

MURCHISON MIDDLE SCHOOL ORCHESTRA & GUITAR HANDBOOK

2021-2022



DIRECTOR

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Orchestra Office Number: 512-414-6341



Dear Parents, Guardians, and Students,

Welcome to the Murchison Middle School Orchestra and Guitar Program! I am proud of the many honors the orchestras and their individual members have received in recognition of their excellent performances.

Orchestra students develop in many areas including: responsibility, self-discipline, social skills, confidence, leadership, and dependability. Participating in orchestra will give students a sense of accomplishment and pride as well as developing musical skills that will enrich their lives. I know that you will be a valuable part of the group and that you will discover the joy that comes from a fine musical performance.

Orchestra classes include the study of violin, viola, cello, string bass, and guitar. All of the instruments require no previous musical experience. In the Beginner Orchestra and Guitar, we emphasize the fundamentals of music and the basic skills required to play your instrument. Mastery of these fundamental skills helps students progress smoothly through the orchestra program as higher-level skills are introduced. In the more advanced orchestras, students continue to perfect skills while learning new and more challenging aspects of music and music performance.

This orchestra handbook has been written to present important information concerning the various activities, policies, and regulations of the Murchison Orchestras. All orchestra members and their parents are asked to read the entire handbook carefully. At the beginning of each school year, we want you to be informed so that conflicts with the policies and rules may be avoided. **Please keep the handbook for reference throughout the year.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call or email. I am typically much quicker replying through email than through the phone but we will get back to any questions or concerns as quickly as possible.

I am looking forward to an exciting and successful school year! I can't wait to get to know you all and to make great music together!

Musically yours,

Brandon Clinton
brandon.clinton@austinisd.org

MURCHISON ORCHESTRA AND GUITAR SUPPLY LIST

1. **Instrument** - (violin, viola, cello, bass, nylon string acoustic guitar) Instruments should be sized by a teacher or professional at a string shop. It is highly recommended that you rent an instrument from a local string shop, see our list of vendors below. **Please do not buy an instrument from Walmart, Craigslist, or an online vendor.** There are a limited number of instruments that can be rented on a first come first serve basis for \$40.00 per semester (\$80.00 for the year). Please contact Mr. Clinton for more information on renting a school instrument.
2. **Instrument Accessories** -
 - a. Violin/Viola - Shoulder rest. Adjustable shoulder rest that is the appropriate size for the instrument.
 - b. Cello/Bass - Rockstop. Either a rubber rocktop or a strap for cellos.
 - c. Guitar - Collapsible foot stool.
 - d. Orchestra Students only - Rosin (or Pops Bass Rosin), and a cleaning cloth.
3. **Binders** - All students will be supplied a 3-ring black binder, music and materials, and a pencil (Returning students can use their binder from the previous year). It is the student's responsibility to take care and maintain their binder throughout the school year. **This will be paid for by the orchestra fair share fee, which is explained below.** If the student's binder is severely damaged or lost, it is their responsibility to replace the whole binder (which includes the binder, pencil, and **all** included music and handouts, which are available on BLEND).
4. **Clip-On Chromatic Tuner** - This clip-on tuner is for classroom use and must affix to the instrument to be used for personal tuning. You can either purchase a tuner that clips directly to the bridge or scroll (ex. Snark SN or ST Model, D'addario NS micro, or similar), or a tuner that has a detachable pick-up clip (ex. Korg tuner with Korg CM-200 contact microphone, or similar).
5. **Optional items** - An extra set of strings (only for violin, viola, or guitar; optional but handy if you happen to break one). A music stand for home practice (an inexpensive fold up stand is sufficient)

ORCHESTRA FAIR SHARE FEE

All students will be asked to pay a fair share fee of \$30.00, which will cover the cost of: t-shirts, binders, pencils, music, clinicians, and snacks/food. **Fees can be paid by cash, check (address checks to Murchison Middle School), or by School Cash Online.** Fees are due by the end of the second week of school (August 27, 2021).

Financial limitations should never be a reason that a student cannot participate in orchestra. If your financial situation limits you from obtaining any of the supplies or instruments, please reach out to Mr. Clinton. He will discreetly make sure that students are equipped with what they need to be successful including all items listed above.

LOCAL STRING VENDORS

There are a number of excellent instrument dealers in our area. They carry new and used instruments and they service instruments of all types. They also carry accessories needed for our classes. Many music stores have rental plans where your monthly payments go toward the purchase of an instrument. Most allow you to trade up an instrument size within the rental plan.

- Terra Nova Violins - 7795 Burnet Rd, Austin, TX 78757 - 512-640-4072
- Blackerby Violins - 1111 W. Anderson Lane, 78757 - 512-469-9343
- Strait Music Co. - 13945 Hwy. 183 North (at 620) 512-918-3743
- Austin Strings - 13276 N Highway 183 # 201, 78759 - 512-918-1863
- Westbank String Shop - 6301 Manchaca Rd., 78745 - 512-326-4898

CARE OF THE INSTRUMENT

String instruments are delicate and subject to damage from temperature extremes, humidity, and careless handling. The following suggestions are offered for their care.

1. Do not touch the hair of the bow as moisture, perspiration, oil, or dirt from your hands, face, or hair will spoil the bow hair.
2. Always loosen the bow after you play.
3. After playing, use a soft cloth to wipe rosin from the top of the instrument, bow stick, and strings.
4. Do not expose your instrument to excessive heat or cold.
5. When you are not using the instrument, always store it in the case.
6. Never put books or music in the case unless there is a pocket specifically for that.
7. Never polish the instrument with furniture polish.
8. Be sure to latch the case.
9. Check your bridge often. If it is not standing straight, ask your teacher to adjust it.
10. Do not let other people play your instrument.
11. Never use glue on any part of your instrument.
12. Do not attempt your own repairs. Only an expert repairman has the skill and experience to do a good job.

ORCHESTRA CLASSES

Symphonic Orchestra - This class is our varsity orchestra. This class is for students who have been playing for at least two years, or more, on their instruments and is an audition only ensemble. This ensemble will participate in our UIL evaluation and other community events throughout the year. **Members of this ensemble will be required to attend after school sectionals.** Private lessons are strongly encouraged to participate in this ensemble.

Philharmonic Orchestra - This class is our non-varsity orchestra. This class is for students who have been playing for at least one year, or more, on their instruments and is an audition only ensemble. This ensemble may participate in our UIL evaluation. Private lessons are strongly encouraged to participate in this ensemble.

Concert Orchestra - This class is for students who have been playing for at least one year, or more, on their instruments. You do not have to audition to be a part of this ensemble. Private lessons are strongly encouraged to participate in this ensemble.

Beginner Orchestra - This class is for students who have never played an orchestra instrument before. No experience is required to join this class. You will be able to choose from learning: violin, viola, cello, or bass.

Guitar Ensemble - This class is for any student who is interested in learning how to play *classical* guitar (nylon strings). You do not have to have any prior experience to be in this class. This class is only open to eighth grade students.

Please note: All orchestra and guitar classes are full year courses. Dropping the course mid-year will not be an option for students enrolled in any of the orchestra classes unless approved by the director.

AFTER SCHOOL SECTIONALS AND FREE PRACTICE TIME

Orchestra Sectionals (Symphonic Orchestra Only) - Symphonic Orchestra members will be required to attend sectionals once a week to help us prepare for our concerts and UIL evaluation. These sectionals will be graded. **Sectionals will be held from 4:00 pm - 4:45 pm. Violin/Viola sectionals will be held on Tuesdays and Cello/Bass sectionals will be held on Wednesdays.** I understand that students may have occasional conflicts, doctor's appointments, other academic commitments, etc. Makeup Sectionals for those with an excused absence from their normal sectional time can be made during Free Practice Time in the mornings. Students can sign in with Mr. Clinton and practice in a practice room for the 30 minutes.

Free Practice Time - The orchestra room will be open daily from 7:45 am - 8:15 am for students to use to practice. I know that scheduling time to practice at home can sometimes be difficult. If your student needs a space to practice, please feel free to use the orchestra room during this time.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

1. **BE ON TIME.** Students should be in their seats with instruments, music and pencils within three minute of the tardy bell.
2. **PREPARE FOR CLASS.** Students should practice their music at home each day so that class time may be spent making music with the other members of their ensemble. 5 points will be deducted from the student's Daily Grade for failure to bring materials to class each day.
3. **INSTRUMENTS AND FOLDERS MUST BE TAKEN HOME EACH NIGHT.**
20 points will be deducted from the Daily Grade for failure to bring an instrument home for home practice each day or failure to have an instrument in class.
4. **REMAIN QUIET, ALERT AND FOCUSED DURING CLASS.** 5 points will be deducted from the Daily grade for failure to participate well in class.
5. **ASK PERMISSION TO TALK.** Please raise your hand. 5 points will be deducted from the Daily Grade for excessive talking in class.
6. **MAKE MUSIC** with your instrument only when asked to do so in class. Contribute positively to your music education and that of others by the best use of your talents. Make a real effort to improve each day and practice, practice, practice!
7. **STAY IN YOUR SEAT** unless you have permission to leave it.
8. **RESPECT** instruments, materials, the school, your teachers and your classmates. Be responsible for and expect to assume the consequences of your actions.
9. **GUM, CANDY, DRINKS, OR OTHER DISTRACTIONS SHOULD BE KEPT OUT OF THE ORCHESTRA ROOM.** A 30 minute after school detention may be assigned for excessive violations of these expectations.
10. **KEEP FINGERNAILS SHORT.** Students cannot play in tune with proper technique if they have fingernails extending beyond the end of the finger. Students will be required to keep the fingernails trimmed so as to achieve an optimal sound.

CONSEQUENCES

- Warning
- Discussion with the teacher
- Call to parent
- Parent-Teacher conference
- Referral
- Loss of class celebration, trip privileges, or removal from the class

GRADING

During each nine weeks grading period, grades will be calculated using the following criteria:

50% Daily Grade - Each week, students will start with 100 points for being prepared for class, having all materials, and making their best effort. Remember that students will only have orchestra 2 - 3 times a week, so participating and being prepared for each class is very important. Points will be deducted for the following:

- 20 points will be deducted for a missing instrument or leaving your instrument at school (exceptions are made for students who have large instruments).
- 15 points will be deducted for missing sectionals or after school rehearsals
- 5 points will be deducted for each of the following: missing binders, music, pencils, or tuners.
- 5 points will be deducted for classroom disruptions or disrespectful behavior.

40% Concert (Major Test Grade)/Weekly Check-Ins (Quiz Grade)

- 25% - Weekly Check-Ins (Quizzes) - This includes quizzes on sections of music, theory, and other concepts taught in class. We focus on mastery grading in orchestra. This means that students will be given as many opportunities to complete (re-take) a check-in until they are satisfied with their performance until the last week of the semester. Once the nine weeks are over, the grade book will close for that semester.
- 15% - Concerts (Major Test Grade) - Concerts are the culmination of all our weekly check-ins and work throughout the semester. Musical performance in concerts is an extension of the classroom curriculum and is a **required** part of the student's responsibilities in all Murchison Orchestras. Students are expected to remain at all performances until they conclude. I do realize that extenuating circumstances can occur. They will be evaluated on an individual basis. In the event of such circumstances, students will be expected to notify the director in writing at least ONE WEEK in advance of any possible conflicts except in the case of emergencies.

10% Practice Journals - Practice journals are a way for students to set weekly goals on what to prepare for class and also to track how much they practice. It is expected that students practice a minimum of 5 days a week for 30 minutes per day. Doing the expected amount of practice will earn a 100%. Each day is worth 20%. If students practice more than the required days, they will earn extra credit. **Practice journals must be signed by parents/guardians and are due at the beginning of each week, either Monday or Tuesday, depending on the A/B day.**

PRACTICE

Practice is necessary to learn and maintain skills on any instrument. Conscientious, daily practice is expected of all orchestral students. Although 30 minutes of daily practice is most desirable, the quality and consistency of the practice is more important. It is helpful to have planned practice sessions with set goals, a daily scheduled time, a music stand, a comfortable chair, and a specific place, free of distractions, that is conducive to a successful learning environment. Parents can help a great deal with positive encouragement and helpful criticism.

We also are flexible when it comes to students falling ill, getting injured, or going on extensive family travels. If this occurs, contact your director to let us know of the issue and we can make concessions in the grading expectation.

The biggest suggestions I can offer families who are trying to find the time management skills to balance practice, homework, and other activities are as follows:

- Treat practice as musician's homework. Some students share with us that their parents ask them to finish all their academic homework before being allowed to practice. This can be hard for students who end up working late into the evening on homework and then are too tired to practice or don't want to disturb family members at night.
- Have students use practice as a homework break. Have them unpack their instruments when starting to do homework. Then in small chunks, students can take homework breaks by practicing 10-15 minutes at a time.
- Encourage a routine. Follow the suggestions on the practice report to warm up, do scales, method books, and music.
- Have your child give you a performance! If they are getting stuck or frustrated with practice, ask them to play you something that they enjoy.

We want to work with you to make this "musician's chore" a manageable one. Thank you!

ATTENDANCE

A calendar of events will be given to each student at the beginning of the school year. It is vital that all orchestra and guitar members be present for all required events. The concert is each musician's "Major Test Grade" following many hours of preparation and study. It is a team effort. In an orchestra, each musician is important to the total sound. When people are missing, the group sound changes dramatically, often with disastrous results. *If schedule conflicts occur, please notify the directors as soon as possible.* Since a conflict may sometimes involve a large number of students, advanced notification is important if the concert or rehearsal needs to be rescheduled or cancelled. Of course, absences due to illness or family emergencies will be excused. The directors will make final decisions about excused and unexcused absences.

CHARMS

The Murchison Orchestra uses a program called CHARMS for all of our mass communications and as a way to track student accounts. If you have never logged into CHARMS or just need to update your information, please see the charms instructions page, linked below. Once you log into CHARMS, please check/update the following information:

- Name
- Student email
- T-shirt size

ORCHESTRA CONCERT DRESS

A pleasing appearance builds pride in an organization, and pride will improve the quality of the performance. If this will cause a financial problem, please contact the director privately.

Beginner Orchestra Students:

- ✓ Orchestra t-shirt
- ✓ Blue jeans (blue please – no other colors)
- ✓ Shoes (no flip-flops/sandals)

Symphonic, Philharmonic, Concert, and Guitar – FORMAL ATTIRE

Ladies:

- ✓ All black attire. Attire may be black blouse and black dress pants/black skirt OR black concert dress.
- ✓ Neckline must be modest.
- ✓ Outfits must have sleeves or must be worn with a black sweater or cardigan.
- ✓ Black skirts must cover knees when seated (if outer fabric is sheer, then the inside slip must cover knees when seated).
- ✓ Black dress shoes (no sneakers or flip-flops). If socks are worn, they must be black.

Gentlemen:

- ✓ Black button-up dress shirt with long sleeves.
- ✓ Black dress pants.
- ✓ Black dress socks and dress shoes (no sneakers or flip-flops).

FESTIVALS AND COMPETITIONS

AISD FALL STRING FESTIVAL FOR BEGINNERS

AISD hosts a city-wide festival at Zilker Park or the AISD PAC on election day in November for all first-year orchestra students. Every beginning student from every school in the Austin Independent School District learns the same pieces and comes together for a giant concert! This happens during the school day and parents are encouraged to attend.

ALL CITY ORCHESTRA AND GUITAR

AISD hosts a city-wide Honors Orchestra and Guitar Ensemble which brings together both Middle and High School string players from all schools in Austin. The director will select students to participate in this event. Information will be sent home with the selected students.

REGION ORCHESTRA

Texas Music Educators Association sponsors this event. Auditions occur on a Saturday in October. Participation is optional, although all advanced students are encouraged to learn the music. Audition music is handed out to interested students at the beginning of the school year. Students pay their own entry fee and must be passing all their classes to be eligible to participate. Murchison students compete against string players from all over Region 18, which includes the Austin Independent School District and the surrounding area. Those selected for membership in the Region 18 Orchestra participate in a clinic and concert in November and receive a patch. More information about this will be sent home at a later date. Only students who have been playing one or more years are eligible.

UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE (UIL) ORCHESTRA EVALUATION

Three selections are prepared through concentrated work in class, extra rehearsals, and a “practice” concert, (Pre-UIL). In addition, each orchestra is required to “sight-read” a composition. Both performances are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest rating. Trophies are awarded to orchestras receiving the 1 rating in either concert or sight-reading, with a Sweepstakes trophy awarded for a rating of 1 in both areas. This evaluation is only for students who have been playing one or more years and is part of the non-beginner curriculum. A clinic for this event, which allows each orchestra to have a “practice round” for UIL, occurs in February. This event is usually held in March for Orchestra. Students must be passing their classes in order to attend.

MMS & AISD SOLO AND ENSEMBLE

This optional event, usually held in the spring, allows students to display their individual talents. All students are encouraged to enter. The orchestra will cover the entry fee unless a student drops out, which in that case a student will be expected to reimburse the fee (\$7 for solos, \$5 for each ensemble member). Preparation should begin more than a month before the event. Students can elect to play a solo (with piano accompaniment is required at AISD, but not MMS) or an ensemble (small group). Either the private teacher or the orchestra director will assist in the selection of appropriate music. Murchison will host the event in early April, which is open to all students in the MMS orchestra or guitar program. AISD hosts the same event in late April for the entire district; soloists interested in trying for Best in Class are encouraged to attend this event as well as those who cannot attend MMS Solo & Ensemble. Best in Class an honor given to select students who will have the opportunity to perform live on TV.

AUSTIN YOUTH ORCHESTRA (AYO)

Austin Youth Orchestra is a group for all Austin area students interested in performing string and full orchestra music. Auditions will be held for new students in September and January. Students meet one day a week on Monday evenings at O. Henry Middle School. There is a fee per semester. We highly encourage students to participate in this group. You can find more information at www.austinyouthorchestra.com

PRIVATE LESSONS

Private lessons are available for students who would like one-on-one weekly instruction on their particular instrument. Private lessons are a great way to excel more quickly on your instrument and are a great supplement to the orchestral experience here at Murchison. Although encouraged, private lessons are in no way a requirement for membership in any Murchison orchestra ensemble.

Murchison Orchestra Private Lessons

We will have private instructors available to teach students once a week during part of the orchestra class. Private instructors will be coming on a specified day once per week and 30 or 45 minute lessons will be available. This is a great opportunity to help your child learn and accelerate more quickly on their instrument. Please find the teachers and their contact information below. *We encourage you to contact them about prices and payment plans for lessons. Payment for lessons will be made directly to the private instructor.* Time slots may fill up quickly, so let the orchestra directors know if you are interested in taking lessons during class.

We ask that if you decide to provide lessons for your child that you commit to continuing through at least the whole semester.

We have a few private instructors available to teach students once a week **during part of their orchestra class**. Payment is set up directly between the teacher and the family. These teachers were chosen for their outstanding expertise in the field as well as their dedication to our students and our orchestras. They were also chosen based on their reputation as responsible, reliable, and dedicated teachers.

Violin and Viola

Gretchen Seaver Lee 814-404-8489, gseaver@gmail.com

Kyra McCarthy 512-517-3097, kyramccarthy@gmail.com

Cello

Anna Park, 847-372-4271, annaparkcello@gmail.com

Marie Pantina Chhibber 678-662-0950, marie.pantina@gmail.com

Murchison Orchestra Private Teacher List

(North and Central Austin)

Students are also able to take lessons **outside of school**. The following is a list of teachers in the area. Again, we highly recommend private lessons for orchestra students. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us!

Violin/Viola Teachers:

Gretchen Seaver Lee 814-404-8489, gseaver@gmail.com
Kyra McCarthy 512-517-3097, kyramccarthy@gmail.com
Leigh Wallenhaupt 704-287-8428, jessica.leigh.wallenhaupt@gmail.com
Leah Nelson 512-689-3210, leahceleste@gmail.com
Megan Peaco 410-300-7745 mpeaco@utexas.edu
Josh Terry 727-348-1691, joshterrymusic@gmail.com
Andrew Noble 512-517-7101, andrewwnoble@gmail.com
Kristi Mano Washeka 512-740-0852
Tim Washeka 512-740-0852
Angela Robertson 512-773-5928
Catharine Van Zanten 512-567-9836

Cello Teachers:

Anna Park 847-372-4271, annaparkcello@gmail.com
Marie Pantina Chhibber 678-662-0950, marie.pantina@gmail.com
Frank Jenkins 847-372-8437, fjenkinscello@gmail.com
Rachel Garner 210-218-7641, rachelg.cello@gmail.com

Bass Teachers:

Laura Dykes 281-543-3440, laura.dykes32@gmail.com
Jessica Gillian-Valls 512-350-4477
Dana Wygmans 616-460-5979

*****Blackerby Violin Shop** offers private lessons on violin, viola, cello, and bass.
512-469-9343
1111 W. Anderson Lane Austin, TX 78757

*****Orpheus Music Academy** offers private lessons on violin, viola, and cello.
512-231-8999
3918-C Far West Blvd Austin, TX 78731

*****Austin Soundwaves** offers lessons on all instruments based on financial need. You can apply for lessons and financial aid to this program at the following link:
<https://thehispanicalliance.org/advanced-skills/>

Note: This list above is not exhaustive of all private teachers in the Austin area. If you find that any teacher listed above does not have room in their studio, please contact brandon.clinton@austinisd.org, we will help you find a private teacher.

Now that you have completed reading the handbook, please complete the following steps by using the links below.

****Please have all forms completed no later than Friday, AUGUST 27th, 2021****

- Set-up/Up-date CHARMS account (especially, T-shirt size)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W_Y3MxWu_vV-eHoMR_tlFB3Z_lqyook_msHTa5d5ZlF8/edit?usp=sharing
- Fill out and submit Media Release form
<https://forms.gle/9JzixNFyGdJxkksH6>
- Send in Fair Share Fee of \$30.00 (Cash, Check, or School Cash Online)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GPgbVtdkeYMjSvcCfS-aAdoCut_v6O1xFywQcf68IQIY/edit?usp=sharing
****Fair Share Fees due August 27th, 2021****
- Complete Instrument Form
(<https://forms.gle/SzJrcw3GnSu8PErn6>)
****Rental Fees are due by August 27th, 2021****
- Fill our the Parent/Student Agreement Form
(<https://forms.gle/fsSRDhSymafWGgc96>)

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Kind Regards,

Brandon Clinton
Director of Orchestras and Guitar
brandon.clinton@austinisd.org