Most public school music performance programs fit neatly into one of four distinct categories: Concert Band, Jazz Band, Orchestra and Chorus; each of which has instruction that emphasizes prescribed canons played on instruments standard to a corresponding musical genre. At schools with robust music programs, all of these ensembles may exist harmoniously under a single roof. Other schools may offer fewer choices, due to a lack of resources, enrollment or budgetary constraints. These music education categories are distinct from General Music or Music Appreciation courses.

Modern Band is a new school-based music program that utilizes popular music as its central canon. Modern Band teaches students to perform the music they know and love and to compose and improvise. Styles that are studied include rock, pop, reggae, hip-hop, rhythm & blues, electronic dance music, and other contemporary styles as they emerge. Modern Band also utilizes (but is not limited to) the musical instruments that are common to these genres: guitar, bass, drums, piano, voice and technology.

Over two million school-age children currently attend schools in districts that offer Modern Band classes as a part of their standard in-school music programming. An additional million children attend schools in districts that have piloted large-scale popular music programming, but have yet to codify those classes into distinct, official courses. Programs like these have been rapidly unifying behind the Modern Band moniker as a means of making popular music programs more systemic, scalable and sustainable.
Many school districts offer Modern Band as a district-wide course offering. These districts include some of the nation’s largest, such as the New York City Department of Education, the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Chicago Public Schools, as well as mid-sized and smaller districts, such as the Dallas Independent School District and the Pasadena Unified School District. New districts are incorporating Modern Band programming into their official coursework each year.

Prior to Modern Band, the most recent category of music education introduced in the US public school system was Jazz Band, which gained acceptance on a national level in the 1970s. Like its predecessor, Modern Band is the newest instrumental and vocal music program to expand the horizons of school music instruction, and is spreading quickly through public school districts across the country.

“We know that a Modern Band program can leverage our kids’ cultural and community experiences in a very unique way. It helps us reach kids and students with diverse musical experiences that they may not be getting at this point. It helps them have a different understanding of the world and how it functions.”

- Paul L. King, Executive Director, New York City Office of Arts and Special Projects
WHY MODERN BAND?

Contemporary popular music is a pervasive and abundant cultural asset that has been under-utilized in public education. Modern Band offers teachers easy access to this material and can help bridge the gap that can sometimes exist between the music children experience daily in their communities and that which they experience in school.

Bringing music that is familiar to students into schools allows students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. By validating and leveraging the cultural capital of youth, Modern Band can help form stronger bonds between students and the schools that serve them, and engage marginalized students who otherwise might not take part in existing school music programs.
Teacher Education and Modern Band

Many colleges and universities feature Modern Band in their teacher education programs. It is covered in mandatory methods courses, stand-alone elective courses, summer symposia and is an ongoing area of focus at academic conferences. A growing number of public and private colleges and universities utilize the frame of Modern Band in their music teacher education programs as a means of propagating and scaling popular music education within their own course offerings.

The Nation’s Largest Modern Band Program

Building on the success and popularity of Modern Band programs in public schools throughout New York City, in 2014 the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) announced its intention to expand Modern Band programs to be in 600 of its schools by the end of 2016, with more than 60% of the district’s certified music teachers offering it at their schools.

This landmark build-out of the NYCDOE’s Modern Band programs will happen through significant investment of teacher hours and through special support from Berklee College of Music, the original trailblazer in the field of popular music instruction, and Little Kids Rock, the nation’s leading provider of Modern Band professional development and instruments for in-service teachers. The joint venture is called Amp Up NYC, and it is making a very large donation of Modern Band teacher training, curricular resources, and instruments available to NYCDOE schools. Amp Up NYC represents the largest single private investment in a city’s public school music program in US history.

Modern Band Conferences

Modern Band Rockfest and Symposium is an annual national convention of Modern Band stakeholders held in Fort Collins, Colorado. Hundreds of school music teachers, college and university professors, school district arts administrators, and nonprofit organizations from across the country assemble with the goal of advancing Modern Band in US public schools. The conference features professional development sessions, workshops, an academic symposium, and other presentations focused on best practices from a diverse spectrum of Modern Band practitioners.

The Association for Popular Music Education (APME) is an organization dedicated to promoting and advancing popular music at all levels of education. Our annual conference includes more than 50 presentations, panels, and workshops, from attendees representing five countries, focusing on all elements of popular music education.

To learn more about Modern Band, to locate Modern Band resources or to find out how you can help bring Modern Band programming to your own school district, visit www.modernband.org.