

Effective/Efficient Beginner Band Program

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**If pressed for time, the most significant information is Written Work, Bootcamp, Basic Notes(YEAR ONE) and Improvising*

Contents

- Goals
- Classroom Setup
- Written Work*
 - Fingering Chart
- Tips/Tricks
- Routines
 - Bootcamp*
 - Basic Notes (Year ONE)*
 - Basic Notes (Year TWO)
 - Chorales/Scales
 - Blues
 - Improvising
- Getting a Good Turnout!

Goals

- teach fundamental skills (sound production, increase range, basic articulation, play forte/piano, basic theory/writing/reading work, listening while playing/balance, follow conductor)
- efficiency - how to save time in the following areas (classroom layout, clear language, routines)
- get students to 'buy in' to what they are doing (enjoyable, purposeful)

Classroom Setup

Starting Instrumentation

In order to streamline, I start off with **only four wind instruments** (flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone). As the year goes on, I add tuba, alto and percussion. I find that it's important to find out who the independent learners are and put them on these instruments. Also, when developing a pleasant sound on an instrument, percussion can hinder the class's ability to play relaxed and hear their sound clearly. It also requires them to develop an internal sense of 'time'.

Videos/Balanced Instrumentation

This helps achieve 'buy-in' and gets students to select a variety of instruments. While showing these videos I talk about how each instrument works and describe their differences. I use these videos because they show a wide range of levels. In order to make an informed decision, students should hear what they will sound like for the next few years. Here are the links that I use.

This configuration changes as instruments are added throughout the year. I usually add tuba and alto saxophone then percussionist. For your own enjoyment, please put strong musicians on these instruments (especially percussion). These students should be able to solve problems on their own and learn independently.

Washing Stations

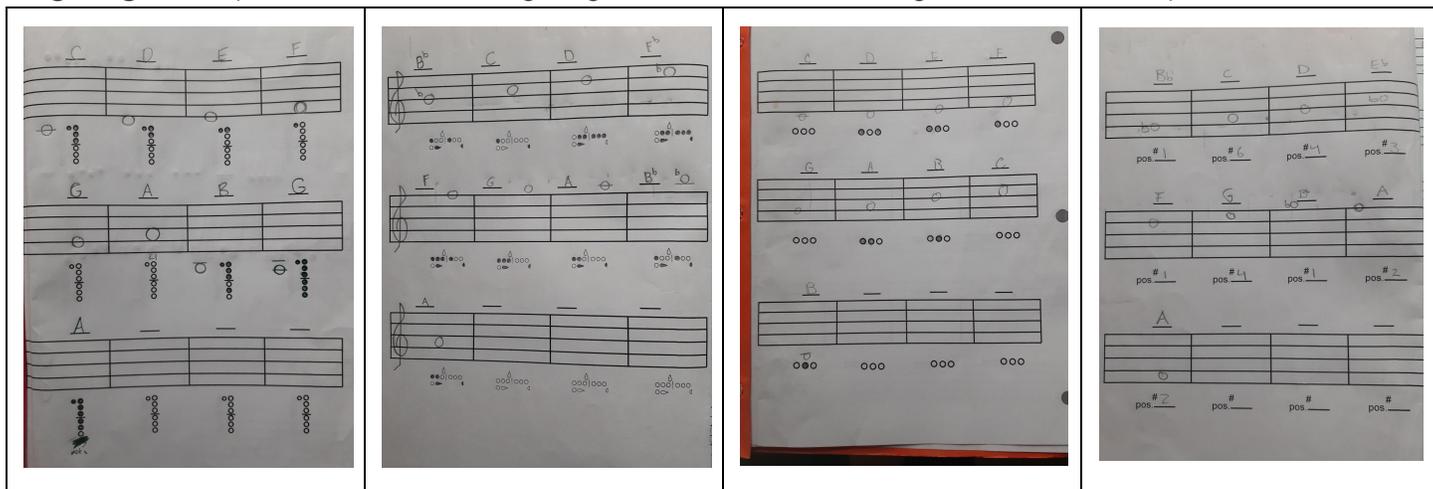
Most music rooms have a sink but I'd encourage you to **create a second cleaning station** in your room. To do this you need a **small bowl** (for cleaning solution), **paper towels**, a **water spray bottle** (to rinse off mouthpieces) and a **large bin** to spray over (to avoid a mess). The primary reason I started to use two stations was to speed up the cleaning process but I've noticed a significant drop in behaviour issues at the start of class. The "mile long line at the sink" was a bad place for kids to get into trouble. I also find that I start the class in a better mood because it feels like we're not wasting so much time getting ready.

Written Work

I was growing frustrated with how students treated the band ensemble books. Every year, no matter how hard I tried, they would get destroyed. I didn't care so much about the rough edges and torn pages, that was simply a sign of use, but it really frustrated me how so many of them would have notes and fingerings written on them. It seemed like a battle I couldn't win. I decided to try something different.

All of my **students write out their own band ensemble music in a duotang that they leave in class**. The first page is a fingering chart that they fill out, themselves. They also write out all of their warm ups chorales and scales. Since I don't teach much theory in the first couple of years, I've found that this has provided a nice base for their understanding of clefs, basic notation, rhythms and how music is written so that it is easy to read. It takes some time away from their instrument but I've found that for many students it's a welcome break when their embouchure muscles are tiring.

Fingering Chart (band method book fingering charts are overwhelming for some students)



Tips/Tricks

Here are some rehearsal/classroom techniques that I use. They're pretty standard in the music teaching world but they work!

Hands In The Air (and singing!)

Students sing in my class (it's how we start the year). I've noticed that the musical concept or "up and down" is often misunderstood by students. Once in a while for pieces of music that move by step and skip I'll have students put their hands in the air and sing the piece of music while moving their hands accordingly. It usually takes a few tries but they seem to get it. It helps some of them understand that higher/lower on the page correlates to higher/lower sounds.

Rhythmic Reading

- 1 - Say it
(ta, titi, ticka ticka etc)
- 2 - Say and Clap it
(ta, titi, while clapping)
- 3 - Clap it
(just clapping)
- 4 - Clap and Count it
(clap the rhythm while counting 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4 etc.)

I Point You Play

When many students in a specific section are struggling to play the notes that are written, they may need an opportunity to play the notes "out of time". I tell them to play the first note when I point at them. When I point again they play the next note and so on. You may have to call out the next note name as you point. This gives weaker students an opportunity to go slowly. Students should be encouraged to use this technique when practicing independently.

High Push-Up/Low Push-Up

During "Boot Camp - Push-ups", brass players learn how to buzz high and low. Be sure to reference this during other parts of the class. If a trumpet player is struggling to play high enough, remind them to do their "high push-up" into the mouthpiece while pushing down the correct valves. The opposite applies to low notes.

OHOT! (other hand on top)

Occasionally I encounter a clarinet player who plays with their right hand on top. I tell them to play with their Other Hand On Top and point out the acronym **OHOT**. For the remainder of the year I can simply call out OHOT while we are playing to remind them to switch hands. Nothing profound but it works!

Routines

Efficient (less talk more playing - saves time if everyone knows what to do)

Effective (learning to play something well requires repetition)

SLOW DOWN!!!

There are different opinions as to which students to “teach to”. I have found that at the beginner level, that is unstreamed, it is important to **focus on helping the lower students**. If they get left behind too early in the year the entire class will suffer. The class will not be able to sound good playing simple band repertoire if there are too many weak links. Another thing that will become a problem is behaviour. When students feel useless they will stop focussing on the task at hand and find other ways to remain interested!

When students are playing a routine that is simple, and often perceived as mundane, I **use accompaniment** to change the way the note sounds. They seem to enjoy experiencing how the same note changes colour when contrasted by a different chord. This makes it much more interesting for them when they are playing through a routine.

***Rounds** (canons) allow students to play the same simple piece many times in a row. After the class has learned a round in unison have them play it as a two then three then four part round. Obviously you can overdo this, but it slows things down and gives struggling students more opportunities to succeed.

Routine #1 Bootcamp (mouth-piece work)

Jogging - sustained sound.

Brass - Repeat after me, P P P P, Ppp Ppp Ppp Ppp (with a bit of a buzz), then a long Ppppppp. This free buzzing is quite difficult but it make them create an embouchure. Also, it's nearly impossible to free buzz without using an adequate amount of air. They then buzz on their mouthpiece.

Target Practice - starting a sound accurately.

Discuss how when you say “ta” your tongue stops (or releases) the air precisely. Start with...

Repeat after me. Ta (ta). Too (too). T”wind sound” (t”wind sound”)

Four shots - t---t---t---t---- (repeat)

Double time t-t- t-t- t-t- t-t- (repeat)

For fun, have each section (flutes, trom., trum., clar.) play four shots one section after another. Once they get into a rhythm, change to two shots each and eventually one shot each. It sounds pretty funny and they usually start laughing.

Push-ups - (mostly for **brass** players) learning to control pitch using their embouchure.

I make reference to low and high push-ups throughout the year to help them play correct notes.

Buzz Low - blow hot air (like a bad breath check) on your hand. Now use that air and buzz with a slightly relaxed embouchure.

Buzz High - blow fast air and tighten up your lips.

High-low-high push-up (I use my hands to direct this). Only do one push-up at a time. Repeat.

Low-high-low push-up (I use my hands to direct this). Only do one push-up at a time. Repeat.

I do a version of this with **flutes**. For the first few weeks they try to hold a sound as long as they can on one breath. After they can do this, I ask them to use faster/focussed air to see if they can get the higher octave.

As a joke, I get the **clarinets** ready to do a push-up but after I count them in I cut them off before they can make a sound. I then make a comment like "we don't need to hear anymore from you".

Routine #2 - Playing Basic Notes (Year ONE)

Duotang example - Trumpet/Clarinet

The image shows two pages of handwritten musical notation for Trumpet/Clarinet. The first page is labeled 'Pg. 1' and the second page is labeled 'Pg. 2'. The notation includes staves with notes and rests, and some dynamic markings like 'p'. The first page has six staves, and the second page has six staves. The notation is written in a simple, clear style.

Accompaniment - Chords

Page #1

#1 /D --- / --- /Bmin --- / --- /Bb --- / --- Asus - /D --- / --- /

#2 /Eb --- / --- /Cmin --- / --- /Ab --- /Abmin --- /Eb --- / --- /

#3 /C --- / --- /F --- / --- /Ab --- / --- Bb - /C --- / --- /

#4 /Bb --- / --- /Eb --- / --- /F --- / --- /Bb --- / --- /

#5 /Bb --- / --- /Eb --- / --- /F --- / --- /Bb --- / --- /

#6 /Bb --- /Eb --- /Bb --- / --- D(Abass)/Gmin --- /Cmin - F - /Bb --- / --- /

Page #2

#1 /Bb - - - / - - - - /F - - - - / - - - - F#o /Gmin - - - - /C7 - - - - /Cmin - F7 - /Bb - - - - / - - - - /

#2 /Bb - - - /Eb - - - - /Bb - - - - / - - - - D(Abass)/Gmin - - - - /C7 - F - /Bb - - - - / - - - - /

#3 /Bb - F - / Bb - Eb - /Bb - - - - / - - - - /Bb - Eb - /Bb - F - /Bb - - - - / - - - - /

(#3 can also be played as a 2, 3 or 4 part round. You can start every bar or second bar)

#4 /Bb - - - /F - - - - /Bb - - - - /Eb - - - - /Bb - - - - /Eb - Bb(Dbass)/Cmin - F7 - /Bb - - - - /

(#4 can also be played as a 2, 3 or 4 part round. You can start every second bar)

#5 /Bb - Dmin(Abass) - /Gmin - (fbass) - /Eb - F - /Bb - - - - :/

#6 /Bb - - - /F - - - - / - - - - /Bb - - - - / - - - - /Eb - Cmin - /Bb(fbass) - F7 - /Bb - - - - /

Routine #2 - Playing Basic Notes (Year TWO)

Flute

Trombone

The image shows four panels of handwritten musical notation. The first two panels are for the Flute part, and the last two are for the Trombone part. Each panel contains several staves of music with notes, rests, and other musical symbols. The notation is written in black ink on white paper.

Accompaniment - Chords

Page #1

#1 /D - - - - / - - - - /Bmin - - - - / - - - - /Bb - - - - /G - - - - /Asus - - - - /D - - - - /

#2 /Eb - - - - / - - - - /Ab - - - - / - - - - /B - - - - /Cmin - - - - /Db - D - /Eb - - - - /

#3 /Cmin - - - - / - - - - /Cmin - - - - / - - - - /Do - - - - /G(b13) - - - - /Ab7 - G(b13) - /Cmin - - - - /

#4 /Bb7 - - - - / - - - - /Eb7 - - - - / - - - - / Bb7 - - - - /Eb7 - - - - /Bb7 - Eb7 - /Bb7 - - - - /

#5 /Bb - - - - /Eb - - - - /Bb - - - - /F - - - - /Bb - Eb - /Bb - F - /Bb Eb Bb F /Bb - - - - /

#6 /Bb - F - / Bb - Eb - /Bb - Eb - / Bb - F - /Bb F Bb Eb /Bb Eb Bb F / uni. w/class/

(#3 can also be played as a 2, 3 or 4 part round. You can start every bar or second bar)

Page #2

#1 /Bb - - - /Eb - - - /Bb - Eb - /Bb - - - /Bb - Eb - / - - Bb - /Bb - Eb - /Bb - - - /

#2 /Bb - - - /F - - - / - - - - /Bb - - - / - - - - /F - - - /Bb F Bb F /Bb - - - /

#3 /Bb - Eb - /Bb Eb Bb - /Eb - F - /Eb F Eb - /F - Bb - /F Bb F - /Bb F Eb F /Bb - - - /

At this point students are ready to play the B flat concert scale.

Routine #3 - Playing Chorales/Scales

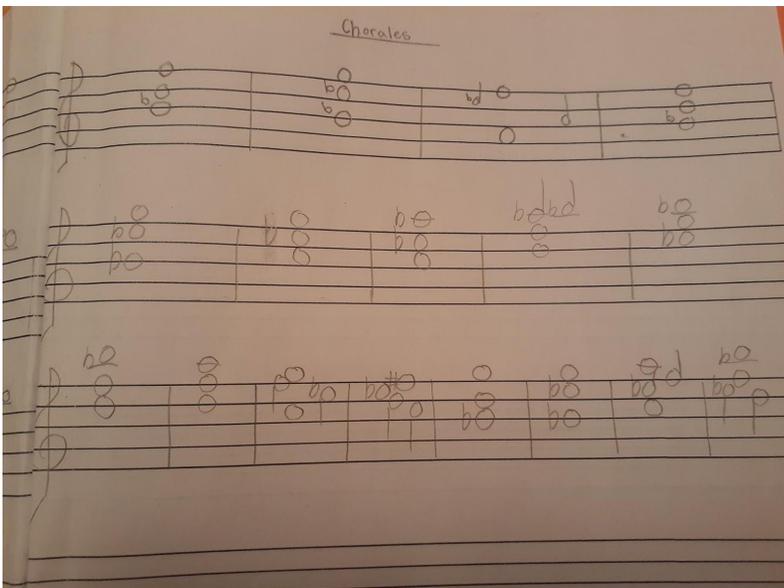
These chorales are used to **slow things down**. Students are basically repeating the basic notes again, but this time they get to hear simple harmonies with each other. They are usually amazed the first time they hear the class and individuals play these well.

Teaching Method

- Write the bottom part on the board/students copy into their duotang. Play that part as a class.
- Write the middle part on the board/students copy into their duotang. Play that part as a class.
 - Half the class plays bottom part, half the class plays middle part. Then switch.
- Write the top part on the board/students copy into their duotang. Play that part as a class.
 - Half the class plays top part, half the class plays middle part. Then switch.
- Split the class into thirds. Try the chorale in three parts. Switch groups and parts and play again.
- Have three individuals play this for the class. The class can come up with different configurations and discuss which ones sound the best.
- Discuss balance.** Often a trio will play the notes quite well but one instrument will be too loud or too soft. Ask if students can hear the imbalance. Have the trio play the chorale again but fix the imbalance.

As A Warm-up

Part way through the year these chorales can be used in conjunction with the scales as the warm-up routine. I will divide the class into three sections and play a chorale three times in a row without stopping in between. Each group will switch which part they play on each repeat.



Scales

No Surprises here. As students progress, I like to use scales and chorales as a warm-up/routine. By the end of year two (grade eight) many students will be able to play B flat Major, E flat Major, G minor and the Bb blues scales. A few will also know F and C Major.

As a routine, pair scales with chorales. The three chorales I currently use are in B flat Major, E flat Major and G minor. I encourage students to create scale patterns and practice them.

Routine #4 - Blues

After a few months students are ready for something new. I have listening units, percussion activities and songs to sing that I will use to try and break up the year. That being said, there is another way to continue to play instruments and keep things “fresh”. I do a blues unit that is mostly taught by rote. For the students who can produce a nice sound on their instrument but struggle to read music this is a fun way to validate their skill set.

Learning to improvise is a risky thing to do. There is a good chance that at some point you will look foolish or sound bad. If we expect our students to take this risk, we must try to understand what they are going through. This best way to do this is to improvise ourselves. The other side to this involves eliminating the size of the risk that students face. This unit requires that teacher to take a risk while trying to **minimize the risk for students**. As their confidence grows, they will be able to deal with small failures and hopefully come to understand and experience the joy of expression through improvisation.

Something you and the students will learn throughout this unit is that improvisation is not necessarily made up “on the spot”. Many successful improvisers draw from patterns, melodies and phrases that they have played hundreds of times before. This means that hard work and repetition are a very important part of improvising.

Learn To Play Jazz Yourself

Start by learning the Bb blues scale. You’ve all practiced for many hours so you already know how to become proficient instrumentalists, but this requires thinking “on the fly”. Try to get rid of the paper in front of you, experiment with patterns, and when you can’t play something that you want to play, take some time to figure it out! You might even want to try closing your eyes when you play.

Piano Accompaniment

This is a bit trickier but quite important. If you can learn to play a simple blues chord progression on the piano, you can make the improvising experience more authentic for the students and yourself. If you struggle at first, keep in mind that this is what your students are going through as well! Refer to the handout for a basic blues example that you can use. When accompanying students, use dynamics to help create a different mood once in a while.

Piano Accomp. - B^b Blues

- The walking quarter notes is important. It's really an important part of the "jazz feel"

- Eventually you'll be able to make up your own lines and add more chords.

Blues - Bass Lines

* There are no rules, play what sounds good!

Blues Scale - How To Teach It

(students do all of this without any written music)

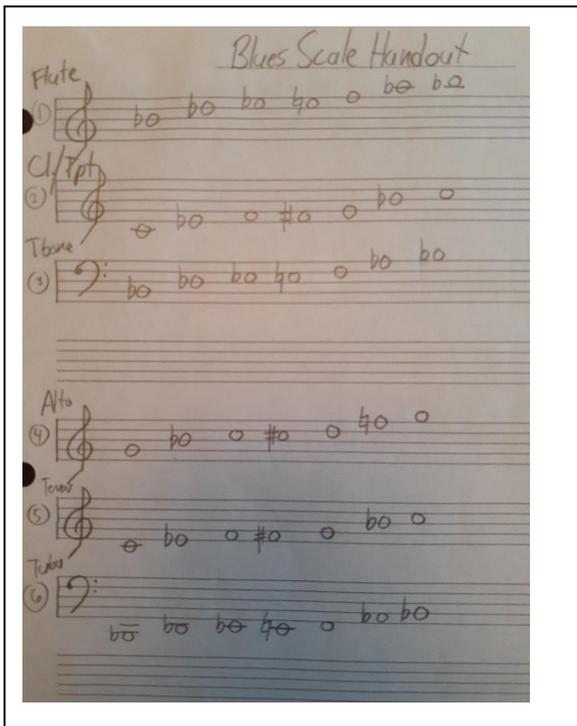
- Teach them the first note
- Teach them the second note.
- Entire class sings slowly, O - n - e, T - w - o, T - w - o, O - n - e then have them play it.
- Teach them the third note
- Entire class sings slowly, O - n - e, T - w - o, Thr - ee Thr - ee, T - w - o, O - n - e then have them play it.
- Keep going this way up the scale. Stop when they know the first five notes. They will be working extensively with these notes for a few weeks.
- TIP - while singing, I usually have them to the "hands in the air" techniques.

Once they have the first five notes down they can use them to play a blues melody.

1 2 3 4 5-----, 5 4 3 2 1----- (to the rhythm ta ta ta titaaaa, ta ta ta titaaaa)

With piano (or CD) accompaniment, they can play this three times as a blues head.

If students only get music once per week, you'll need to reteach the blues scale this way for at least three weeks. Be sure to refer to the blues scale using numbers. It comes in handy when talking to the entire class. It will also be very helpful when teaching different blues heads.



Blues Heads (all blues heads that I teach use the notes from the blues scale)

*Listen to versions of these blues heads on your own and with the class. If they can't sing it, they can't learn it. They need to know how the piece sounds. I teach one blues head every two to three weeks. Let them master one at a time.

C Jam Blues (actually "B flat Jam")

-Write the following numbers on the board then have the class sing(w/hand in the air), then play...

/5,5 - - - /5,5 - 5,5 - / 5--1 - - / - - - - /

-This repeats three times to complete one time through the blues head. Usually jazz musicians perform a complete head two times at the beginning and end of a piece, but in class I only do it once at the beginning and end.

Blues In The Closet (modified version)

-Write the following numbers on the board then have the class sing(w/hand in the air), then play...

/1 2 3 2 /3 21 - - /1 2 3 21/ - - - /

-This repeats three times to complete one time through the blues head.

Sonnymoon For Two (modified version)

-Write the following numbers on the board then have the class sing(w/hand in the air), then play...

/^7 6 5 / 3 2 11 1 / ^123--21/^123--21/

-This repeats three times to complete one time through the blues head.

Improvising

All Soloing Together

This is when all the students solo at the same time while the teacher plays the blues on the piano. It sounds awful! This is the best time for students to take risks without fear of public humiliation. During this time, I have two rules.

1 - They must play

2 - They must use the notes from the blues scale.

Repeat this several times. This activity will always be the way to get the class back into improvising mode.

They are often surprised at what they come up with and what those around them are playing.

Two Bar Solo

Have them play a two bar solo all at the same time (again minimizing risk). While they are doing this, the teacher is counting out loud for two bars and cutting them off when two bars is complete. Repeat this about six times in order to give them a chance to experiment and finalize what they want to play. Advice that I always give them is to start on a note that they can consistently play well. If they stumble on the first note, the rest of their solo usually doesn't go well (especially when it's only two bars long!). They are now ready to play their first solo by themselves. The class will play the blues head with piano accompaniment. Start the solos with a confident student and work your way through the class having each student improvise for two bars. You will have to nod your head, and/or say "next", when the next soloist should begin. After everyone has soloed the class plays the blues head again.

*many solos will be one note and that is great!

Have a discussion about the solos. Was anyone pleasantly surprised by anyone's solos? Some students may complain that two bars wasn't long enough!

4 Bar Solo

Preparation for this will be the same as for the two bar solo. Again, emphasize the importance of a strong starting note and be sure to give them many attempts to practice four bars all at the same time. It is very important to keep time by clapping or counting while they practice their solos. They need to develop a sense of playing "in time" and how long a four bar phrase feels.

Longer Solos/Final Project

Eventually you can let students decide how long they want to solo for (as long as it's at least four bars). I will sometimes ask two students to try trading solos. They will alternate four bars a few times, then shorten it to two bars, then one, and eventually play at the same time. The class always find this exciting!

This unit ends with students forming their own groups, choosing a blues head and organizing their solo orders/length. They have to be taught that the total number of bars must be a multiple of 12. If you have more questions about this unit feel free to contact me and I can share more information with you.

Getting a Good Turnout!

The more the merrier. Try to have a full band. You never know who is capable of achieving more simply by having more opportunities to play music. I recommend holding a **sign up meeting** at a time when it is very convenient for the students. Lunch-time works really well but not on a Friday! If you're worried about students not being available before or after school, try a lunch rehearsal. Anything that gets them to attend for the first few weeks is important. Once they are hooked you can reschedule rehearsals to a time that works better for you or is more productive. These first rehearsals must be "successful" (whatever that means). They must feel like they are improving and are somehow gaining something over what they would normally learn in class.

I used to be tougher on absentee students, but I now treat each student differently. **As long as students approach me to let me know that they missed rehearsal I go easy on them.** If they miss and don't come and talk to me, I get a bit grumpy!

Scheduling Rehearsals

I like mornings but I start my first year students by rehearsing after school for the first couple months. By January they rehearse before school. Rehearsal/practice conflicts with other activities, like sports and students council, are going to happen. I try to get the student to make balanced compromises. I'm happy as long as they miss equal time from each activity.

Announcements

The **music rehearsal schedule is read out every morning** during announcements. Grade 7/8 students need a daily reminder. Here's what it looks like...

Choir - Monday and Wednesday at lunch

Gr. 7 Band Tuesday after school

Gr.8 Band - Thursday morning at 7:45

Percussion Ensemble - Thursday after school