come home and discuss this with you, **please be aware that there is a rental fee for these school instruments.** The fee is not high, but students often just forget to mention this factor to their parents. Specific information will be available for you at that time. **Students renting "specialty instruments" (e.g., French horns, tubas, baritones, oboes, etc.) from the school should refer to Section V for expectations concerning Solo and Ensemble participation.**

Likewise, **there is a fee for all students who play in the percussion section.** These students all rotate on a large collection of school-owned percussion instruments, some of which are quite expensive and which collectively cost a great deal. Due both to heavy usage and many different individuals using them, this equipment gets a lot of wear and tear, and, frankly, some abuse. Also, due to its very nature, some of it has to be replaced on a rather frequent basis. Thus all percussionists in Junior and Senior High share in the maintenance costs. Our fee is currently an escalating fee which starts at \$15 per year and increases for everyone with various incidents of mistreatment of the equipment. While we have never yet reached the maximum, the current maximum fee is the standard school instrument rental fee of \$35. (Our neighboring school district to the north charges \$50 per year flat fee. If anyone is unhappy with our escalating fee system, we can quickly change the fee to be equivalent with their system.)