

San Diego Unified School District

Challenger Middle School

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Orchestra Handbook

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Welcome to the Challenger Middle School Instrumental Music Program!

You have chosen a class that will enable you to have a lifelong experience: music! Learning to play a musical instrument in an ensemble is an exciting and challenging experience for the student, and one which is not always an easy thing to do; time and patience are important factors for the family, student and teacher. The skills you will learn, including working in a large group, preparation for a goal, and personal discipline, will add to your development as a person.

In order to provide you with the best possible experience, I have placed as much pertinent information in the following pages as I can to help you with every aspect of our program. I hope you will find this Handbook both helpful and informative.

During the course of the year, if you ever need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Please note that email is my preferred method of contact (efoster@sandi.net). I make it a point to answer emails promptly, often including holidays and weekends. In addition, I am available after school almost every day, and I usually stay late. Please stop by!

STANDARDS

Every music ensemble at Challenger Middle School will strive to meet and exceed the Standards for Music Education set by the Visual and Performing Arts Department of the San Diego Unified School District, the San Diego County Office of Education, the California Department of Education, and the National Association for Music Education.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

CREATING

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
3. Refine and complete artistic work

PERFORMING / PRESENTING / PRODUCING

4. Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation
5. Develop and refine artistic work for presentation
6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work

RESPONDING

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work

CONNECTING

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art
11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

OUR GOALS

1. To provide a background in the appreciation of music and an understanding of music fundamentals as it relates to each student by learning the skill of a musical instrument.
2. To promote responsibility and good citizenship habits through the musical medium.
3. To broaden the student's sense of self-discipline and group responsibility as the student works toward a common goal of technical proficiency, artistic appreciation, and performance excellence.
4. To prepare the student for the successful completion of the public school instrumental music program at the high school level.

COURSE OFFERINGS

Beginning Orchestra (ORCH 5-8TH BEG) is available to all students who have completed at least one year of traditional instrumental music instruction on an instrument of the string orchestra at the middle, elementary, or private level, or those who would like to begin instruction on an instrument of the string orchestra. All instruments of the string orchestra are offered. Instrument availability is limited, and students may be asked to begin or continue instruction on an instrument other than their first choice. Emphasis of instruction will be placed on:

- Developing expression through body and instrument
- Producing a superior tone on the instrument
- Developing aural skills such as intonation and balance within the ensemble
- Reading and performing music notation
- Acquiring confidence in sight-reading
- Learning new skills with other instruments of the string orchestra

Advanced Orchestra (ORCH 6-8TH ADV) is available to select students who have completed at least one year of traditional instrumental music instruction on an instrument of the string orchestra at the middle, elementary, or private level. All instruments of the string orchestra are offered. Balanced instrumentation is ideal, and instrument availability is limited as well; students may be asked to continue instruction on an instrument other than their first choice. Emphasis of instruction will be placed on developing and extending skills from previous performance ensemble experiences:

- Developing expression through body and instrument
- Producing a superior tone on the instrument
- Developing aural skills such as intonation and balance within the ensemble
- Reading and performing music notation
- Acquiring confidence in sight-reading
- Learning new skills with other instruments of the string orchestra
- Preparing for frequent performances through the acquisition of confidence in the most challenging literature for the string orchestra at the middle school level

Additionally, this ensemble will, at times, be augmented by a complement of selected wind and percussion students to provide the full orchestral experience whenever possible.

Jazz Band is an additional ensemble offered after school, beginning after the Fall Concerts, twice per week, for students interested in additional performance opportunities in different musical styles, such as Jazz, Rock, and Latin, and skills in improvisation are also developed. Jazz Band is offered only to students enrolled in Advanced Ensembles, or upon selection by the Director. All instruments are welcome, and students are also encouraged, as needed, to learn and play instruments of the traditional Jazz Ensemble.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Students are expected to follow the rules and expectations of Challenger Middle School, as outlined in the student planner, at all times. Students shall follow the CATS Code of Conduct, focusing on Community, Attitude, Tolerance, and Scholarship.

Each student is to come to class on time, with instrument in good repair, and with all recommended materials and supplies. On time means in assigned seat, instrument assembled where necessary, and ready to begin.

Class begins when the Director steps on the podium: **all talking and playing of instruments stops, and the room is silent, until the Director signals otherwise.** Proper body posture and instrument position is essential to the best musicianship and will be enforced during rehearsals. As well, class ends when the Director signals: students will reposition their music stand, and then wait for the signal to disassemble and put away instrument in its case (as necessary) while remaining seated. The Director will then dismiss students to put instruments away, after which students will return to their seats, again awaiting dismissal by the Director.

The only acceptable conduct is that which reflects good taste, maturity, and pride in our Music Program and our school. Horseplay, profanity, and vulgarity will not be tolerated at any time.

There will be absolutely no eating, drinking, or gum-chewing allowed in the Rehearsal Rooms. The only liquid that is acceptable in the Rehearsal Rooms is water- NO EXCEPTIONS! Violations will be confiscated and the student will be sent to the Office with a Referral.

Students will respect the Rehearsal Rooms and the contents therein; hands will be kept to self, instrument, chair, music stand, and music.

It is a School-District-wide rule that no student may write on, paint, etch, or otherwise deface any surface, and this applies to music chairs and music stands. Any student who abuses a chair, stand, or any other piece of equipment, may be subject to dismissal from the class and will be held liable for repair or replacement.

NO ONE BUT A PERCUSSION STUDENT IS ALLOWED TO TOUCH THE PERCUSSION EQUIPMENT AT ANY TIME, and indiscriminate beating on any of the equipment is considered abuse. Any student who damages any equipment will be liable for repair or replacement costs.

All instrument cases are to be labeled with the student's name. For the protection of the student, **NO NAME = NO ADMITTANCE TO INSTRUMENT STORAGE AREA**. Cases found to be without a label will be removed from the storage room until a new label is applied.

All students are responsible for keeping the Rehearsal Rooms and Instrument Storage Rooms neat. Before dismissal, all students will be required to return chairs, stands, and other equipment to their original positions and instruments to instrument storage. At no time are music binders or method books to be left on any floor, chair, stand, shelf, rack, instrument, or piece of equipment; only instruments may ever be stored in the Instrument Storage Rooms.

Just like being on time for class means in your seat, with mind, body and instrument ready to begin, so does “call time” for concerts and other activities. For instance, if a concert is to begin at 6:00 PM, and call time for performers is 5:00 PM, then the performer should plan on arriving by 4:45 PM or before. This will allow plenty of time for the student to get situated and focused, as well as to provide a time buffer for traffic and other inconveniences life tends to throw your way at the last minute.

PRACTICING

*** ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO PRACTICE A MINIMUM OF 30 MINUTES DAILY ***

If you practice, you get better.
If you get better, you play with better players.
If you play with better players, you play better music.
If you play better music, you have more fun.
If you have more fun, you want to practice more.
If you practice more, you get better...

Douglas Yeo, Parenting Musical Children

Homework in Orchestra means practice at home. You are expected to take the necessary amount of time to learn your music and polish it. Whatever the time period, you are responsible for learning and perfecting your music. The **ENTIRE** ensemble is depending upon you to do this.

The only sure way to realize a positive improvement in one's playing is through a thorough, consistent, comprehensive practice routine; daily class rehearsal is not enough. Lack of at-home practice diminishes the likelihood of a student meeting the Standards, and will detract from the ensemble experience. We want EVERY student to succeed, and we want our ensemble to sound its best- this will only be realized through the diligence of every student.

LEARNING HOW TO PLAY IS LEARNING HOW TO PRACTICE.

If the student takes the instrument home, the likelihood of practice is increased. However, if the instrument is left at school, it is proof-positive that the student is not practicing. I usually stay after school to offer students the opportunity to practice; if the student practices for a minimum of 30 minutes, then the instrument will be allowed to remain at Challenger overnight. In order to reinforce the concept of daily practice, the student will receive a note on the case of an instrument left overnight in instrument storage. Subsequent instances will result in contact with family, and further instances may include consultation with Counseling and/or Administration.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES

I do not require a parent/guardian signature on a "practice time sheet". Family reinforcement of practicing, as with homework completion for any class, will help to ensure the student's musical progress, and this will lead to a successful ensemble performance for all students. Here are some additional suggestions:

- **Assist the student with practice by helping them to establish and maintain a weekly routine.**
A regular time set aside daily, especially if done early, preferably before dinner, to practice and to complete other homework yields the greatest rewards: A MUST.
- **Be generous with your interest and praise.**
If it sounds good, let your student know! If it does not, be patient and supportive. Remember, it is a "work in progress". You will be amazed at the progress of your student, given your praise, in even just the first six weeks of school, and you will be even more impressed by the end of the school year- your attention is incredibly meaningful for your student and will help motivate your student to achieve even greater musical successes.
- **Credit each achievement with some form of recognition.**
Listen to your student play and make a constructive comment on the performance.
- **Encourage music reading rather than rote learning or imitation ("playing by ear").**
- **Encourage the student to practice ALL of the music, not just the parts that are easiest or are the most recognizable.**
If the student never works on the "hard parts", they will always remain "hard"! Your student will be provided a "How to Practice" guide which you and your student can refer to in learning and mastering the music.
- **AVOID NEGATIVE SUBJECTIVE CRITICISM.**
As mentioned above, family attention is incredibly meaningful for students, and negative language, including using worn-out, obsolete, and inaccurate phrases such as "You play flat!" or "You sound lousy!" only denigrates and discourages the student. No one ever starts with a "professional" sound!



MATERIALS (Recommended by Tuesday, September 7th)

Students are recommended have two (2) graphite pencils on their person at all times- mechanical are preferred, but wooden #2 pencils are acceptable as well. Students are expected to bring functioning pencils to class every day; Challenger Middle School will provide these pencils upon request.

In order to protect music and method books throughout the year, ***all students are recommended to keep all materials, including this Handbook, in a standard black loose-leaf binder with pockets (1" for Beginning Orchestra, 2" for Advanced Orchestra)***. Challenger Middle School will provide 1" binders upon request. Sheet music will be issued by the Director, for the student to keep in the music binder. Students are expected to bring their music binder to class every day. **Note: students may share a binder for rehearsal purposes, but each student must still bring their own individual binder to and from class every day- NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Students are encouraged to acquire their own ***method books***, also known as ***technique books***, in the ***Essential Elements for Strings [2000]*** series, available at any local music store. This enables each student to write inside the book as needed to further the musical development of the student. These books are also available for check-out in the Challenger Middle School Media Center, but students may ***not*** write in those books, and students are liable for damage or theft. As with the binder, students are expected to bring their method book to class every day; one (1) grade point will be deducted from the student's semester grade for each day the student is without their method book. **Note: students may share a method book for rehearsal purposes, but each student must still bring their own individual method book every day- NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Beginning Orchestra will utilize **Book 1** of the *Essential Elements for Strings* series of method books. This will include beginning instruction for all students; students who have previous experience will benefit from reviewing the material and will be an indispensable resource to the Director for aiding instruction.

Advanced Orchestra will utilize both **Book 2** and **Book 3** (*Essential Technique for Strings*) of the *Essential Elements for Strings* series of method books, and depending on the progression throughout the school year, we may also use **Book 4** (*Advanced Technique for Strings*). We will work in one book at a time; the Director will inform the student when the class is moving on to the next book in the series. To ensure the student is on track with the ensemble, it is recommended that students acquire and review material from Book 1 of the *Essential Elements for Strings* series.

INSTRUMENTS

Each student is required to bring their instrument to rehearsal every day, in addition to taking it home every day, with the exception of large instruments as designated by the Director. In order to reinforce the concept of daily practice, the student will receive a note on the case of an instrument left overnight in instrument storage. Subsequent instances will result in contact with family, and further instances may include consultation with Counseling and/or Administration.

Loan

Although there are a number of school-owned instruments available for student loan, it is strongly recommended that the student provide their own. Selection of those students who will receive school instruments is based on the following criteria:

1. Suitability to the student
2. Ensemble balance
3. Inventory availability

Each student will receive a questionnaire during the first week of the new school year which will help to determine instrument placement. Especially given constraints of instrument inventory availability, students may be asked to begin or continue instruction on an instrument other than their first choice.

INSTRUMENTS – Loan – continued

PLEASE NOTE: An instrument on loan to the student becomes the sole responsibility of the student/parent/guardian while on campus and outside the school. Although temporary storage is provided in the Instrument Storage Rooms for the convenience of the student during the school day, it shall remain the responsibility of the individual and family with regard to theft or damage.

Rent

If it is your intention to rent an instrument, DO IT NOW. Most music stores experience a great deal of requests in the first weeks of school, and some even run out!

Own

If it is your intention to buy a NEW instrument online through Amazon, eBay, Craigslist, etc., BEWARE! A good rule of thumb: if the offer looks too good to be true, it probably IS. Of course, local business is BEST when you consider warranties, repairs, and other services that may be difficult, if not impossible to obtain through online services.

If you are looking to buy a USED instrument, know that only a few stores in the area sell used instruments. If possible, take the instrument to me, and/or a repair technician FIRST for an opinion before you buy it, although for obvious reasons, this may be difficult.

Whether you buy a new or used instrument, NEVER EXPECT TO PAY FULL PRICE! Do not be afraid to bargain with a salesperson—they will expect this, just the same way that car salespeople do. However, this does not apply to RENTALS—those rates are fixed.

A few more notes on instrument purchasing:

1. If it looks too good to be true (inexpensive), it more than likely is (cheaply made, will not work well- your student will be FRUSTRATED)
2. It is likely an unwise investment to buy an instrument where you also buy toilet paper (consider local music stores and reputable music websites)
3. I would much rather provide an instrument to your student for free (one that I know works well) than to have the student frustrated by an instrument that does not function well (and cost the family money on top of it!)

The following music stores serve our area:

Alan's Music Center (La Mesa)	619-466-1938	alansmusiccenter.com
All Four Strings	858-229-2655	allfourstringssandiego@gmail.com
Allegro Enterprises (La Mesa)	619-698-5519	(phone only, name is Ralph Schatz)
B&H Music Store (Escondido)	760-480-1511	escondidomusicstore.com
Bertrand's Music (Rancho Peñasquitos)	858-780-1812	bertrandsmusic.com
Classic Bows Violin Shop (City Heights)	619-282-2010	classicbows.com
Hammond Ashley Violin Shop (Sorrento Valley)	858-623-0036	hammondashley.com
La Jolla Music	858-277-7397	lajollamusic.com
Music Central (Mira Mesa)	858-578-2411	musiccentralsd.com
Nick Rail Music (Sabre Springs)	858-560-1434	nickrailmusic.com
Ozzie's Music (Poway)	858-748-4721	ozziesmusic.com
San Diego Music (Tierrasanta)	858-279-2263	
The Windsmith (North Park)	619-220-8984	thewindsmith.com

Please note: this alphabetical list includes stores within reasonable driving distance of Mira Mesa and is complete to the best of my knowledge; it is in no way meant as an endorsement or recommendation of any particular store. If you are aware of other music stores in our region, please forward the store information to me, and I will update this Handbook with the new information.

INSTRUMENTS – continued

Suggested brand names of string instruments:

Scherl & Roth	Florence	Franz Hoffman
Hammond Ashley	Klaus Mueller	Von Imm Strings

String Instrument Sharing

DUE TO COVID RESTRICTIONS, INSTRUMENT SHARING SHALL BE AVOIDED

The below information remains in this Handbook for future reference, when sharing is safe and necessary.

Challenger Middle School has a number of instruments available for student loan. Unfortunately, these are very few and certainly not enough for every student in the program. In the case of a larger instrument, such as a string bass or cello, those numbers are slim. With large orchestra classes, it sometimes becomes necessary to share these instruments between students. So long as each student treats the shared instrument carefully and properly, as if it was their own, most problems can be avoided.

1. Bows are to be loosened at the end of each playing session
2. Rosin is to be wiped off the strings and the body of the instrument, also after each playing session
3. Instrument is to be placed in case (except basses and cellos) and placed on storage racks

Maintenance of Instruments

All music students are required to maintain their instrument in proper working order, regardless of ownership.

Since most problems with instruments occur through accident, misuse, or neglect, *it cannot be stressed enough the importance of respecting and maintaining one's instrument.* If the student will take the minimum time and care required of the instrument on a daily basis, most problems can be avoided almost indefinitely. Instruments are not toys—they are delicate and sensitive devices.

Repairs

Even with the best of intentions, accidents do occur at times. In the case of a School-District-owned instrument, the school district will repair it at no cost to the student, at the discretion of the Director: if the damage is believed to have occurred through abuse, neglect, or misconduct on the part of the student, the student will be charged for repair or replacement of the instrument. Students who rent or own their own instruments must make every effort to have their damaged instrument repaired as soon as a problem is identified. If the instrument will be unable to be used for any period of time, an email or written notification from the family will be required to excuse the student. Often, music stores will provide a “loaner” while the instrument is being repaired- be sure to inquire about this!

INSTRUMENTS – continued

Recommended Accessories

The following accessories are recommended for the student to have daily:

1. **Reusable Water Bottle** (to fill up during passing period and avoid needing to leave rehearsal)
2. Rosin: be sure to obtain the specific [dark] rosin for violin, viola, cello, or bass [“Pops” suggested]
3. Soft cloth for removing rosin after playing
4. Extra set of strings
5. Shoulder rest for violins and violas: Everest, Kun, BonMusica, Resonans, brands suggested
6. Rockstop for cellos and basses (or endpin anchor for cellos)
7. Tuner, Metronome, or combination thereof
8. Instrument-specific stand (for home use)
9. Music Stand for Home Practice and Performance

To assist the student in developing their musicianship outside of the classroom, it is highly recommended that the student acquires a music stand for home. This will aid in developing tone and technique while reinforcing good posture and correct instrument position. Inexpensive foldable music stands are available in a variety of colors and styles from any of the local music stores listed on page 7, and Challenger Middle School can provide these on loan, free of charge, as well as a tuner/metronome.

Strings

Strings do not last forever: expect to replace the whole set at least once per year. As well, save and label the older strings; a string may unexpectedly break at any time, thus it is recommended to always carry both an extra set of new strings, as well as those older strings, for use in such an emergency. Challenger Middle School will provide individual strings upon request; installation of strings may be delayed until after school, so as to not interrupt instruction for the remainder of the class.

The following brands of strings are recommended for violin, viola, cello, and string bass:

Thomastik Dominant; D’addario Prelude; D’addario Helicore, Larsen, Bel Canto

Bows

Bows that come with student-level instruments are usually minimally-adequate for young string musicians. Although there is no such thing as a “magic” bow, or any other piece of equipment for that matter, substantial improvement in tone quality, ease of playing, and general control of the instrument may be realized in a relatively short amount of time by simply replacing this small but often inferior part. Although it is not required, it is nonetheless highly recommended if possible. Intermediate or Advanced players should not hesitate to go into a music store and request to test several prospective types of bows before making a choice; this is an accepted practice at reputable establishments. Furthermore, if the student has a private lesson instructor, their suggestions will be very helpful.

SEATING

Seating arrangements in any class at Challenger Middle School are entirely at the discretion of the instructor; this is true as well for musical ensemble classes. Many factors influence the decision of the Director with regard to placement of students within the ensemble, including:

1. Type of ensemble
2. Level of ensemble
3. Instrumentation within ensemble
4. Individual ability, attitude, maturity, etc.

It is entirely possible that the most-skilled student in a given section may not be placed in the “First Chair” position; in fact, the Director sometimes rotates seats and part assignments between pieces to give more students different opportunities, and sometimes the Director seats together students of differing levels, so the more-experienced student can model for and otherwise assist the development of the less-experienced student.

Any student who thinks that they have been placed incorrectly, or has improved to a degree which warrants recognition by "moving up" in the section, should arrange to speak with the Director about it.

Remember: this is MUSIC, NOT SPORTS. There are no bench-warmers or substitutes or first-strings or second-strings and so on. EVERY student, at EVERY moment, contributes toward the success of the ensemble. It's about the MUSIC!

SCHEDULED PERFORMANCES

It has been my experience, as both a professional musician and educator, that the greater the frequency of performing in front of an audience, the more confidence and poise is gained by the performer. All music students are encouraged to perform in public as often as possible, in and out of school, and in a variety of situations. Such performance opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Elementary School Fall Festivals
- Fall Concerts
- Mira Mesa High School 8th Grade Nights
- Student vs. Staff Athletic Pep Band Performances
- Winter Concerts
- Chamber Ensemble Performance Opportunities
- Honor Orchestras
- Upcoming 5th Graders Presentations
- Pre-Festival Concerts
- Festival Performances
- Performance Trips
- Area Concerts
- Pops Concerts
- 8th Grade Promotion Ceremony Performance

All events for the year are or will soon be posted on the calendar on the school website, as well as on my website. An “Important Dates” document will be shared with students, and a hard copy of that list will be provided upon request.

CONCERT DRESS (Recommended)

The most important aspect of a performance is that all performers are present and participating. Uniform concert dress inspires the performer to focus and perform at a higher level, and also allows the audience to focus on the music, rather than the appearance of the ensemble. For those reasons, it is recommended that each student attend performances in concert attire as outlined below. However, again, the most important aspect of a performance is that all performers are present, whether or not they are in concert attire. The recommended attire for each student is as follows:

- Black dress pants
- White long-sleeve dress shirt or blouse
- Black dress shoes (no heels, no open toes)
- Black socks
- Back bow tie (if the dress shirt works for bow ties)
- No jeans, t-shirts, or athletic shoes

PRIVATE LESSONS

When I was in grade school, my family and school music teachers gave me my start on my instrument, but my private teachers gave me the real "edge" on my technical and professional development, which I then brought back to my middle and high school ensembles, to help elevate the level of our group musicianship. Private lessons involve one-on-one instrument-specific instruction in typically weekly hour or half-hour blocks, often at local music stores. The instructor is usually a local professional performer on their particular instrument. Many local music stores employ a staff of private lesson instructors, and many more individual instructors can be found through a basic online search of the San Diego area.

Please note that private lessons are NOT a requirement of participation in music ensembles at Challenger; their mention is only meant to create awareness of the potential benefits to our student musicians and families.

GRADES

Every teacher at Challenger wants every student to meet or exceed the standards in their respective content area, and every teacher at Challenger goes above and beyond to work with students in their respective areas of need. Whereas in other classes, the progress and achievement of a student rarely affects any other student in a given class, in music ensembles, the success of the ensemble is dependent upon the success of each student.

The ideal in Music Class is that every student achieves at or above the standard of musical excellence, both individually and when contributing toward the success of the ensemble. Assessments are designed by ability level to gauge the musical progress of each student, feedback from which will inform the student of their progress, along with applicable areas for improvement. For any student achieving below the standard, I shall make extra efforts to provide additional assistance for that student, through after-school direct instruction, or peer tutoring, or other means or methods. I shall also be in contact with families if issues persist, and Counseling and Administration may become involved in assisting the student. As well, that student will be offered additional opportunities to re-assess, demonstrating their growth and achievement of the standards.

Thus, it is my hope that grades for Music Class shall not be an issue, or shall be an issue easily addressed to help each and every student meet or exceed the standards. Families will likely hear from me before any issues arise, and families are always welcome to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.