

REMOTE PLACEMENT INTERVIEW PROCESS - CAROLYN IRELAND

Here is a brief summary of how our program (Dr. John M. Folks Middle School in NISD) is tackling the job of instrument placements for 5th graders in this time of social distancing.

Step 1 was to get a list of the incoming student from our head counselor. We had to be sure to specifically request that it have email address for the students' parents or we would have had to make a ton of phone calls.

Step 2 was to create 3 items.

The first is a letter welcoming them to the program, explaining the importance of instrument placements so they don't end up on an instrument that their body isn't physically suited for and so that we find what comes the most naturally to them. The letter discusses each of the instruments that we offer to beginners along with links to YouTube videos about each instrument. The letter instructs them to use a Google Form (linked in the letter) to mark their interest in each instrument on a scale of 1-10 (10 being they love it, 1 being they are uninterested) as they watch each of the videos. The letter then instructs them to sign up for a Zoom virtual instrument placement appointment via SignUp Genius (linked in the letter). Each appointment lasts 15 minutes and the students are asked to prepare in advance. First, they must have the Zoom app. Second, they must have a parent present. Third, they must have a chair that allows them to sit tall and straight and their feet to touch the floor and they must position the camera of their device in such a way as to allow us to see all of them from head to foot, sitting tall on the front half of that chair. Fourth, they need to download a metronome app to a device. Fifth, they need some basic supplies. These supplies include a piece of 8 1/2x11 paper, a drinking straw, a ruler and a water bottle (we have found that glass bottles work better if they have them). The straw we use in two ways; if they want to play a double reed instrument, we have them position the lips as you would to play a double reed and insert the straw and blow. Our brass instructor also uses it to help if a student is not getting a proper brass buzz to help them understand how the lips are positioned when they blow through the straw and then having them maintain a similar position when buzzing. The bottle is to blow across to simulate flute. Finally, the letter has our Zoom windows and the meeting codes/passwords that will be used for either morning or evening appointments. Since my associate does morning Zooms and I do evening, our codes and passwords are different.

The second is a Google Form that has the students put in a lot of personal contact information, including their student ID number, the campus they are coming from, their current grade and anything they need us to know such as whether they are already taking private lessons. The Google Form then has them rate the videos of the various instruments on a scale of 1-10 (1 lowest, 10 highest) to indicate their interest in playing that instrument. There is also a question on the form about whether they can afford to either purchase or rent to own an instrument from a music store or whether they might require financial assistance with a school-owned instrument. It lets them know that if they select that option, the student's choices will include flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, French horn, baritone and tuba. These are the instruments that we currently have in our inventory to offer assistance with. When they submit this, we have data that we can reference during the interview.

The third item is the SignUp Genius appointment schedule. We create appointment slots that work around our current class Zoom schedule and any other family commitments that we have. My associate takes morning appointments and I offer evening appointments after 5pm, knowing that in order for the students to have parents present, some have to wait for them to come home from work. It's also the time that my husband can look after our own two kids while I do the interviews. The

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interviews are currently set up for every 15 minutes which is really tight. Some days, I can make that time frame, no problem. Other days, interviews run over. More on that later.

Step 3 is reviewing the data. We look at who is signed up for interviews and their instrument preferences ahead of time. We try to get their names committed to memory so it is like we know them when they pop up on Zoom.

Step 4 is the Zoom meeting. About 5-10 minutes before the first Zoom appointment I have, I get my computer set up with their Google Form on it and I set up my iPad so that the students can see me up close and also from head to toe if they need to for percussion. I make sure I have a metronome on my cell phone in case they don't have one. I open the Zoom meeting using my meeting ID and password and I wait. When the first student pops into the waiting room, I admit them and introduce myself. Depending on what they are interested in, I jump in with how to approach air since many of them just played recorder and have no idea how to move air. I have them hold the piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper vertically in front of their face about an arm's length and take a deep breath in a make that paper fly up horizontally toward the camera. Once they are doing this, I have them start to approach the various embouchures depending on instrument

For flute, I have them pretend to blow bubbles. I have them use their thumb and index finger on one hand to make a bubble wand and then have them send me imaginary bubbles through the camera. That gets them forming the embouchure correctly. If they are struggling, I have them say "pew" and that often fixes it. Then, we move to blowing that fast air across the bottle, aiming the air slightly down on an angle like they are blowing a bug off their knee. We have found that different bottles behave differently and glass works best. Also, they should be empty.

For clarinet, I can have them use their thumb, roll bottom lip and place the thumb resting nail-side down on that "pillow" they created with the lower lip and then rest the top teeth down on top of the thumb to feel how the embouchure is formed. I can even get creative and use the straw if they want to blow air but that isn't really very beneficial. What is helpful is checking finger width. While some may use the ruler, I find that I can usually gauge how wide their fingers are just by having them hold their hand up in front of the camera. I'm looking that the fingers aren't too narrow to seal the rings.

For saxophone, the same thumb and straw exercises as clarinet can be used. The main difference is having them measure their pinky fingers from the base of the V between the pinky and the ring finger to the tip of the pinky with the ruler. We want to see that their pinky fingers are exceeding 2" in length to be able to comfortably reach the side keys.

For brass, I start by explaining how sound is generated on a brass mouthpiece. I then demonstrate my buzz and see if they can just mimic it right away with little coaching. If they struggle, then I have them say "M" and while holding the lips in that position, blow air faster and faster until the lips begin to vibrate. We are finding that we definitely need to tell them to moisten lips. We are also finding that it is difficult to tell, sometimes, depending on the audio quality, what pitch their buzz is. We are also finding that many students hear weird things via Zoom and want to add a hum to their buzz so we have to stop and tell them that the lips make their own sound and they don't need to hum. There are some pretty good visual differences between a high brass buzz, a low brass (baritone/trombone) buzz and a tuba buzz that make getting them placed pretty easy.

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For percussion, we have them sit so their feet rest comfortably flat on the floor and we make sure that we can see all of them on camera. We explain that we will be tapping toes (with heel resting) and patting hands to determine their level of coordination. We explain that we will set the metronome at 80 and every time it beeps, for the first exercise, the right foot is tapping and the right hand is patting on the thigh. We watch that they are hitting exactly on the beat and that they are hitting together. Then, we tell them we will ask them questions while they keep it going. We ask questions like “What is 2+2?” and “What is your favorite food?” and “What is your favorite color?” We move to the left side and do the same with new questions like “How old are you?” and “If today is Monday, what day is tomorrow?” and “What color is the sun?”. Then, we have them go back to the right foot but this time, they alternate right hand then left hand, back and forth. We watch to be sure the foot is patting with both hands. Similar questions are asked to see if they can keep it steady while multitasking. We continue with exercises that show 2 against 1 (eighth notes in the right hand, quarters in the right foot), 3 against 1 (triplets in the right hand and quarters in the right foot) and 4 against 1 (sixteenth notes in the right hand, quarters in the foot). We use to do more but with 15 minutes, that takes about all the time we have.

Step 5 is follow-up after the Zoom. We tell the parents to look for an email with the following information in it:

Recommended brands of instrument

Instrument supply list

Locations of local music stores

Private lesson teacher list

We wrap up by wishing the students and parents a safe, healthy summer and tell them we can't wait to see them in person in the fall.