Grisham MS Orchestra

Handbook

2025 - 2026

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Introduction

Round Rock ISD is proud to offer a comprehensive music program that includes string instruction for grades 6 – 12. GMS Orchestra is a vital segment of the music curriculum. Members of the Grisham Middle School Orchestras will work to exhibit the highest possible musical standards in the following areas:

1. Responsibility 2. Dependability 3. Dedication 4. Musical Excellence

It is the goal of the GMS Orchestras to promote a strong musical understanding, outstanding ensembles, a sense of community among the orchestra program, and a love for making music. To create such a program requires that each student accept certain responsibilities.

This handbook will outline the basic requirements for the Grisham Middle School Orchestras. **Please fill out and submit the First Day Form by August 15, 2025.** Paper copies of all forms and documents are available upon request.

Purpose

The Grisham Middle School Orchestra is a class that meets for one period each school day. The nature of this class requires the development of skills, concepts, and attitudes to be learned in class. These must, however, be demonstrated outside of class via many varied forms of rehearsals and performances. Along with your musical growth, we would expect to see development in the areas of leadership, self-discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and a deeper appreciation for the beauty and joy that music offers to all who partake in it.

The Role of the Student

The success of the GMS Orchestras depends on each of its members. We are a community and a team, and each student is a vital member and expected to try their personal best at everything we do. Students are also expected to maintain a positive attitude, mature conduct, good sportsmanship, and respect for fellow classmates, teachers, and equipment.

Classroom Expectations

1. Arrive promptly to each rehearsal, being respectful to your classmates and ensemble.
2. Candy, gum, food, and drink are not allowed in any area within the orchestra rehearsal space. A container of water is the only exception.
3. Speak or play only in appropriate scenarios and as directed.
4. Bring your instrument, bow, music binder, and pencil to class each day unless told otherwise by your director.
5. Be in your seat with supplies and ready to perform within one minute of the tardy bell.
6. Treat people and instruments with respect.

The Role of the Parent

Family support is integral to the success of not just your own student, but to the success of the program as a whole. In keeping with GMS's vision, we aim to create a successful program that is an important facet in the community. Some ways that parents can support the GMS Orchestras include:

- Help you child be present, on time, and organized in order to do their best at all functions.
- Help your child to practice daily (please see Practicing for more information).
- Help your child care for their instrument and see to repairs in a timely fashion.
- Be aware of scheduled performances and help your child to use a personal calendar. This can help anticipate potential scheduling problems. Log onto the website to see calendar updates and help your child keep their commitments to the GMS Orchestras.
- Attend performances, and applaud and recognize your child's achievements.
- Communicate with Ms. Hornbake should any difficulties arise.

Cell Phone Policy

Cell phones, Chromebooks, and other electronic devices should only be used in class as directed. They must be kept in their backpacks during class, unless instructed otherwise. Backpacks will be stored away from the orchestra set-up. *Students are responsible for their own personal electronic devices brought into the orchestra room, regardless of where they are kept.* If devices are found in students' pockets, cases, binders, stands, etc. during rehearsal, students will be asked to place the device on the piano. Repeated offenses will result in disciplinary consequences with official write-ups.

Grisham Middle School Orchestra Supply List

View the supply list for each ensemble and instrument here.

Orchestra Uniform

Students are responsible for purchasing all uniform items. If you have any questions about the uniform items, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Hornbake.

FORMAL CONCERT DRESS (for all evening concerts and Region Orchestra events)
Shirt: Long sleeved black dress shirt, such as a button-up or nice sweater **Bottoms:** Long black dress pants or skirt **Dresses:** Long black dresses with at least ¾ length sleeves may be worn instead **Shoes:** Black dress shoes with long black socks ● Jeans, even if black, are *never* appropriate formal concert dress. ● Skirts and dresses should fall below the knee, and leggings may only be worn underneath an appropriate skirt or dress. ● All shirts that can be tucked in should be done so. **Please view this document for *suggestions* on formal concert wear. You do NOT have to purchase from those links, but they are available if you need them.**
INFORMAL CONCERT DRESS (not used for evening concerts)
Current Grisham Orchestra T-shirt with nice blue jeans (no rips or tears) and tennis shoes.

Attendance

An orchestra performs at its optimum with all members present. Therefore, students are required to participate in all rehearsals, sectionals, and performances unless excused by the director. An orchestra calendar accompanies this handbook, and it should be studied closely so as to avoid possible conflicts. All rehearsals will be announced as far in advance as possible. Sectionals, extra rehearsals, concerts, contests, and UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluations are considered an extension of the classroom instruction and are considered **curricular** by the district.

Students who enroll in other school activities such as athletics, choir, drama, etc., need to plan ahead to avoid conflicts that cannot be resolved. The orchestra directors will work together with the other teachers, coaches, and directors of various activities to give each student every opportunity to be a part of other groups. **NON SCHOOL-SPONSORED activities, teams, and organizations must not conflict in any way with the practice or performance schedule of the orchestra. Good communication between teacher, student, and parents can prevent misunderstandings.**

Absence Policy: Concerts and Sectionals

Sectionals, orchestra rehearsals, concerts, and UIL Concert and Sight-reading Evaluations are considered an extension of the classroom instruction and therefore, co-curricular. In the event that a student is excused from a rehearsal, concert, or contest he/she will be permitted to submit a 45-minute recording of at-home practice time (in addition to the weekly required at-home practice). ***Every before or after school rehearsal and performance is graded.***

1. Written notices from parents are required for all absences. Verbal or written excuses from students are not accepted.
2. Advance notices are required for all prior commitments. A prior commitment is defined as an event already committed to before the Orchestra time schedule is announced. **Doctor, orthodontist, dental, eye, etc. appointments must be made with consideration to sectionals and performances. These appointments are considered routine and will not result in an excused absence unless your child is unexpectedly ill.**
3. In the case of illness and/or family emergency, the parents/guardians should send a written notice or email to the orchestra director as soon as they are aware that such a situation exists. If it is an emergency situation it may be impossible to get in touch with anyone. In this case, please follow up with a written note within four days after the fact. This is the only category where absences will be excused the same day or after the event.
4. Religious holidays or conflicts with individual religious beliefs are considered excused if the director is notified in writing by a parent before the scheduled date.
5. All absences in the above categories, verified by parent note, will be considered excused.
6. The following are examples of unexcused absences:
    - Non-school related commitments
    - Commitments accepted after a rehearsal or concert date is announced.
    - Homework. Please plan ahead. Good time-management is essential to success!
    - Transportation problems.
    - Forgetting instrument and/or music.
    - Forgetting about a rehearsal or concert.

Please communicate directly with Ms. Hornbake if there are individual or unusual circumstances that may be a problem. Unexcused absences and tardiness affects the morale of the entire orchestra. *Please note that unexcused absences for concerts and rehearsals can affect eligibility to attend non-mandatory Orchestra trips and social events.*

Grades

Nine weeks grades are based on the effort, knowledge, and responsibility of each student as follows:

- **Major Grades: Performances; Major Tests (40%)**
    - Regular playing tests will occur both “live” during class time and as recorded assignments in Schoology
    - All scheduled performances are graded in this category.
- **Minor Grades: Class Participation and Preparedness; Weekly practice reflections; Other assignments (60%)**
    - Goal-setting and reflections will be an ongoing part of the GMS Orchestra curriculum
    - Pop playing quizzes will be given periodically. These will be graded on the following scale:
        - 100 points: student demonstrates mastery of the content or skill
        - 80 points: student demonstrates a developing understanding of the content or skill
        - 60 points: student demonstrates little understanding of the content or skill
    - Student participation is graded weekly using the following rubric:

Orchestra _____ **WEEK OF:** _____

No.	Name	Monday					Tuesday					Wednesday					Thursday					Friday					Grade
		-S	-M	-Par	-G	-PH	-S	-M	-Par	-G	-PH	-S	-M	-Par	-G	-PH	-S	-M	-Par	-G	-PH	-S	-M	-Par	-G	-PH	
1		A	+CB	+TP			A	+CB	+TP			A	+CB	+TP			A	+CB	+TP			A	+CB	+TP			

S	Out of seat at bell or out of seat during class -4	**Par**	Participation/Talking -4	**CB**	Change in Behavior +4
M	Missing materials -4	**PH**	Phone out during rehearsal -4	**TP**	Team Player +4
G	Gum (or anything in mouth) -4	**A**	Absent		

        - Students will lose 4 points for each infraction, up to 20 points for the day
        - If a student receives 3 or more infractions in one day, they will receive a disciplinary consequence and parents will be notified
        - Students may gain back points by making a positive change in their behavior and/or demonstrating characteristics of a team player

Performance Eligibility

Students and parents should be aware that state law limits participation in any out-of-school activity to those receiving 70 or above in every class during the six weeks in which the event occurs. This law applies to Region Orchestra Auditions, Region Orchestra Clinic/Concert, the orchestra spring trip, and the Round Rock Solo and Ensemble Contest. The law does not apply to school concerts or the UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluation, as they are considered an extension of classroom activities.

Students can also become ineligible for performances or trips due to behavior. This can include behavior both in and out of the orchestra classroom. Any students who receive ISS or OSS in the 3 weeks prior to an event will be unable to participate. Further, students with recurring behavior issues will be unable to attend performances or trips, as communicated in advance by the director.

Practicing

Student success in orchestra depends greatly on the amount and quality of their practice sessions at home.

Practice Guidelines

In order to ensure successful, productive practicing at home, it is helpful to consider the following guidelines:

1. **Schedule:** Students and parents should work together to create a time each day when the student will practice. The minimum time that should be scheduled depends on your student's level. **It is expected that FYO students will practice 20 minutes per day, and that students in Philharmonic and Symphonic will practice 30-45 minutes per day.** Students are most successful when they have a set practice schedule upon which they are able to rely.
2. **Environment:** Practicing should be done away from any sort of distractions. Poor playing posture hurts students physically as well as musically, and students should use a music stand during practice. Choose a place that is comfortable and safe, but where you will be able to remain focused on your practicing.
3. **Feedback:** It is encouraged that parents take an active role in their child's learning! Offer them words of encouragement. Ask them what they are practicing, to see their Practice Agenda, and to show you *how* they are practicing it. Ask them to perform for you! Learning to play an instrument is incredibly difficult and often frustrating. When you hear improvement, tell them. The best motivation comes from knowing that hard work has paid off.

Orchestra Placement

Yearly placement in each orchestra and occasional changes are based on the following criteria: Instrumentation needs and limitations; Eligibility status; Overall performance and consistent progress; Attendance at all orchestra functions; Attitude and behavior; Audition.

Instrument Information

All students are expected to acquire an instrument to participate in orchestra. It is highly recommended to rent an instrument from one of the following recommended local shops, who all deliver instruments to the school:

- Blackerby Violin Shop (call to order; view flier)
- Terra Nova ("Classic" level recommended)

If you are thinking of purchasing an instrument, please consult with Ms. Hornbake beforehand. I want to make sure you get the most for your money. Please avoid purchasing instruments from retailers such as eBay, Amazon, Craigslist, etc. These instruments tend to be difficult to play and will hinder students' development.

The following will be expected of all orchestra members:

1. Personal instruments (violins/violas) & binders should be placed in your storage area. After class, all instruments should be completely packed (end pins in and bows loosened) and stored in their assigned areas for safe-keeping.
2. All instruments are to be in good playing condition, including regular bow rehairs and string replacement. **Leaving your instrument at the repair shop is not a valid reason for lack of an instrument.** Most shops will provide a "loaner" violin while yours is being repaired. **Please do not attempt to repair the instrument yourself.** Instruments should not be put in repair without first being inspected by the director. Many times minor adjustments can be made by the director which may eliminate a trip to the repair shop
3. **All instruments kept in the orchestra room during the day MUST have the student's name clearly printed on the outside of the case.**

Students are to purchase replacement strings immediately following a string breaking. In an emergency, strings may be borrowed from school but must be replaced within 24 hours after receiving one.

Instrument Usage Fee and Fundraising

School-owned Instruments

All students using Round Rock ISD owned instruments must pay a $50 (home rental) or $25 (shared, on campus use only) maintenance fee and fill out the appropriate form. Full payment is due on August 29, 2025. You can pay this fee online (preferred) or send cash/check. Checks must be made out to "RRISD Fine Arts." This fee is minimal but necessary for the upkeep of instruments. If you need help accessing the instrument brand, model, and serial numbers, please contact Ms. Hornbake.

Fundraising

We will have fundraising events during the year. Money made through our fundraising activities will go toward purchase of sheet music, music supplies, guest clinicians and sectional coaches, and socials. We need everyone's help! A student may elect not to participate in fundraising. Donations are accepted.

Festivals, Competitions, and Other Performance Opportunities

University Interscholastic League Orchestra Evaluation

Three musical selections are prepared through concentrated work in class, extra rehearsals, and a Pre-UIL concert. In addition, each orchestra is required to "sight-read" a composition. Both performances are rated on a scale of "I" to "V", with "I" being the highest rating. Trophies are awarded to orchestras receiving the "I" rating in either concert or sight-reading, with a Sweepstakes trophy awarded for a rating of "I" in both areas.

All-Region Junior High School Orchestras

Texas Music Educators Association sponsors this competition, which occurs on a Friday and Saturday in October. Participation is optional. Audition music is handed out to interested students at the beginning of the school year. Students pay their own $15 entry fee. GMS students compete against string players from all over Region 26, which includes RRISD and the surrounding area. Those selected for membership in the Region 26 Orchestra participate in a clinic/concert in November/December and receive a patch.

Round Rock ISD Solo and Ensemble Contest

This optional event, which will be held in April, allows students to display their individual talents. All students are strongly encouraged to enter. They must pay their own entry fee. Preparation should begin at least a month before the event. Students can elect to play a solo (with piano accompaniment) or an ensemble (small group). Either the private teacher or the orchestra director will assist in the selection of appropriate music. A medal will be awarded for a first division rating (I). Students will also receive a written critique of their performance.

Spring Trip

To be determined. For Symphonic and Philharmonic students only.

Austin Youth Orchestra

Austin Youth Orchestra is an excellent group for all Austin area students interested in performing string and full orchestra music. Auditions are held at the beginning of the school year. Students meet one day a week on Monday evenings at

Austin High School in the Austin ISD. There is a fee per semester. Please visit their website for audition requirements at https://austinyouthorchestra.org/

Private Lessons

Private lessons are highly encouraged for all students. Private lessons are offered through the Round Rock ISD Private Lesson Program to instrumental music students that are interested and can be taken during the school day on campus. These teacher's dedication and service to our orchestra program is exemplary and worthy of your consideration. I highly recommend private lessons for all students. The Round Rock ISD private lesson rate starts at $23 per half hour to be paid directly to their teacher. **If you are interested in this program, please indicate so on the First Day Form.**

There are also instructors in the area that I would recommend that do not teach in the RRISD Fine Arts Program. These teachers may request you travel to their home if they do not travel to your home. All payments and lessons are scheduled between the child and the instructor. View a list of instructors on our website.

Although your child receives valuable instruction in our classes, private lessons provide:

1. Students with an opportunity to deal with the unique challenges of the particular instrument one-on-one with an expert teacher. This will allow them to progress at their own level at all times rather than at the rate of the class.
2. Review and reinforcement of class assignments when necessary.
3. Earlier exposure to techniques such as vibrato, advanced bowing, shifting, and intonation.
4. Expanded opportunities for advanced solo and ensemble instruction.
5. Greater confidence in their individual performance because of the individual attention private lessons provide.
6. Enhanced opportunity for success at individual competitions such as All-Region Orchestra and Solo & Ensemble Contest.
7. Heightened standard for group endeavors such as concerts and contests.

Private lessons are not required but are one of the best investments in a student's success!

Student Health History

Round Rock ISD requires that each student traveling off campus with the orchestra must have a current medical release form on file. Please be sure to complete the First Day Form, which includes the Parental Permission for Educational Trip: Release of All Claims and Consent to Medical Treatment online form. A paper copy can be requested.

Orchestra Contact Information

Grisham Middle School Orchestra
10805 School House Road
Austin, TX 78750
Emily_Hornbake@roundrockisd.org

Orchestra Websites

Website	How to get there	When you're looking for…
GMS Orchestra Website	https://sites.google.com/roundrockisd.org/grishamorchestra/home	Information about the orchestras, private lessons, and the calendar
Schoology	Via Classlink	Documents, handbook, forms due, assignments, etc.
Home Access Center	https://roundrockisd.org/hac/	The official gradebook

Grisham Middle School Orchestra Calendar 2025 - 2026