



SHOW CHOIR HANDBOOK

2025 - 2026



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About Our Program

Russell Middle School is proud to offer two competitive show choirs: **Leaders of the Pack** (varsity) and **Subwoofers** (JV). Each ensemble generally has about 55-65 performers each and will work together throughout the year to put on a 10-15 minute show with high-energy singing and choreography. These ensembles are accompanied by our **Show Band (aka Wolfbeat)**, who provide us with the instrumental backing music for our shows. The show band is usually comprised of 2-3 trumpets, 2-3 trombones, 2-3 saxophones, 1-2 keyboards, guitar, bass, drums, percussion, and violin.

The RMS Show Choirs (RMSSC) will perform several times each year, not only in community performances, but at competitions throughout “show choir season” (January-early March). We begin with our debut night at Millard West in December, then compete at five competitions across the metro area (usually with one or two out of town) starting in early January, and end back at Millard West with the show choir finale at the beginning of March.

Mr. Firkins will generally communicate through three channels: weekly newsletters to email (general info and details), direct emails (important updates), and the Remind app (day-of competition or rehearsal updates). Please also join our Facebook group (search Russell Middle School Show Choir and request to join)- our social media chair will post many reminders and it's a great place to connect with our community with questions or updates. Please also bookmark the show choir website for quick access to the handbook, calendars, and other important links. sites.google.com/mpsomaha.org/rmssc

Show choir is a demanding but rewarding activity that is very athletic in nature. Students will work hard individually and as a team to put together their shows and accomplish their goals throughout the season. Instilling work-ethic, building a strong community, and giving kids a safe environment to explore and perform are the core values of our program. More than anything, we want to give our students something meaningful to be passionate about- not just the shows they create on stage, but the relationships they create with their team members.

Drew Firkins, head director



Kiley Meleán, assistant director



Drew Higgins, band director



Audition Process

Auditions will take place **August 20th-22nd**, all after school. You will sign up for a 10 minute slot on **just one** of these days via sign-up-genius (the link will be posted on the show choir website and the Google Classroom). Auditions will take place in front of a small panel of teachers, and students will audition in groups of four– you can pick your group, or sign up alone and wait for others to join your group– nobody will need to audition alone. The audition results will be posted **Saturday, August 23rd, at 4:00pm** on the show choir website and Google Classroom.

We are also hosting audition help clinics after school in the choir room to assist students with preparing for their auditions. These are all optional help sessions and will last until 4:15pm each day and will take place on **Monday 8/18** and **Tuesday 8/19**. We will teach the dance and also practice “My Country Tis Of Thee”.

Auditions will include:

1. Singing portion - “My Country Tis of Thee” (students will sing alone with piano)
2. Dancing portion - TBA (students will dance with their group to the track)
(learning/practice videos for both will be posted on Classroom)

Once you have gone through this packet with an adult, you both need to go onto the show choir website or Google Classroom and electronically sign the audition form.

Show Band/Crew

Show band members are generally selected by invitation, but if you are interested, please reach out to Mr. Firkins directly to ask him about a spot in show band. The show bands are generally comprised of jazz band/chamber orchestra members, or advanced musicians who take lessons on their instrument. Any students interested in being a part of stage crew should fill out the **Crew Application** in Classroom. We are always looking for problem-solving, independent, and self-activating crew members, so please apply if you feel like you would be a good fit. The last day to fill out the application is **Friday, August 22nd**.

JOIN THE AUDITIONS GOOGLE CLASSROOM: o73q7oyf

How to Prepare For Your Audition

- ☐ Join the Google Classroom (use code **o73q7oyf**)
- ☐ Sign up for an audition time
- ☐ Fill out your audition form with a parent
- ☐ Attend the audition help clinics (optional)
- ☐ Practice and memorize “My Country Tis of Thee” using practice tracks
- ☐ Practice and memorize the audition dance using tutorial videos
- ☐ Practice with a trusted friend or family member
- ☐ Read through the performer audition rubric and focus on those items
- ☐ Stay positive and be proud- especially if you are a first-time auditioner!
- ☐ Remember that everyone struggles with stage fright
- ☐ Ask Mr. Firkins if you have any questions or need a pep-talk ☺
- ☐ Get a good night's sleep and prepare well in advance to reduce stress

NOTE: In your group audition, you will sing by yourself (Mr. Firkins will play piano with you), and you will dance all together with your group members.

♪ Performer Audition Rubric ♪	
VOCALS	
1. Tone - 5 points	Do you sound mature and confident? Are you opening your mouth and singing with tall vowels and plenty of air?
2. Intonation - 5 points	Are you singing the right notes? Are you right on all of your notes?
3. Projection - 5 points	Can we hear you? Can we understand what you are singing?
CHOREOGRAPHY	
4. Accuracy - 5 points	Are you doing the right moves? Are you doing your moves at the right time/not rushing the choreography?
5. Energy - 5 points	Are you putting power into your moves? Do all of your moves have a clear beginning and end?
6. Performance - 5 points	Are you fun and exciting to watch? Are you using your face and your eyebrows?

Rehearsal Commitments

Regular Rehearsal Breakdown		
Subwoofers	Leaders of the Pack	Show Band
<u>Aug 25 to Mar 2</u> <i>Mondays, 3:15-5:00</i>	<u>Aug 29 to Sep 12</u> <i>Fridays, 3:15-6:00</i> <u>Sep 15 to Mar 2</u> <i>Mondays, 5:30-8:30</i> S/A Sectional (girls) <i>Tuesdays, 3:15-3:45</i> T/B Sectional (boys) <i>Wednesdays, 3:15-3:45</i>	<u>Aug 29 to Nov 21</u> <i>Fridays, 3:15-5:00</i> <u>Dec 1 to Mar 2</u> <i>Mondays, 4:30-5:30</i>
<p>→ Communicate via email if you need to miss a rehearsal for any reason.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students need to send an email to Mr. Firkins PRIOR to any absences from rehearsal when they will be missing rehearsal and their reason for missing rehearsal. ◆ 4 absences without notification will result in immediate dismissal from show choir. ◆ It is always better to over-communicate than to under-communicate. 		

Choreography Rehearsals	
Subwoofers	Leaders of the Pack
→ Mon, Sep 8 3:00-6:00pm → Tues, Sep 9 3:00-6:00pm → Mon, Sep 15 3:00-6:00pm → Mon, Sep 29 3:00-6:00pm → Tues, Sep 30 3:00-6:00pm → Mon, Oct 6 3:00-6:00pm → Tues, Oct 14 3:00-6:00pm → Mon, Nov 24 3:00-6:00pm	→ Fri, Sep 19 3:00-8:30pm → Sat, Sep 20 12:00-8:30pm → Sun, Sep 21 2:00-6:00pm → Mon, Oct 20 3:00-8:30pm → Tues, Oct 21 3:00-8:30pm → Fri, Oct 24 3:00-8:30pm → Sat, Oct 25 12:00-8:30pm → Mon, Oct 27 3:00-8:30pm → Tues, Oct 28 3:00-8:30pm → Fri, Nov 14 3:00-8:30pm → Sat, Nov 15 12:00-8:30pm
<p>→ Choreography rehearsals (AKA choreo) are more important than a regular rehearsal, since we bring in our choreographer to teach the material for the show. Since we have limited time with our choreographer, attendance is especially important at these dates.</p> <p>→ Dates and times are subject to change. Any calendar changes will be communicated via email ASAP.</p>	

Dress Rehearsals & Performance Dates

Date	Event	Time	Details
12/5/25	Elementary Tour (Leaders Only)	All day	Willowdale, Ackerman, Rohwer
12/14/25-12/15/25	Dress Rehearsal	TBD	TBD
12/19/25	Debut Night	7:30-8:30pm	Home Performance - MWHS
1/10/26	Winter Camp (Dress Rehearsal 2)	Subwoofers: 10am-2:30pm Band/Crew: 12:30-2:30pm Leaders: 2:00-8:30pm Band/Crew: 6:30-8:30pm	RMS
1/16/26	Primetime Competition	After school-late evening**	Gretna HS
1/23/26	Echoes of the East Competition	After school-late evening**	Gretna East HS
1/30/26	Mid-Iowa SC Championships	After school-late evening**	Ankeny Centennial HS (IA)
2/13/26	Crystal Cup Competition	After school-late evening**	Elkhorn South HS
2/27/26	Standing O! Competition	After school-late evening**	O'Gorman HS (SD)
TBD	Finale Night	7:30-8:30pm	TBD

→ **Please ensure that you can be at all the performances before you audition.**

- ◆ If you have potential conflicts with a choreography, dress rehearsal, or performance date, please email Mr. Firkins those conflicts before auditions, or as soon as possible. We are usually able to work with conflicts with other activities. We always have students involved in dance, cheer, basketball, football, gymnastics, other musical/performance ensembles, etc. and we will make a plan to work out any conflicts as long as they are communicated far in advance.

- Specific competition performance times are often not communicated until 2-3 weeks before the competition. These will be communicated as soon as we receive them from the host school.

You can access, download, and subscribe to the full calendar on the show choir website:
sites.google.com/mpsomaha.org/rmssc

Performance Eligibility

The show choir program will follow the RMS "Good Standing Policy" to determine performance eligibility based on academic standing. Those expectations are as follows:

- ☐ Earning a passing grade (4 or above) in all classes during the semester in which the event is scheduled.
- ☐ No major behavior referrals during the two weeks prior to the event.

Individual student plans/contracts may be created based on student academic, attendance, and behavioral support needs that could include additional restrictions for participation in special events and activities. Mr. Firkins will pull grades for all students the week of every competition/performance. Failing students will not travel or perform with the group, but are still expected to attend all rehearsals while they work towards academic eligibility.

Code of Conduct

RMS Show Choir participants are SAFE, RESPECTFUL, and RESPONSIBLE.

SAFE:

- Follow all school rules.
- Abstain from vaping/drug/alcohol use and any other illegal activities.
- Act school-appropriately at competitions, performances, and trips.
- Help set up and tear down risers in a calm and mature manner.
- Always communicate with your adult(s) at home.

RESPECTFUL:

- Treat our rehearsal spaces like your home. We do NOT ever throw objects, run and scream in rehearsal spaces, break/take objects from others, or leave trash/messes uncleaned. When you have an emergency, don't try to hide it. **Ask for help.**
- Never have phones out in rehearsal, and never ever in dressing rooms/restrooms where others may be changing.
- Take good care of our rehearsal materials and costumes.
- Show respect to all directors, choreographers, teammates, **and performers from other schools** through your words and actions. You may not always like everybody on your team, but we all treat each other with respect regardless.
- Offer solutions not complaints. When we have problems with people, we are able to talk out our problems in a respectful, solution-minded manner, and to de-escalate issues.

RESPONSIBLE:

- Be on time to all rehearsals. Early is on time. On time is late.
- Make sure you always have your music and a water bottle.
- Be at all choreography sessions and performances.
- Manage your academics and time responsibly.
 - ◆ If you need extra help with a class, or need to retake a test, every effort needs to be made to do this around our rehearsal schedule.
- Communicate early via email if you need to miss a rehearsal.

Violations of the show choir handbook may result in dismissal from the show choir program, at the discretion of Mr. Firkins and RMS administration.

Your personal attitude, effort, and rehearsal etiquette is the greatest determinant of your success in the show choir program.

Costuming and Fees

The show choir participation fee will be as follows:

- Leaders of the Pack (varsity show choir): \$250
- Subwoofers (j.v. show choir): \$200
- Show Band & Crew: \$50
- ◆ *Students in both a show choir and show band/crew do not need to pay the extra band fee.*

The participation fee helps to cover the operating costs of our program, including:

- Weekly vocal and dance instruction
- Costumes and alterations
- Professional choreographers and vocal coaches
- Professional musical arrangements
- Show choir rehearsal t-shirt
- Registration/student entry for five show choir competitions
- Props and set pieces
- Equipment for rehearsals, competitions, and performances

While the show choir fee covers most of the family expenses of the participation in the program, it is important to be aware that expenses will be incurred during the season, such as admission for families to attend competitions, concessions and souvenirs at competitions, bonding activities, undergarments and accessories for costumes (and potential replacements if a student loses them), make-up and hair products, personal care items, and other show choir merchandise. These expenses are not incurred all at once, but can arise during the season. **All students are responsible for purchasing their own shoes this year (around \$30 purchase). Every other costume piece is supplied by the program, and you will keep everything at the end of the season.**

Students will be responsible for their fee as soon as they are selected for show choir. Costumes are ordered almost immediately when students are assigned to a group. In the case of leaving the program for any reason, 75% will be refunded if the student leaves before September 1st. If a student leaves the program for any reason after this date, a refund cannot be issued. Show choir fees may be paid either through ParentVue or cash/check in the main office. The deadline for payment of the show choir fee is September 15th. If the fee is not paid in full by this date and you do not have a payment plan agreed upon with the RMS Office, you will not be able to participate until the fee is resolved. If show choir is a financial hardship for your family, please contact our bookkeeper Connie Novacek at cjnovacek@mpsomaha.org. There are options to help, and your situation will be kept confidential.

The quality of our programming is something that truly sets us apart! This quality of instruction and performance is not possible without the fees to allow us to hire amazing staff and design/execute incredible shows. Thank you for your support and belief in our program– the power of music to help our kids learn, grow, and become better humans cannot be understated.

FAQs

“Can we be involved in multiple activities/sports in addition to show choir?”

Yes! Middle school is the time to try new things and figure out what you enjoy being a part of. Every year, we have kids who are also in dance, gymnastics, cross country/track, football, soccer, jazz band, chamber orchestra, theatre, and the list goes on! At RMS, your teachers and coaches will work together to make a plan if you are involved in conflicting activities. You will just want to spend time looking at your schedule to ensure you are ready for the extra time commitment.

“What if I’m interested in show choir, but am really worried about the dancing?”

About 95% of students come to us with NO DANCE EXPERIENCE! We have amazing instructors and choreographers who will help build the skills from scratch that you need to be confident and successful. Show choir dance is very modern and fun, and ANYONE can become a great dancer in this program if they are willing to put in the work!

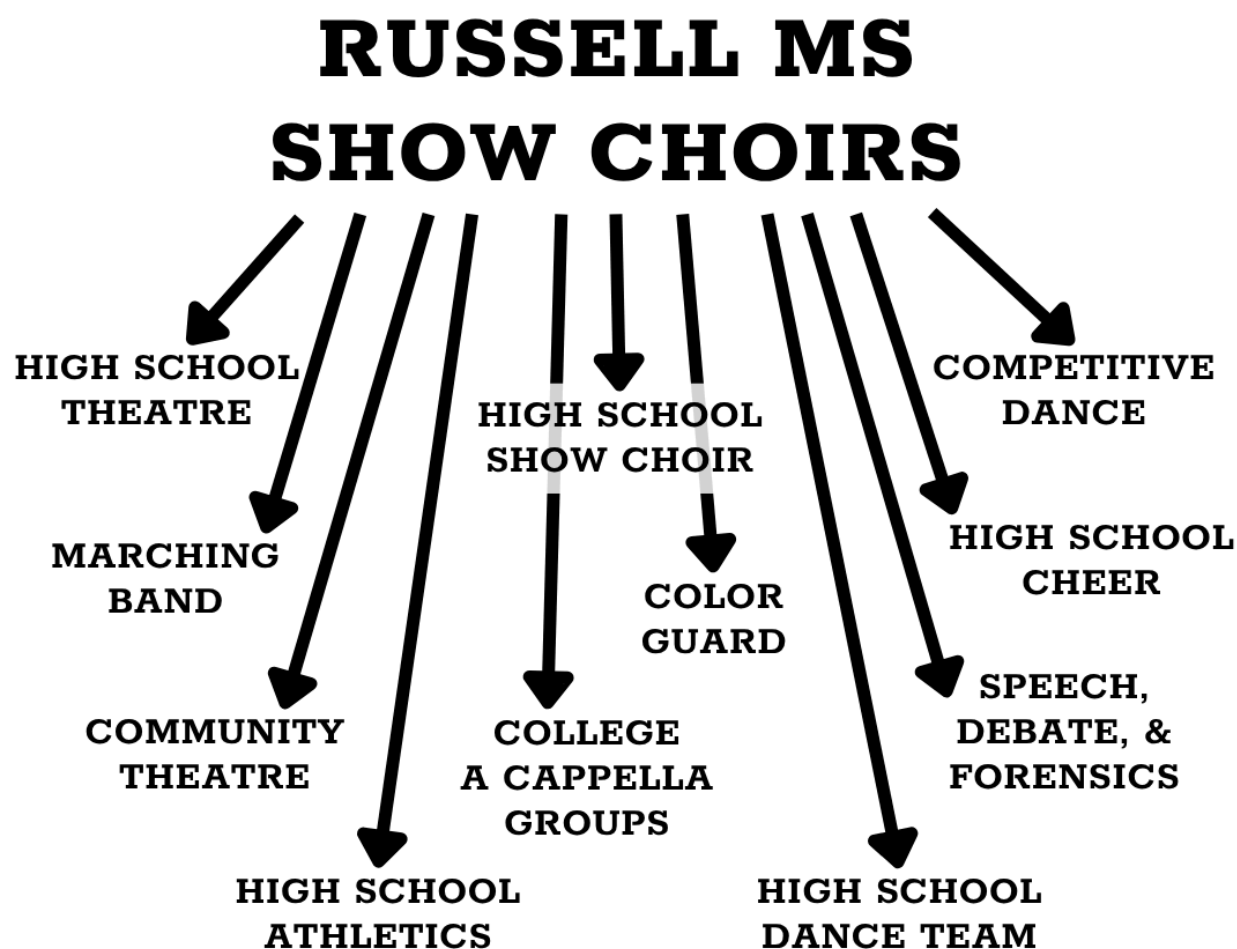
“I think show choir would be fun but I’m really scared to audition or perform.”

Everyone experiences or has experienced stage fright, even performers on Broadway, famous performers, and professional singers. Stage fright or performance anxiety is something that stops a lot of people from having the time of their lives on stage. Overcoming stage fright is something we get better at with practice, just like singing, dancing, sports, you name it. But, you will never get better at dealing with stage fright if you never try. So believe in yourself, take a deep breath, and GO FOR IT! *(And trust that Mr. Firkins and your team members have your back!)*

“What are the show choir competitions like?”

Competitions all take place on Friday nights and will generally have anywhere from 5-15 middle schools involved. Generally, they will have a varsity and JV division, but sometimes it is also one open division. Groups are looking to receive the highest scores in vocals, choreography, band, and general entertainment factor, all of which will combine to determine group scores and rankings. By nature, show choir judging can be very subjective– so while we are always striving to do the best we can in competition placements, the real value in competitions is learning from and supporting other groups, self-improvement, and pride in the quality shows that we are putting on stage.

Please reach out to Mr. Firkins (abfirkins@mpsomaha.org) if you have any questions about the show choir program or audition process. You won’t regret getting involved with show choir at RMS!



Show choir isn't the only path forward! We teach many more skills aside from just singing and dancing. RMS show choir students will improve their coordination, athleticism, leadership, problem-solving, and overall confidence, which will give them the skills they need to be successful in whatever they want to explore in high school and beyond. Past RMS show choir members have been involved with every single one of these activities and more!