

Gina Moody is currently the Director of Orchestras at Columbus High School and Wynnton Arts Academy in Muscogee County. She has taught orchestra in Muscogee County for 20 years. Her orchestras have consistently received Superior ratings at LGPE. The CHS Encore Quintet performed at the GMEA Conference in 2025. She previously held the second clarinet chair in the Midland-Odessa Symphony and Chorale, while teaching as a private clarinet and saxophone instructor for the Midland Independent School District and other schools in Texas. Mrs. Moody received degrees in Clarinet Performance from the University of North Texas (2003) and Music Education from Columbus State University (2001). Mrs. Moody balances her teaching duties while remaining an active performer playing with several local groups. Mrs. Moody has performed at GMEA, ClarinetFest, and the Midwest Band Clinic International Band, Orchestra and Music Conference. Mrs. Moody was honored with the GMEA District 3 Music Teacher of the Year award in 2024.

What inspired you to become a high school orchestra teacher?

Teaching high school orchestra was not actually what I had planned. After finishing up my master's degree at the University of North Texas, I was looking to move back home to Columbus, Georgia. I was expecting to teach band, but the only job openings were one orchestra and one choral position. I was apprehensive, but I accepted the orchestra job. Luckily one of my former teachers, Nolan Bishop, offered lots of advice in my few first years. Life threw me a curve I wasn't expecting, but I love teaching orchestra!

What instrument do you primarily play, and how did you start learning it?

When I was a 6th grader at Wesley Heights Elementary, the band director came by our class to talk about joining band. It looked like a lot of fun, so I asked my mom that night. She was a little apprehensive. Neither of my parents played an instrument and we had to consider the cost of renting the instrument. My mom said yes, with the condition that I had to give up taking dance classes which I had been doing for several years. I chose band. I started learning to play clarinet, and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made!

What does a typical day look like for you as an orchestra teacher?

I teach at two schools every day. My mornings start before school at Wynnton Arts Academy where I teach a class of 5th graders to play the violin. I love the energy and enthusiasm of my beginning students. Then I drive down the street to Columbus High School where I teach AP Music Theory followed by 3 orchestra classes. I've been lucky to have a supportive administration team that has helped me expand the orchestra program.

**What challenges do you face when teaching students with different skill levels?
How do you overcome them?**

I feel like this is a common issue in our district. Our high schools have magnet programs, so we draw students from all of the middle schools. One strategy that works for me is taking some time at the beginning of the school year to go back to the basics. Even though reviewing is not the most exciting thing for students, you have to establish a classroom environment where the students understand we are a team. We need every player to have certain skills for the team to be successful.

How do you encourage students to stay motivated to practice their instruments?

I think the best way to encourage students to practice is by selecting music that they connect with. It has to be fun and challenging. In my 20 years of teaching, I've realized many students don't practice because they don't know HOW to practice. I spend a lot of time teaching my 9th grade students practice techniques. Once they start seeing growth and improvement from practicing, they are hooked.

How has teaching orchestra changed since you first started?

Of course we have more technology available, but if I'm being honest, I'm old school. I use my tried-and-true strategies.

What is one of your favorite memories or a piece that you really loved?

Of Glorious Plumage by Richard Meyer is one of my favorite pieces. We played it for LGPE in 2020. It was the last day I saw that group of Seniors because the next day school shut down. Their performance was so musical, and then added in the emotions of not getting to celebrate or say goodbye. I still get "the feels" when I listen to the recording.

What final advice would you give to someone considering becoming an orchestra teacher?

Teaching is tough and exhausting, but also wonderful and rewarding. Find a support system to help you get through the tough parts: a mentor, a colleague, a friend to bounce ideas off of. Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice. Give yourself grace. You won't ever be a perfect teacher, but be a teacher that cares for their students and works hard to give them an amazing education.

Do you have any specific teachers who influenced your teaching career?

I would say my high school band directors Dr. Jim Arnold and Laura Estes made band my favorite class. They created the spark that led me to majoring in music and becoming a teacher.