

Dear Band Parent,

Can we have a little chat? There's something very important we should talk about. With all the activities of daily band directing (like teaching your wonderful kids) it's easy to forget to give this subject it's due. Let's take a minute now to talk about step-up instruments.

Step-up (advanced/professional) instruments can help your child take their music performance to the next level. Beginner instruments are just that - they help your child begin. However, like your child has probably outgrown their first bicycle, there's a good chance they have outgrown their beginning band instrument.

How will you be able to tell your child is ready?

Unless you are a semi-professional musician on their chosen instrument, you might not be able to tell. You may need to rely on your child and your child's director to help you make this decision. If your child is practicing consistently, committed to band, and seeing a normal rate of success on their instrument, there is a good chance that they will be ready in their second year of playing. If your child is above average and is very responsible and careful with their instrument, they may be ready by the end of the first year of playing.

As parents (and teachers) know, all children grow and develop at different levels, so check with your child's band director if you have any questions. For most students, this step-up instrument will last them through high school and possibly college. Some directors have a very strong preference as to which brands they prefer due to ensemble considerations. They can guide you to the perfect band and model for your child.

What is different about a step-up instrument?

- **Improved Tone** - Think of tone as the engine of a car. Step-up instruments play with incredible tone and resonance unlike what is possible on a beginner instrument. This is due to the use of exceptional materials and craftsmanship.
- **Improved Response** - As your child advances through band, the music they play will become increasingly demanding as far as technique and intonation. Step-up instruments allow them to improve unhindered due to their quick response, improved extreme ranges and excellent intonation.
- **Additional Keys/Tubing** - Many woodwind instruments have additional keys that are used in intermediate and advanced music. Many brass instruments have thicker metal (double walled). Trombones have an F attachment. French horns, baritones and tubas have additional valves.

Going back to the bike analogy, these features are like the difference between riding a bike with training wheels and flying down the road freely. The level of speed, performance and enjoyment of playing a step-up instrument can not be overestimated.

What about the money I've paid?

If you bought your child's beginner instrument outright, that's just fine! Woodwind players will want a marching instrument, and beginner instruments are perfect for that. Step-up woodwind instruments should never be subjected to outdoor elements, so your child will need that instrument. If your child plays a brass instrument, you can resell your child's beginning horn to a future band student and put that money toward the step-up instrument.

If you have been renting an instrument from a local music store, many stores offer the option to return the instrument and have some (or all) of those payments applied to the better quality instrument. It's also possible to pay off the current instrument if it's almost paid for (to use for marching band or resell) and then negotiate a substantial discount on the step-up instrument.

This is an investment.

Yes, quality instruments hold their value well and can be resold down the road as needed. But we hope your child will be a lifelong musician and keep their instrument to play in community bands and possibly pass on to your grandchildren!

But regardless of whether your child continues to play after high school, this is an investment in your child's music education and it is priceless. You're not just investing in the instrument.

You are investing in the experience.

You are investing in the love of music.

You are investing in memories.

You are investing in your child expressing themselves.

You are investing in your child learning discipline, work ethic.

You are investing in your child being part of a team, a family.

You are investing in your child committing and seeing results.

You are investing in your child's success.

You are investing in your child.

This article was provided with the help of N-Tune Music & Sound. If you are in the West Texas area, please visit their store and allow them to help you find the PERFECT instrument for your child. If you do not have a local music store and want to buy from a "service first" company, we highly recommend contacting N-Tune Music & Sound at 432-522-1212

