

BHS Jazz Audition Results 2024-25

Hello Berkeley High School Musicians,

Thank you so much for your interest in BHS Jazz, and to so many of you for preparing beautifully for your auditions. We are deeply impressed with your skill and commitment!

This year many students auditioned for BHS Jazz – more than we have space for. We know that at this moment some of you are pleased with your placements for the 2024-2025 school year, and others of you are disappointed. Please allow us to explain a little bit about factors that influenced the audition results. In doing so we hope to add more meaning to the information you have just received. We will also give you some info about what to do if we were not able to find a place for you in a BHS Jazz class this year.

The process of figuring out where to place everyone who wants to be in a jazz class is a huge puzzle that we take very seriously. We talk extensively with the audition judges, with our BHS Jazz sectional leaders, and with the BUSD middle school music teachers. We try to make placements that are as fair as possible, and of course we hope that everyone will find themselves in a class that makes them happy. However, it is simply not possible, mathematically, to put everyone in the class they would most like.

The ideal instrumentation for a jazz big band is 5 saxes, 4 trombones, 5 trumpets, 1 piano, 1 guitar, 1 vibes, 1 bass, 1 drummer, and 1 percussionist. That's 20 students in each class.

We have augmented every class to include more than this number of students, and indeed more students than most jazz band directors accept into their bands. However, at a certain point adding more students creates bands that sound worse and classes in which students are sitting around rather than playing. And so, once again, in keeping reasonable class sizes with an instrumentation that supports our bands sounding good together, we have not found a place for every musician who would like to be in a jazz band next year.

The good news is that at BHS we have fine concert bands in addition to the jazz program. **For students who are not deeply drawn to the art of improvisation, playing in a concert band is frankly a more appropriate placement.** Ms. Wells, our band director, is one of the best teachers at Berkeley High School, and any young musician would be lucky to be in her band. Her zero period Concert Band has unlimited instrumentation – EVERYONE can be in that class.

If you do not find your name on a class roster for BHS Jazz this year, I urge you to sign up for Ms. Wells' Concert Band. You'll have a great time, gain skill, and find a wonderful community of friends. If at the end of the year you would like to audition again for BHS Jazz, please do! If you would like to be placed in Concert Band, please email Ms. Wells at karenwells@berkeley.net, and she will work to get you placed in this class.

I've written a lot above aimed at folks who are not happy with their audition results. **If you ARE happy with your 2024 -2025 jazz placement,** please do not take this year's success as a sign that you can safely rest on your laurels. **Your placement is for ONE YEAR ONLY.** Every year the competition is stronger, and this year's incoming freshmen are very, very good. I have no doubt that they will work hard to move up to higher level bands in the future.

Once students get into classes, our tendency is to de-emphasize competition and emphasize cooperation; after all, at that point we are a band, and we need to learn how to support one another to take risks, and grow together as a group. Some people find this orientation confusing when auditions come around – they believe that because they have played our band music reasonably well and are good band citizens, they deserve to be moved up, or to at least stay at the same level.

However, the current level of competition on every instrument makes automatic promotion, or even automatic continued membership in the same band, impossible. Unless you are actively improving, quite possibly above and beyond the musical expectations of our class, there is a good chance that another student who is very hungry, is practicing a ton, is taking private lessons and following his/her teacher's directions, and is listening to jazz extensively, will beat you out in the next round of auditions.

One last bit of information – some may wonder how we determined who would be in Mr. Figueroa's two Jazz Lab 2 classes vs. Ms. Cline's one section of Jazz Lab 2. Every year Ms. Cline takes her Jazz Lab 1 students on an extended exploration of US history through the lens of Black American Music – it's a 19-part jazz history curriculum that we hope enriches all students' understanding of the music we all love, and the social/historical and cultural contexts from which it arose. Not every student is able to fit into the Jazz Lab 1 class, so this year Ms. Cline's Jazz Lab 2 class has been populated almost exclusively with students who have not yet gotten that curriculum. There are a few exceptions due to scheduling or instrumentation concerns.

Thank you all again – we know the audition process is difficult, and we appreciate all the hard work you all put into it. We hope to see all of you, either in our classes, or in the hallways of the music building as you head to your class with Ms. Wells.

Respectfully,

Robert Figueroa and Sarah Cline
Jazz Directors
Berkeley High School