

Waltham Public Schools

Middle School String Program



**2025 - 2026
Handbook**

Kennedy and McDevitt Middle School String Orchestra Handbook 2025/2026

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Middle School String Students & Families,

Welcome to our middle school string orchestras! We look forward to having you in our classes this year and sharing all the great music we will be making!

Please carefully read these sections to answer any questions you have about the orchestra. If you would like a hard copy of our orchestra handbook, which covers all of these topics, we are happy to provide one.

If you need to contact me, please locate my email at the top of this page. We can also arrange phone calls as needed. I look forward to teaching all of you this year!

Musically Yours,

Mrs. Garcia & Ms. Kelley

Handbook Outline:

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1. Required Materials for Class:

Intro to Orchestra I	6th, 7th Grade	8th Grade
Orchestra Expressions Book 1 Violin , Viola , Cello	Orchestra Expressions Book 2 Violin , Viola , Cello , Bass	Sound Innovations Violin , Viola , Cello
1. Instrument and bow Rosin (keep in case) 2. Shoulder Rests - Everest/kun style Cellists - Rockstop or Endpin rest 3. Tuner/Metronome (can be on a smart device or physical) 4. Pencil (keep in case) 5. ½ inch or 1 inch 3 ring binder - all distributed music and handouts will be hole-punched 6. Extra set of strings+		

+Students are required to replace their own strings. Families can purchase strings at music stores or through their rental company. Our Fine Arts Department will have a limited amount of strings available for purchase (violin/viola strings - \$8. and cello - \$10.).

Vendors for Rent to Own, Repair, Sale: David French Music, www.DavidFrenchMusic.com, Leonard's Music – www.leonardsmusic.com, and Johnson String Shop – www.johnsonstring.com

*** Parents can assist by** reminding their string student to have all their class materials. For students who need extra support remembering, and since students are on a 6-day schedule, it is helpful to be familiar with their weekly schedule to check with them.

2. Class Expectations and Rehearsal Behavior:

Students are expected to:

- Respect, support, and show courtesy towards others.
- Raise their hand and wait to be called to ask questions or comment.
- Displaying seriousness, focus, and giving one's best effort are important when learning new techniques and practicing music.
- Avoid having food in class. This includes gum, candy, etc.

* **Parents can assist by** checking with their child about how their class is going, and if necessary, reminding them that their positive attitude and focus contribute to a successful class.

3. Grading:

It is important to remember that orchestra is a class and students receive a grade based on class requirements. A letter grade is given, as well as comments that reflect student participation. Grades and comments are based on the following.

<i>ACTIVITY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE</i>
Practice Grades Demonstration of individual preparation for class Ex: Monthly Practice Chart and Reflection	30%
Application Grades Participation and demonstration of musical skills - written and playing Ex: All materials for class, appropriate and respectful classroom behavior, student effort, focus, and active participation during class	30%
Evaluation Grades Assessments, including performances and major playing/written exams Ex: Playing Tests (1-2 times per quarter), Mandatory after-school rehearsals, Concerts, Compositions, Written Concert Evaluations	40%

You may check plusportals/Google Classroom for our homework assignments and earned grades. Please do not hesitate to reach out for clarification of assignments.

* **Parents can assist by** staying in touch with the teacher, assisting in setting up practice time, and checking with their child at the end of each month for completed homework.

4. Rehearsal and Concert Dates:

In middle school, string players perform as one large ensemble group. Concert preparation requires a team effort. In the String Orchestra, we have high standards for working together during our class time. We also encourage you to reach out to your orchestra teacher if you have any concerns. For any quality performance, musicians need to be dependable, dedicated, and focused. **To be in the Kennedy and McDevitt String Orchestra, full participation in all after-school scheduled rehearsals and concerts is essential and mandatory.** Time adjustments will be made to accommodate late bus travel.

En la escuela intermedia, los músicos de cuerda actúan como un grupo grande. La preparación de un concierto requiere un esfuerzo de equipo. En la Orquesta de Cuerdas tenemos altos estándares para trabajar juntos durante nuestro tiempo de clase. También lo alentamos a que se comunique con su maestro de orquesta si tiene alguna inquietud. Para cualquier actuación de calidad, los músicos deben ser confiables, dedicados y enfocados. **Para estar en la Orquesta de Cuerdas Kennedy y McDevitt, la participación completa en todos los ensayos y conciertos programados después de la escuela es esencial y obligatoria.** Se realizarán ajustes de tiempo para adaptarse a los viajes tardíos en autobús.

Concert Information for 2025-2026:

School	Winter	Movin' On Up	Spring
Kennedy	Chorus/Band/Strings Concert: December 16, 2025 KMS Auditorium 6:00 Call Time 5:00 Rehearsal: December 8, 2025 KMS Auditorium 2:45	Band/Strings 5-12 Concert: March 12, 2026 KMS Field House 6:00 Call Time 5:15 Rehearsal #1: AFTER SCHOOL	Strings Only Concert: May 21, 2026 WHS Auditorium 6:00 Sound-Check Rehearsal: May 21, 2026 WHS Auditorium 4:45 Arrive 5:00 8th Grade 5:10 7th Grade 5:20 6th Grade 5:30 Doors Open
McDevitt	Band/Strings Concert: December 9, 2025 McD Auditorium 6:00 Call Time 5:00 Rehearsal: December 1, 2025 McD Auditorium 2:45	Rehearsal #2: IN SCHOOL March 12, 2026	

Concert Dress: WPS Performing Arts Shirt, Black Bottom, Black Shoes
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To excuse a student from a rehearsal/concert for emergencies or sickness, a written note or email is required. An alternate assignment will be assigned for students who have provided advanced notice of absence.

*** Parents can assist by** checking concert and rehearsal dates, making family and other appointments that won't conflict with these dates, arranging rides to/from rehearsals/concerts if necessary, and contacting the teacher promptly if there is a scheduling issue... And attending and cheering your child's effort at concerts!

5. Practicing:

Daily practice is **expected** of every member of the orchestra and it is important for improvement. It is my job to teach you how and what to practice, but it is your job to use what you learn! This is what makes musicians special. Musicians know that practicing is the key to everything they want to be able to play and experience musically with others. If you have any problems during your practice, please ask for my help. We are here for YOU!

Here are some helpful tips:

- Each week, students are assigned specific measures, passages, scales/arpeggios, and music sections/rhythms to concentrate on in their music.
- Your home practice space needs to be in a quiet space with no distractions, having the music stand adjusted to eye level.
- To be the most successful at accomplishing skill, ALWAYS start with good posture and correct positioning/posture with both the left and right hand. Check for bow angle and straight bow strokes.
- Practicing 5-7 days a week for 20-30 minutes is better than practicing 1-2 times for 1-2 hours.
- Practice the assignment slowly, using correct rhythm, bowings, and articulation. When you can play it correctly at a slow tempo, then try increasing the tempo. Afterward, try playing the piece from beginning to end.
- There are many times we need to analyze where a playing problem lies. It could be a fingering issue, a bowing issue, a rhythm issue, etc. Once you figure it out, repeating the area of need several times is necessary. It can be very tedious, but necessary!
- Use a metronome. There are free apps as well as ones online.
- Practice with others
- Perform for someone family, friends, pets?
- End your practice playing something you enjoy!

*** Parents can assist by** helping, if necessary, your child to set aside daily practice time as part of their

homework time. Make sure they have their own space without distraction. Encourage them to play for you and compliment their efforts. And be very patient in listening to them practice ... progressing is a process and it doesn't all sound lovely!

6. Group Performing Opportunities:

Waltham is very special in that it has an Honors Ensembles Program. String players are encouraged to audition for these specialized groups. **Honors Orchestra**, grade 4-6, Thursdays- 3:30-5 pm, Kennedy MS (Audition can be arranged). **Honors Middle School String Ensemble**, grade 7-8, Tuesdays, 3:50-4:30 pm, Kennedy MS. Audition information will be given during class in the first week of school. Students are required to be part of their school ensembles and lessons to participate in extracurricular groups.

7. Private Lessons:

Private lessons are important for students to enhance their playing skills and to provide them with individual attention. It is also recommended for students playing in additional school ensembles, such as the Honors Ensemble.

The Waltham Public Schools Fine and Performing Arts Department offers private after school lessons for instrumental and voice for interested students. Interested students can complete the online registration link through the walthampublicschools.org site. Please contact Kevin Burke for questions, Coordinator of Private Lessons at 781.314.3093 X 6524 or email to juliesouza@walthampublicschools.org.

Other After-School Orchestra Programs: [The Rivers School](#), [CMCB of Boston](#), [NEC String Orchestra](#), [BYSO](#)

8. Music Listening

Listening and enjoying music is essential for musicians to stay connected to their "art". There are so many variations to music that we listen to and enjoy. String instruments are very diverse and musicians play in a multitude of genres and styles. Please encourage your child to attend concerts and listen to string musicians on the internet/youtube (using supervision and guidance). Local orchestras perform throughout the year. In Waltham, we are privileged as well to live in an area surrounded by a world class orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra!

***Parents can assist by** taking your child to music, dance, art performances and exhibits. Check websites and newspaper "arts" section for local groups performing (Arsenal Arts, Gore Estate, Brandeis, Boston University Performing Arts Department, Berkley School of Music, New England Conservatory, many more!)

Check out these Artists:

Classical Violinist: Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Gil Shaham, Hilary Hahn, Ann Sophie Mutter **Violist:** Pinchas Zukerman, Nobuko Imai, Yuri Bashmet, Lawrence Power **Cellist:** Yo-Yo Ma, Gregor Piatigorsky, Jacqueline du Pre, Mstislav Rostropovich. Zoe Keating **Bassist:** Donovan Stokes, Esperanza Spalding **Orchestras:** Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, London Philharmonic **Conductors:** Seiji Ozawa, Ariane Matiakh, Sir Georg Solti, Leonard Slatkin, Andre Previn, Gustavo Dudamel, John Williams

Jazz: Esperanza Spalding, Mimi Rabson, Darol Anger, Turtle Island, The Hot Jazz String Quartet

Alternative Rock: Lindsey Stirling, Bobby Yang, Mark Wood, Todd Mark Rubenstein, Apocalyptica, Piano Guys, 2 Cellos, Vitamin String Quartet

Hip Hop/Rap: DAKAH, Hip Hop Orchestra, Nuttin But Stringz, Black Violin, The String Queens

Bluegrass: Mark O'Connor, Rashad Eggleston, Alison Krauss

***Parents can assist by** helping their child find internet sites where they can listen to the music that they are performing in school, music they enjoy, or just exploring various genres of music, etc.