

## BEING A BAND OR ORCHESTRA PARENT

Parents often ask how they can help their beginning band or orchestra student at home when they are not musical themselves or do not know how to play the instrument their student is learning. Here are some tips to help your student succeed.

1. **BE INTERESTED.** The single best thing parents can do to help their student practice is to be genuinely interested in what is going on in their class. To find out what happened in class, and how their student plans on being ready for the next class or test or performance. To want to know how their instrument fits together, or which fingers press down which keys or valves, learning the proper bow hold or how to hold the mallets.

Such questions happen anywhere: in the car, at the dinner table, right after school...but they should happen a lot. The more questions parents can ask, the more the student knows that they are interested and, in turn, the more often the student will want to practice.

2. **ENCOURAGE.** Calculated, positive feedback from parents is a great way of reinforcing behavior. The logic is that if the parent catches their student doing something right and then praises them for it, the student is likely to want to repeat that behavior in the future. If the parent asks enough questions they will know what concerns/problems the student perceives. The point is that when the student battles with practicing “demons”, they do so with the support and with plenty of encouragement to persist.

3. **REFLECT.** Successful practice at home begins with an understanding by the student of exactly what they need to achieve. Broad objectives for the week will be posted on Google Classroom and discussed in class but students are also encouraged to make notes in their book and on their music when there are things they need to work on. Parents who are interested and open up that dialogue with their child as to what they need to work on gives the student the ability to reflect on what is going on in the classroom. Students should be able to explain exactly what their tasks are as well as any possible practice techniques that were discussed in class that would help them accomplish their task.

4. **STEER.** Even when kids are completely clear on what their goals are and have a comprehensive list of practice techniques to use to pursue those goals, they can sometimes be confused as to how to organize it all. Parents can help students work out a scheduled practice time. Parents can also help by listening to their students' practice: If they hear the student spending a lot of time on a section that they can already play, it's time to go in and tell their child that it sounds great and to move on to something they haven't mastered yet.

5. **ENTHUSE.** Praise can be useful for reinforcing what a student is already doing, being enthusiastic can help motivate students to be excited about things they haven't even started yet, affecting practice sessions that may not take place for months. Parents can enthuse about the new piece their student is working on. They can enthuse about the fact that their student is almost finished with their book. They can enthuse about how well their child did during their practice or at their last concert.

*Adapted from The Practice Revolution, by Philip Johnston*