

2026

OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER



JANUARY EDITION

Welcome back and cheers to a New Year!

Welcome to the new year, everyone! We hope you all had a restful and well-deserved break. As we jump back into the rhythm of the school year, we want to take a moment to recognize the incredible work each of you is doing. This stretch of the year can be busy and demanding, but it's also filled with opportunities for growth, connection, and meaningful musical moments with our students. We hope you're heading into it with renewed joy, energy, and passion.

Many of us are juggling a lot right now—taking students to annual honor choirs and honor band, attending conferences, supporting performances, playing pep band for basketball games, preparing ensembles for district festivals, or simply managing the day-to-day momentum of classes and rehearsals. Whether you're leading a concert band, choir, guitar class, jazz band, or teaching that fun and challenging new game song to your 3rd graders, your dedication to showing up for your students in so many ways does not go unnoticed. The impact you're making reaches far beyond the rehearsal room.

Through all the craziness of the school year, let's continue to focus on creating enriching, supportive environments where our students can succeed, feel valued, and find joy in music—no matter the setting. Winter can be a challenging season for many of us, but remember that the days are slowly getting longer, brighter moments are ahead, and the work we do continues to bring light to our schools and communities. Keep taking care of yourselves and each other—we're in this together.



TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

AMIE BRECHEISEN

Amie Brecheisen teaches band and choir at Taft 7–12 in Lincoln City, where she leads a wide-ranging and demanding music program that serves both middle school and high school students. Her day includes five bands—6th grade beginning band (brass and percussion), 7th grade band, concert band, symphonic band, and jazz band—as well as middle school and high school choir. Most ensembles meet every other day on a block schedule, while 6th graders start their mornings with music every day. The scope of the program reflects both the needs of the school and Amie’s commitment to giving students consistent, meaningful musical experiences across multiple grade levels.

Amie is an Oregon-grown music educator. She attended North Bend High School, where she studied under Amber Yester, before earning her bachelor’s degree in Music Education from the University of Oregon. Those experiences shaped her belief in the power of strong mentorship and the importance of access to music education, especially for students in smaller or more isolated communities.

One of the biggest challenges Amie sees in small-school music education is lack of opportunity. Many students are unaware of the vast world of music beyond their immediate surroundings, simply because of geographic isolation. Amie works intentionally to bring opportunities to her students on the coast, while also recognizing that rural students face unique barriers to music making. By meeting students at their current skill level and clearly showing them a path toward excellence, she has found that students rise to the challenge when they feel supported, capable, and seen.

Like many small-school music educators, Amie wears many hats. While she finds great joy in watching students develop genuine passion—especially when they choose to learn music outside of class just because they want to—the workload can be intense. In addition to teaching both middle school and high school band and choir, she plans festivals, manages and repairs instruments due to limited repair budgets, oversees equipment for multiple programs, and accompanies choir rehearsals. In small schools, she notes, you are often expected to be the music teacher, not just one member of a larger department.

Music at Taft plays a powerful role in strengthening the small-town community. Concerts become meaningful weeknight gatherings, pep band energizes athletic events, and community members regularly share stories of hearing students practice at home or perform outside of school-sponsored events. For Amie, seeing students take music beyond the classroom and share it with their community is one of the most rewarding parts of the job—music becomes something lived, not just taught.





AMIE BRECHEISEN CONT.

Looking ahead, Amie hopes that in five years the program will have grown to include full instrumentation across all ensembles and enough high school choir students to sing confidently in four parts. Due to past staff turnover, there are gaps in musical knowledge among different age groups, and one of her long-term goals is to vertically align the program with clear expectations and goals at each level. While younger students are currently on track, closing those gaps for older students remains a key focus.

Amie's teaching style is best described as a balance of high standards and approachability. Students might call her passionate or a perfectionist, and on some days, decidedly goofy. She holds students to a high level of musical excellence while still making room for humor—yes, including the occasional tuba fart joke—because joy and rigor can exist side by side.

Outside the classroom, Amie continues to make music, but she also spends a great deal of time running. She has completed two marathons in the past two years, along with numerous half marathons, and enjoys arts and crafts as a creative outlet beyond music.

One of Amie's most meaningful success stories comes from her very first year of teaching at a 1A Title I school in a remote area. On her first day with a combined 7th–12th grade band, a student asked what a B♭ major scale was. The day was difficult—students cried, complained, and openly compared her to their former teacher. Instead of lowering expectations, Amie went back to the basics and worked tirelessly to earn their trust. She practiced alongside students during lunch, built relationships, and made it clear that they were just as capable and worthy as any other musicians. She never told them that success would be harder because of limited resources, so they never believed it was. That year, the program started a football pep band, sent two students to WIBC, performed school-wide holiday caroling, attended their first-ever festival and earned state-qualifying scores, learned a 90-minute funk and Star Wars set, and raised \$2,000 for the program. That experience cemented Amie's belief in the power of meeting students where they are and never doubting their potential because of the size of their school.

While Amie is quick to say she is not an expert, the advice she offers to educators teaching music in small schools is simple and hard-earned: meet students where they are, do not put limits on them, and hold them to high standards.



GOT A TikTok? CHECK THESE PAGES OUT!

CLICK ON THE UNDERLINED
NAMES BELOW TO ACCESS
THEIR ACCOUNTS!!

MRS. ALLEN

HINGHAMBANDTOK

MR. GARCIA

MS.LENCHER

BAND TEACHING TIPS

BRANDON PHELPS REPAIR

CRANE SCHOOL OF MUSIC REPAIR

NEAL DRUMS

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE
SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT
YOU FOLLOW? IF YOU
WANT TO SHARE ME EMAIL
SAMELLIBEE@HCSD3.ORG
SO WE CAN INCLUDE
MORE PAGES IN THE
FUTURE!



TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

DAVE WESTON

Dave Weston teaches in the Bandon School District in Bandon, Oregon, where his day starts early with jazz band at 7:30 a.m. and continues with high school choir, 7th/8th grade band, high school band, and 6th and 5th grade band. Depending on the season, evenings can include pep band at basketball games, and in the fall, football games as well.

Dave's path into education wasn't traditional. He began as a youth pastor in eastern Oregon and started substitute teaching because he was one of the few people in the area with a bachelor's degree. After moving to Bandon to pastor a church, he continued subbing during a time when teaching requirements were becoming more demanding. That push led him back to school for his Master's degree in Elementary Education. His move into music happened after taking a long-term sub job for the band teacher, where he realized he loved teaching music even more than the regular classroom. With years of musical background, including 20 years of piano lessons, he earned his endorsements and says that once the official education ended, the "real education" began.

In a small-school setting, Dave has learned flexibility is everything. His students are involved in nearly every activity—sports, clubs, and more—while still committing to band. During basketball season, he may only have half of his high school band present, so he constantly adapts to keep everyone progressing. He supports students as individuals, while also balancing that support with "tough love" and accountability.

What Dave enjoys most is working with students and seeing them grow. He loves the moment when something clicks, the pride students feel when they improve, and the process of turning a group of different personalities into one strong musical team.

Like many small programs, challenges include scheduling conflicts and limited funding. Repairs and equipment costs add up quickly, so Dave has learned to handle many instrument repairs himself and has become experienced at writing grants to keep the program moving forward.



DAVE WESTON CONT.

One of the most rewarding parts of teaching in a small school is the relationships. Dave knows almost every student in the building, and many kids feel connected to him and the program—even if they've never been in band or choir. He believes music strengthens small-town communities because music is culture and brings people together. That community support grows when the program stays visible through performances and public involvement.

Dave hopes to keep building a strong music culture in Bandon and would love to see the choir program grow to match the success of the band program. When asked how students would describe him, they said: high school choir—eclectic; high school band—enlightening and sarcastic; and middle school—unpredictable.

Outside the classroom, Dave is just as energetic and project-driven. He jokes that his wife believes he has undiagnosed ADHD, because he has a barn, pump house, and garage full of ongoing projects. His interests range widely, from tuna fishing off the Oregon coast to building trailers, and he's the kind of person who always needs something to work on, or else he might drive someone (most likely his wife) a little crazy.

One of Dave's proudest success stories comes from last year, when every single senior who applied for a college music scholarship received one—even though none of them were music majors. That accomplishment still makes him smile, because it proves those students valued music enough to continue with it when they didn't have to.

If Dave could leave small-town music educators with one strategy, it would be simple: ask. Community organizations like the Elks, Masons, Rotary, and VFW are often eager to support kids and music programs, and they want to invest in opportunities that matter. Dave believes that if students are willing to go in and share what they're doing, communities will often rally behind them in powerful ways.

And in the end, Dave reminds us of something that matters even more than music itself: sometimes it isn't about the notes you're teaching—it's about the kid behind the instrument. If you reach the kid behind the instrument, you create a singer or player for life.



WANT TO COME TO **HILL DAY** THIS YEAR?

Oregon Music Education Hill Day:

Showing Up for Our Students

Oregon Music Education Hill Day is a chance for music educators and supporters from across the state to gather at the Capitol and advocate for strong, sustainable music programs in our schools. It's a day built around positive, professional conversations with legislators—sharing the impact music has on students and helping decision-makers understand what our programs need to thrive.

Hill Day matters because music education doesn't just create better musicians—it builds confidence, discipline, teamwork, and belonging. It strengthens school culture and brings communities together through concerts, pep bands, festivals, and the everyday moments that shape students for life.

This event is especially important for small schools and rural districts. Many of Oregon's music programs are led by one teacher doing it all, often with limited resources and fewer opportunities due to travel costs, scheduling challenges, and staffing constraints. When small schools show up, it ensures lawmakers hear the full story of music education in Oregon—not just from the largest districts.

If you've ever felt like your program is overlooked or "out of the way," Hill Day is the perfect opportunity to change that. More small-school representation means a stronger voice for every student, in every zip code. We'd love to see you there.

**HILL DAY THIS YEAR
IS FEBRUARY 19TH!**



CHECK OUT THE NEW GOOGLE DRIVE FOR SMALL SCHOOLS!

This drive is a work in progress and is designed specifically for educators in small schools like yourselves. Our goal is to create a shared space where we can easily access and contribute valuable teaching resources throughout the busy school year.

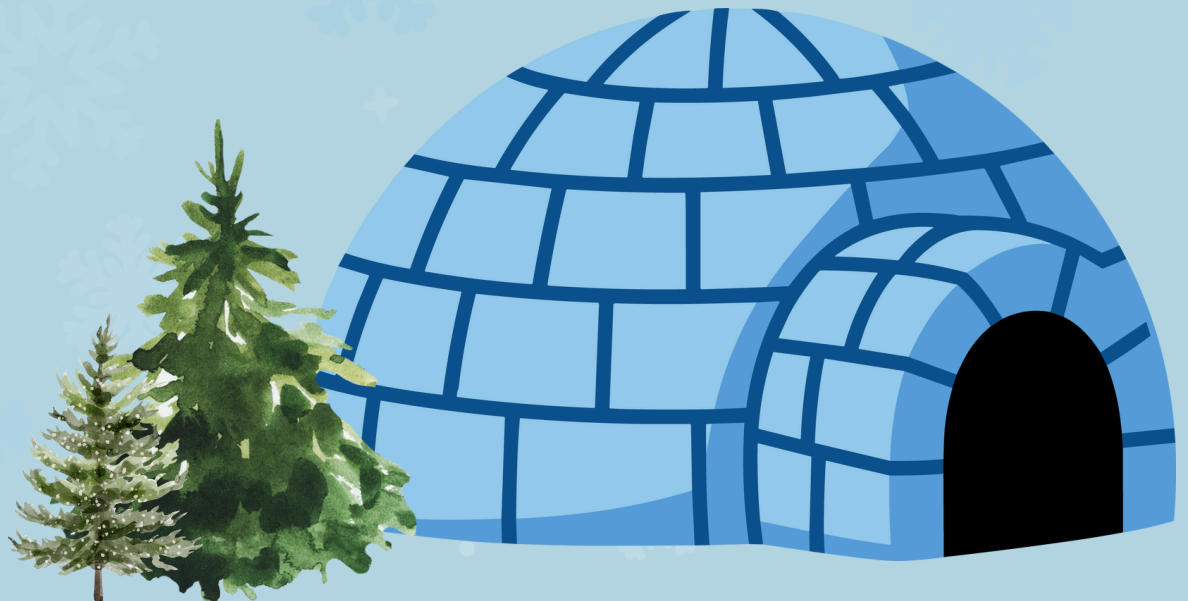
We've organized the drive into labeled folders by topic to help keep everything clear and easy to find. Many of these folders are still empty, so if you have resources you'd like to share, please reach out to Melissa Jmaeff or Sam Ellibee so we can get them uploaded.

Our vision is to grow this drive into a powerful tool that supports collaboration and resource-sharing among small school educators.

Thank you for being part of this initiative and for helping us build something truly useful for our community!

— The Small Schools Task Force

**CLICK ON THE IGLOO
TO ACCESS THE
GOOGLE DRIVE!**



WE MISSED YOU AT CONFERENCE!
HERE WERE SOME OF THE AWESOME
HIGHLIGHTS WE CAPTURED IN THE
SMALL SCHOOLS EVENTS!



FLEX BAND SIGHT READING SESSION LED BY PAT DIXON!





BASIC WOODWIND TECHNIQUE SESSION

Presenters: Sam Ellibee (Oboe), Karalyn Soffer (Tenor Sax), Melissa Jmaeff (Flute), Laura Arthur (Clarinet), and Jeff Soffer (Alto Sax).



STACY ATWELL-KEISER'S: TEACHING HARMONY TO BEGINNING SINGERS SESSION!



SMALL SCHOOL'S SOCIAL AT 6TH STREET BAR AND GRILL!



CHECK OUT THESE LINKS!!

FALL 2025 OREGON MUSIC EDUCATOR JOURNAL

"WHEN OUR JOB REQUIRES US TO BE EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE, SOMETIMES INVESTING DEEPLY IN JUST ONE THING CAN HELP ALL OF THOSE OTHER THINGS FALL IN LINE- OR AT LEAST IN PERSPECTIVE." MELISSA JMAEFF EXPLORES THE IDEA OF FOCUSING ON ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE AT A TIME IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF THE OREGON MUSIC EDUCATOR.

NAFME'S SMALL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

NAFME'S SMALL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE WAS STARTED BY TOM MULLER, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT OF NAFME'S NORTHWEST DIVISION. STARTING ITS WORK IN FEBRUARY 2023, THE TASK FORCE IDENTIFIES KEY ISSUES AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR NETWORKING, COMMUNITY BUILDING, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, ADVOCACY, AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT MUSIC EDUCATORS IN SMALL SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, PRIMARILY BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY SERVING IN RURAL CONTEXTS. THIS SMALL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE TOWN HALL FOCUSES ON DEVELOPING A SMALL SCHOOL MUSIC PROGRAM.

STORIES FROM THE PODIUM OF A RURAL BAND DIRECTOR, A PODCAST

CLICK ON THE IMAGES BELOW TO VIEW THE DIFFERENT ARTICLES!



WE WANT TO SPOTLIGHT YOU!!

As small schools educators, we know how isolating the work can sometimes feel — but your dedication, creativity, and passion deserve to be seen and celebrated!

That's why we're launching a Small Schools Educator Spotlight in our monthly newsletter. Throughout the year, we'll be reaching out to different educators on a rotating basis to highlight your stories, classroom tips, and the amazing work you're doing in your schools.

Here's how it works: A member of the Small Schools Task Force will contact you with a few short questions — and we may ask for a photo to feature alongside your story. We'll create a spotlight page for you in our newsletter that will be shared with small school directors and educators across the state.

Our goal is to recognize every one of you over time, so everyone gets the appreciation they deserve!

💡 If you'd prefer not to be included, please just let us know. That helps us ensure we have enough participants for each issue.

Thank you for all you do to support students and music education in our small schools — we can't wait to celebrate your work!

— The Small Schools Task Force



ADVOCACY

Why music matters – Especially in Oregon's small schools

To Rural and Small Schools Music Educators:

Yours is a hard job. It isn't for everyone.

It's for those who aren't easily discouraged. It's for those with vision and a commitment to service. It's for the courageous and the creative; the innovative. It's for those with grit and determination. It's for those who can give of themselves– not in charity, but in service. It's for those seeking equity for all. Your job is for those who understand that every child deserves dignity and the right to high quality music education. It is for those who understand that every child deserves resources, tools to help them learn. Your job is for those who understand that small and rural school children deserve a teacher who is not embarrassed to teach them, rather is filled with pride by the opportunity to guide them, to learn alongside them, to empower them.

Small and rural school music teachers, you are the bridge to a brighter future for all of us. You open the door for your students to explore the broader world, often otherwise inaccessible to them. You show them another way of seeing, being, and experiencing this world. You broaden perspective. You illuminate a path to the heart. You illuminate a path from the heart. You let the light in.

To all of the incredible small and rural music teachers in this state, making a true difference in the lives of your students, thank you.

–Small Schools Chair, Melissa Jmaeff

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SMALL-SCHOOLS TASK FORCE

Welcome to your small-schools task force! We want to offer help for small school music teachers and provide a foundation of support specifically to those teaching in small schools and rural areas. This task force has provided a google drive which is shared with you through email. This google drive is filled with resources, but is a work in progress. Feel free to email any of us for questions or to network! Looking forward to hearing from you.

Meet your task force!



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SMALL-SCHOOLS TASK FORCE

Meet your task force!



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THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!



Thank you for everything you do to keep music going in your schools and communities. Whether you are teaching beginning band in a cafeteria, running choir with ten kids, or driving a bus to festival – your work matters! You are inspiring students every day, and together we’re making small-school music in Oregon something truly incredible.

– Oregon Small-Schools Task Force