

Ann Marie Hartley is an accomplished music educator with over two decades of experience fostering musical excellence and creativity in the students. She currently teaches General Music and serves as Choral Director at Jacob G. Smith Elementary School, in Savannah, GA. She is in her 24th year of teaching and is committed to creating a positive and inclusive environment that encourages every child to explore and enjoy music. During her tenure at JGS, she established a Modern Band program to broaden student engagement through contemporary music-making and is actively developing plans to launch a DJ Club for the 2026-2027 school year. Throughout her career, Ms. Hartley has had the opportunity to teach a wide range of students from Pre-K through 12th grade in both instrumental and choral settings. Her previous roles include teaching Beginning Band at Isle of Hope K-8, Hesse K-8, Heard Elementary, and Thunderbolt Elementary, as well as serving as the found Band Director at New Hampstead High School all in the Savannah-Chatham County School district.

Ms. Hartley holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Armstrong Atlantic State University, a Master of Music with an emphasis in Education from Georgia Southern University, and an Education Specialist degree in Instructional Technology from Kennesaw State University. She was honored to be named the 2025 Teacher of the Year at Jacob G. Smith Elementary. Ms. Hartley was selected as a finalist for the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools District Teacher of the Year.

Beyond the classroom, Ms. Hartley remains actively engaged in the local music community by contributing to youth music education through her work with the SING Children's Choir, where she teaches the Kindergarten-2nd grade choir. She has also performed in and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Savannah Wind Symphony. She values these opportunities to continue learning, collaborating, and giving back through music. Outside of her professional responsibilities, Ms. Hartley enjoys spending quality time with her boyfriend, Brantley and her two daughters Kaitlyn and Julianna. She also enjoys exploring the Savannah area with friends.

Who inspired you to become a teacher?

My high school band director, Mr. Manigo, inspired me to become a teacher. He had such a passion for music and taught me so much in my high school years that I wanted to be a band director.

What inspired you to start teaching modern band at the elementary level?

I started attending the Modern Band Summer Summit hosted by Music Will the past three years. That sparked the interest into bringing Modern Band to my classroom.

What do you enjoy most about working with young students in a modern band setting?

I love seeing their excitement when we are learning a popular song they can relate and connect to.

How do your students typically react the first time they get to play instruments?

They are super excited! Many of my students have never played these instruments before and they feel accomplished and excited when they have learned a song they have heard on the radio.

What are some of your favorite moments or memories from teaching elementary school?

One of my favorite moments is when I was able to have one of my 5th grade classes perform at our inaugural Modern Band Bash in Savannah, GA.

How do you choose the songs or styles of music you introduce to your students? What are some of your favorites?

The best ideas come from the students. Collectively we decide what songs to learn. I will always start off with a song that uses all of the chords we have learned so they can feel a sense of accomplishment. From there I ask them for song suggestions.

What does a typical day in your classes look like?

It generally starts off with a welcome and hello. Then we review songs we learned previously before learning a new, challenging song. The class ends with a reflection of the class period, what they thought was great, and what we could work on for the next class period.

What types of schools/music programs should start modern band curriculums?

I think any school can start a modern band program. As long as the music teacher pursues the concept of Modern Band, it will work at any grade level.

How do students collaborate or work together during activities in your class?

They will work together by instrumentation. For example, the bass players will work together to practice their part, the guitars will work together to practice their part, etc... each section will have a certain amount of time to practice together while I walk around and listen to each section. Then they will come together to play the song again as a band.

What advice would you give to someone interested in teaching modern band to elementary students?

Don't be afraid to try it out! Challenge yourself to be more innovative in your classroom and create that connection with your students.