

Summary of Parent and Community Feedback for the Elementary Band & Orchestra Program Spring 2023

This report summarizes the feedback provided by parents regarding the elementary band and orchestra program through a survey administered in Spring of 2023. The survey was sent to parents/guardians of all students who were in 3rd – 8th grade at the time of the survey and we received 973 responses. The input gathered reflects their views on what works well, the challenges faced, and suggestions for improvements. The goal was to understand the key themes and priorities from the community and integrate those things as we plan for improvements and adjustments as part of the Program Review process.

Key Benefits of the Program

1. Skilled and Dedicated Teachers:

- Many respondents praised the **high-quality instruction** provided by dedicated music teachers. Specific teachers were frequently mentioned for their ability to inspire students and foster a love for music.
- Parents emphasized that teachers made learning enjoyable and engaging, helping students not only develop musical skills but also instill a lasting appreciation for music.

2. Musical Skill Development and Enrichment:

- The program was lauded for providing a strong foundation in **music theory**, instrumental practice, and group performance. Many parents noted that their children's abilities in reading music, playing instruments, and working in an ensemble improved significantly over the course of the program.
- Several parents expressed how valuable it was for their children to have early exposure to **instrumental learning**, with many continuing their musical journey into middle and high school.

3. Building Confidence and Social Skills:

- One of the most frequently mentioned benefits was the **confidence boost** students experienced from performing in front of audiences. Concerts and public performances were seen as key motivators for students to practice and improve.

- The collaborative nature of band and orchestra was appreciated for promoting **teamwork** and **social interaction**, helping students develop strong communication skills while working with peers toward a common musical goal.

4. **Early Exposure to a Variety of Instruments:**

- Parents valued the opportunity for their children to be introduced to various instruments at an early age. This exposure allowed students to explore their musical interests and choose the instrument that best suited them, fostering **personal expression** through music.

Challenges Identified by Parents and Community Members

1. **Early Morning Timing and Logistics:**

- The most commonly reported challenge was the **early morning schedule**, which required students to attend band or orchestra sessions before the start of the school day. Parents found it difficult to get their children ready early, and many students were too tired to engage fully.
- The early schedule also created logistical challenges, with some parents citing **transportation issues** or difficulty coordinating morning routines around the program's timing. Many noted that getting to a different school location for these sessions added extra complexity.

2. **Transportation and Scheduling Conflicts:**

- Several families mentioned that the program's location at a **middle school** instead of their home elementary school made participation difficult due to the lack of **busing options**. Students often arrived late to their regular school, which was stressful for both students and families.
- Some parents also highlighted conflicts with other morning commitments or extracurricular activities, making it hard for their children to attend consistently.

3. **Large Class Sizes and Limited Individual Attention:**

- A recurring concern was the **large class sizes**, which limited the amount of individualized instruction students received. Parents felt that beginners in

particular struggled to get the attention they needed, while more advanced students felt underchallenged when grouped with peers of lower skill levels.

- Parents suggested that smaller group sizes or additional teacher support would improve the quality of instruction and ensure that each student received more personalized feedback.

4. **COVID-19 Impact on Learning:**

- The shift to **remote learning during the pandemic** was cited as a significant challenge for the program. Virtual music instruction was widely viewed as ineffective, with students finding it difficult to stay engaged or make progress without in-person lessons.
- The disruption caused by COVID-19 led some students to lose interest in the program, with many struggling to adjust to the virtual format.

5. **Limited Access for Younger Students:**

- Parents expressed frustration that the program was not available to **third graders** or younger students. Several respondents noted that they would have liked to see music learning introduced earlier in their children's education to build interest and skills before fourth and fifth grades.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

1. **Adjust Scheduling to Improve Accessibility:**

- A common suggestion was to **adjust the timing** of the program to better align with family schedules. Many parents recommended moving band and orchestra sessions to after school or integrating them into the **regular school day** to eliminate the challenges associated with early morning participation.
- Offering the program during school hours would allow more students to participate without the burden of early wake-up times or transportation issues.

2. **Increase Availability at Elementary Schools:**

- Several parents recommended holding band and orchestra sessions at **elementary schools** rather than at middle schools, reducing the need for students to travel to different locations.

- Offering the program on-site would also ensure that students did not arrive late to their regular school day and make it more convenient for families to participate.

3. **Smaller Class Sizes and More Individualized Instruction:**

- Parents emphasized the need for **smaller group sizes** to ensure that students receive more individualized attention. Some suggested creating separate **beginner and advanced sections** to cater to students at different skill levels, ensuring that everyone is appropriately challenged.
- Hiring additional teachers or support staff could also improve the overall learning experience by providing more focused guidance for students.

4. **Improve Communication and Outreach:**

- Many families recommended improving **communication** about the program, including providing clearer information on registration, schedules, and expectations. Several parents noted that they were unaware of the program's availability or missed registration deadlines due to a lack of timely communication.
- More **parent support materials** on how to help children practice at home and what to expect from the program would also be beneficial.

5. **Expand Instrument Options and Exploration Opportunities:**

- Some parents expressed interest in expanding the program to include a wider variety of instruments, such as **piano** or **guitar**, as well as introducing students to music technology or composition.
- Offering more opportunities for students to **explore different instruments** before making a commitment would help them find their musical passion and maintain their interest.

6. **Increase Performance and Collaboration Opportunities:**

- Parents valued the performance aspect of the program and suggested increasing the number of **performance opportunities** to keep students motivated. Collaboration with middle and high school music programs was also recommended, allowing younger students to see more advanced musicians and inspiring them to continue their music education.
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Conclusion

The feedback from parents highlights both the strengths and challenges of the elementary band and orchestra program. While the program is highly valued for its role in developing musical skills, building confidence, and fostering social collaboration, several logistical and structural challenges limit its accessibility and effectiveness. This information will be analyzed by the Program Review Committee and used to guide changes to the program and/or model for elementary music.