

# Which Instrument Should I Play?



Choosing an instrument is a very important decision, but a difficult one for many students. We encourage all band members to continue on their instruments for many years, so this decision should be made with careful consideration. Some people know they like higher or lower sounds. Some prefer deeper sounds, others like brighter sounds. Some people are tall with long arms, while others are smaller with small hands and fingers. All of these factors contribute to deciding which instrument is best for you. Below are brief descriptions of the instruments you may choose from as a member of the DCMS band and orchestra programs.

**The band instruments fall into three families: woodwinds, brass, and percussion.**

## WOODWINDS



The **flute** is the highest sounding woodwind instrument in the beginning band. Its sound is produced by blowing air across the hole in the embouchure plate. The air splits and vibrates creating a clear, bright tone. Some flautists go on to play piccolo as they get older.



The **oboe** is a woodwind instrument with a double reed, which means it has two pieces of cane reed wrapped together. It looks very similar to the clarinet, and may be confused with it. Its sound is produced by forming an embouchure around the double reed and blowing into the instrument, causing the two pieces of reed to vibrate together.



The **bassoon** is a woodwind instrument in the double reed family. The bassoon is known for its body shape and distinctive tone colour, wide range, variety of character, and agility in music. Its sound is produced in the same way as the Oboe, however the double reed is a bit larger in size.



The **clarinet** has the largest range (most notes from low to high) of all the instruments in the band. Its sound is produced by forming an embouchure on the mouthpiece and reed and blowing into the instrument, causing the reed to vibrate and create a full, rich tone.



The **saxophone** is a woodwind instrument usually made of brass and played with a single-reed mouthpiece, much like the clarinet. Although most saxophones are made from brass, they are categorized as woodwind instruments, because sound is produced by a vibrating reed, traditionally made out of woody cane.

## **BRASS**



The **trumpet** is the highest-sounding brass instrument in the band. As with all brass instruments, sound is produced when the player buzzes his/her lips against a mouthpiece. This vibration produces a bright, brilliant tone. Students interested in the trumpet can start on a slightly shorter instrument called the **cornet**, which uses all the same fingerings and sounds almost identical, then switch to trumpet beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.



The **French horn** is the longest of all the brass instruments, with many feet of tubing curling around and around to create its beautiful shape. Even with all this tubing, the horn only sounds a little bit lower than trumpet. Its uniquely dark, rich tone is often used in the band or orchestra to make you think of a hunting scene.



The **trombone** is the only instrument in the band that uses a slide to change notes. It has a big, deep sound. As a member of the low brass family, the trombone plays a very important role in the band by providing a solid foundation.



The **Euphonium** also has a big, low sound, but its tone is slightly darker than the trombone's. This is the instrument you should play if you think you might like to play the \*tuba someday but are not physically big enough to hold one yet. \*The **tuba** looks like the Euphonium's big brother - it is even bigger with a huge, very deep tone. The tuba is the lowest-sounding instrument in the band, and it provides the foundation for all the big chords we play.

### PERCUSSION



Instruments in the **percussion** family vibrate to create their unique sounds when struck with a stick, mallet, or beater. Percussion instruments play a variety of roles in the band: sometimes they are timekeepers, sometimes they are soloists, and sometimes they are used to embellish music played by other sections. Percussion students eventually learn to play a number of different instruments, but during the first year, we focus on **bells and snare drum**. Students in RSD 96 are strongly advised to have at least **one year of piano lessons** to start on percussion or talk to the band director for further information.

---

**\*Special Note:** After a year of playing their beginning instruments, there may be cause for a student to switch instruments. The typical progression of instruments is as follows:

Flute----to---- Piccolo, Oboe; Alto or Tenor Saxophone

Oboe----to----Bassoon

Clarinet-----to----Bass Clarinet; Alto or Tenor Saxophone

Alto Sax----to---- Tenor or Baritone Saxophone----sometimes to Bassoon

Trumpet----to---- French Horn

Baritone/Euphonium----to----Tuba

**\*\*Students are not required to switch instruments! Most students play the same instrument through high school and even into college, and often develop a high level of expertise on that instrument. The decision to switch instruments is one made at the advisory of Mr. Hart and Mrs. Hembruch and only after discussing with both student and parent. Switches are typically only made if the student demonstrates an ability or strong desire to play another instrument or to accommodate instrumentation in the band.**