

Mason Intermediate School

**6th Grade
Orchestra Handbook**

2007-2008

Dear Students and Parents,

August, 2007

Welcome to the Mason City Schools Orchestra Program!! This orchestra program was started in 2002 with the vision and purpose of creating a school orchestra experience in which Mason students could participate. The vision not only included beginning a strings class for sixth graders, but also ensuring and guaranteeing an orchestra program for students to participate in every year thus after while attending the Mason City Schools.

As the sixth grade orchestra teacher, I feel privileged to have the opportunity to work in such a wonderful district with such enthusiastic students and supportive parents. Orchestra is a great organization and I am so glad that you chose to join. Not only will you learn to play your selected instrument, but you will also participate in concerts and other special events during the year. Furthermore, you will learn important life skills such as dedication, teamwork, and discipline. Although orchestra requires hard work and commitment, you will soon see that it is also very rewarding and a lot of fun too.

This handbook contains important information about participation in the orchestra program. Some items included are student expectations, the grading policy, concert information and dates, as well as helpful tips for parents. Furthermore, important information regarding instrument care and selection is also addressed.

I ask that your family read through this handbook, mark down the concert dates, and sign the statement of commitment on the last page. This page only should be returned to Miss Zemanek by Friday, August 31st. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I am excited to work with this very special group of students and look forward to a great school year!

Sincerely,

Erin K. Zemanek (zemaneke@mason.k12.oh.us)
(513) 459-2850 ext. 71490

Mission Statement

The orchestras of the Mason City School District are dedicated to continuous musical and personal development culminating in meaningful musical experiences for all orchestra members and our audiences.

We are committed to the development of a lifelong interest in and appreciation of music.

With patience, understanding, caring, and commitment, we will strive to develop in each of our orchestra members the ideals of leadership, personal responsibility, and pride so we may become the model of an enlightened community.

Objectives

- ❖ **Logical:** To provide each orchestra member a practical knowledge of music he/she can appreciate and participate in the aesthetic experience of listening to and creating music.
- ❖ **Technical:** To provide each orchestra member with the skills needed to participate fully in the orchestral experience.
- ❖ **Citizenship:** To help the student become a better citizen through membership in a community where each person's contribution is equal in importance.
- ❖ **Performance:** To provide rewarding performance and learning experiences for all members of the orchestra and audience.
- ❖ **Emotion:** To promote personal expression and creativity through the making of music.
- ❖ **Community:** To continually broaden the musical interests of each member and our community through the performance of fine, yet diverse, orchestral repertoire.
- ❖ **Teamwork:** To collaborate with our fellow musicians to experience the full spectrum of musical expression and to promote a friendly and rewarding environment.

Student Expectations

1. **Come to class prepared:** Bring your instrument, planner, music, pencil, and other necessary equipment to every class.
2. ***Respect:** Yourself, others, and property (this includes instruments)
3. **Try your best and be positive:** Be proud of what you are doing and show it!!
4. **Practice sessions at home are essential:** Your success depends on it!!
5. **Have fun!!** Being part of this orchestra is a special opportunity for you to learn a new instrument, make some wonderful friends, and to enjoy yourself!! ☺

*When students are well-behaved and strive to positively contribute to the group, the whole group benefits. Therefore, if behavior should ever become a problem, the school's discipline policy will be enforced.

Grading Policy

Students will receive an official grade for orchestra only on their trimester report cards. Most students will receive a "P" to indicate that they are progressing at a satisfactory level. Only students who consistently turn in practice charts and demonstrate competency in all levels of playing will receive a "+". If a student's performance in orchestra is an area of concern, a "-" will be given.

The following criteria will be used when determining class grades:

Class Participation: Includes readiness to begin on time, **bringing instrument, music, and pencil to every class, following stated student expectations, and concert attendance. Being unprepared for class does affect the students' potential for success.

Playing Evaluations: Students will be evaluated on their improvement and effort in the following areas: Music Production (tone and intonation) and Music Literacy (reading rhythms and notes correctly, as well as interpreting dynamic markings & music symbols).

Practice Charts: Practicing at home is vital to the students' success. Students are expected to practice a *minimum* of one hour per week to reinforce the concepts learned in class. Since repetition is important in learning a stringed instrument, 15 minutes, 4 times a week is much more beneficial than a marathon practice session. Each Friday, students are responsible for turning in a practice chart. Throughout the week, students are to record their practice times and acquire a parent signature. Practice charts serve as weekly homework grades.

****Please note:** Forgetting an instrument three or more times per trimester will lead to write-ups based on each team's individual policy. With that said, students are expected to attend every orchestra class, even if they forget their instruments.

6th Grade Orchestra Performance Dates for 2007-2008

We are excited to have such a large group of students participating in orchestra this year! However, due to the large numbers, we will be splitting into two groups for our performances. Each group performs the same music on the same evening, but at different times. Students only need to attend the concert on which they are performing.

Tuesday, December 18: Winter Orchestra Concert, Mason Middle School Auditorium

Concert #1, 6:30 PM: Teams Endeavor, Harmony, Excel, and Horizon

Concert #2, 7:30 PM: Teams Ingenuity, Inspiration, Patriots, Quest, and Success:

*Friday, February 15: Fine Arts Pizza Fun Night, Mason High School

Supports the Fine Arts in Mason (**optional* event)

Thursday, April 24: Spring Orchestra Concert, Mason Middle School Auditorium

Concert #1, 6:30 PM: Teams Endeavor, Harmony, Excel, and Horizon

Concert #2, 7:30 PM: Teams Ingenuity, Inspiration, Patriots, Quest, and Success

****Please Note:** In preparation for our concerts, we will be having one after school rehearsal in December and one in April. Information will be sent home and put on Edline as soon as possible. Attendance at the two school rehearsals is important and crucial to the success of our performance. Since the students perform with other teams in the concert, but meet at different times of the day, it is important that they get a chance to run through the program together before the concert.

Concert Attire

Concert dress gives an ensemble a more uniform and professional appearance. Students are required to provide their own concert dress. Please make note of this requirement so that it is available by the time of the first performance.

Ladies:

- White blouse with long sleeves and appropriate neckline
- Full length black skirt or dress slacks (Skirts must fall at least 2 inches below the knee!!)
- Black dress shoes (no gym shoes)

Gentlemen:

- White button-down long-sleeved dress shirt
- Black dress pants (no jeans)
- Black socks and dress shoes (no gym shoes)
- Tie is optional

Concert Attendance

Concert Attendance is mandatory. Since orchestra is a performing group and the concert is the equivalent of a major project, attendance at concerts is crucial. All members will be expected to play in all scheduled performances dressed in proper concert attire (see below). Students should arrive at the performance venue at least forty-five minutes before the concert starts in order to carefully tune the instruments and warm-up.

Required Performances for 2007-2008:

Winter Concert: Tuesday, December 18, 2007

Spring Concert: Thursday, April 24, 2008

An unexcused absence from a performance will lower the grade by one mark. Only in cases of extreme family emergency, personal illness, or unavoidable circumstances approved in advance by the director will a student be excused from a performance. If there is any concern over an unavoidable conflict, please notify the director as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made.

In the event of an *excused* absence, the student may receive the full performance grade by bringing in a letter two weeks in advance, or in emergencies, upon their return to school, signed by the student's parents explaining the reason for their absence. The director may call for further verification. In addition, the student must set-up a "make-up session" with the director where they will "perform" the pieces from the concert for the director. Just as a student who is sick the day of a major test is allowed to make up the test, so is a student who is absent the day of a performance.

The bottom line is that one of the main goals of playing an instrument in orchestra is to perform as a member of this group. Orchestra is a team effort and concerts are a culmination of this effort in which everyone's contribution is vitally important.

*****Other Noteworthy Performance Dates (attendance not required)***

Tuesday, October 18, 2007	High School Orchestra Concert
Thursday, December 13, 2007	8 th Grade Winter Concert
Wednesday, December 19, 2007	7 th Grade Winter Concert
Thursday, February 21, 2008	High School Orchestra Concert
Tuesday, May 13, 2008	8 th Grade Orchestra Concert
Wednesday, May 14, 2008	7 th Grade Orchestra Concert
Thursday, May 15, 2008	High School Orchestra Concert

** These concerts start at 7:00 p.m. All concerts are in the MMS Auditorium, except for MHS Orchestra concerts which are at the High School Auditorium.

Necessary Equipment for Orchestra

The following is a list of equipment that will be necessary for Orchestra Class. Some of the equipment listed may come with a rental package:

Instrument, Bow, & Case	Name Tag (for your case)
Cleaning Cloth	Essential Elements 2000 Book 1
Rosin	Pencil
Shoulder Rest (violins & violas)	Music Stand (to be kept at home)
Endpin Rest (cellos & basses)	

A Word About Private Lessons...

Private lessons are not required, but can be extremely beneficial to the student. Lessons provide individual “one on one” attention that is not available in a classroom setting. Private lessons are great not only for students who are struggling with certain skills, but also for the advanced students who are need of extra challenges. The pace of learning can be set by the private lesson teacher to maximize the progress of each individual student. Please contact Miss Zemanek if you are interested in taking private lessons and she can refer you to some excellent teachers in the area.

Communication

Throughout the year, I will be sending home newsletters and sending out emails to make you aware of important information and upcoming events. In addition, I encourage you and your child to check Edline regularly. I will upload copies of handouts, blank practice charts, information on upcoming events, private teacher lists, and other important documents.

Furthermore, please check out www.masonorchestra.com for more comprehensive information on instrumental music here in Mason!

As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns throughout the year! I am more than happy to speak with you and offer assistance! ☺

Renting a Stringed Instrument

Renting your child's first instrument is an exciting and perhaps intimidating process. There are a few things you keep in mind when acquiring your first instrument.

Violins, violas, cellos, and basses come in different sizes and it is important to get the correct fit for your child. A teacher or a good string instrument shop can help you determine the right fit. It is very important that the instrument not be too big. An instrument that is too big can be very difficult to handle correctly, leading to lower success rates and a lack of interest.

Here are some other important considerations:

Instrument Quality:

The instrument should be set up properly with a correctly fitted bridge, 4 fine tuners, good quality steel strings, and ebony or boxwood fittings (fingerboard, tailpiece, and pegs). The pegs should turn easily, without slipping or sticking.

Bow Information:

The bow should be straight (looking down the length of the bow along the top) with a gradual curve through the middle. The button should turn easily. Fiberglass or carbon fiber bows are good for beginning students, and should be strung with real horsehair.

Case Essentials:

The case should fit the instrument, with latches that fasten well or zippers that work easily. The purpose of the case is to protect the instrument, but it is important to always handle the instrument with care. Avoid dropping the case, knocking the case against things, etc.

Care for Your Orchestra Instrument

THE BOW

- ❖ Always loosen the hair before putting the bow into the case
- ❖ Never tap the bow against any object (music stands, floor, other bows, etc.)—it may ruin the bow by causing cracks or breakage.
- ❖ Avoid touching the bow hair with your fingers. The oils from your fingers will harm the bow hair. It will make it hard to get a good, clear tone from the strings.
- ❖ Repair the bow once a year (every two years for young players). The work should be done by a professional repair person and will be free when needed if being rented.

THE INSTRUMENT

- ❖ Keep the instrument stored properly in its case when the instrument is not in use.
- ❖ Wipe the body of the instrument before putting in its case. This includes the rosin dust on the strings and bow stick. Use a soft, untreated cotton cloth for best results. Do NOT use furniture polish/cleaners as this damages the varnish.
- ❖ NEVER attempt to repair an instrument at home. Its glue and varnish are of a different quality than those available at a hardware store. Any home repair (especially of cracks or varnish touch-ups) can result in destroying the instrument's value and tone quality permanently.
- ❖ NEVER leave an instrument unattended in a parked car. Extreme heat or cold can ruin the instrument's varnish and lead to melted glue or cracks. Humidity can also affect an instrument. If it is too dry, an instrument can crack, too humid and the pegs will be difficult to turn. Available products on the market to control humidity are: Dampits & Humidguards.

Helpful Parent Guidelines & Tips

A student's interest and success in music depends a great deal on parental support and understanding. Here are some tips for you!

- ❖ Set aside a regular time and suitable place for practice. Despite how much your child may want to play their instrument, he/she is not developmentally ready to take on the task of structuring his/her own time and be efficient at it. Just because they like it, does not mean they will do it. You can help by establishing a regular practice time and helping your child stick to this schedule. Also, try to make sure that the location for practice is free from distractions and conducive to practice.
- ❖ Select a place to store the student's instrument in the home. This helps the student to remember to bring the instrument to school and shows that the instrument is important and special.
- ❖ Make sure that your child has his/her instrument at school on the proper days. This will either be Monday, Wednesday, Friday; or Tuesday, Thursday, Friday.
- ❖ Try to give little words of encouragement and praise. Statements such as, "That sounded a lot better that time," and "You're playing better in tune now," can have a big impact.
- ❖ Help the student understand that the more he/she practices now, the more fun they will have later. They may not want to practice once the "newness" wears off. Unfortunately, the result of this reduction in practice is that progress slows. Your musician may begin to fall behind and discouragement can develop because it is no fun not to be able to keep up with the class. With the proper encouragement, this cycle can be stopped and you child will enjoy playing again.
- ❖ Check with the teacher on a regular basis to monitor your child's progress. Also, communicate any problems that may occur in the home that will keep your student from progressing.
- ❖ Attend all concerts and never make fun of any strange sounds or squeaks that the students may make when playing.
- ❖ Learning to play a stringed instrument is a long process. It requires development of physical coordination, manual dexterity, ear training, and a host of other things to become an accomplished performer. Do not let this scare you, but know that creating beautiful music will not happen overnight. Your child is definitely up to the task, but they will need your help to get through the rough times. This may be your child's first experience with delayed gratification, but in the end, nothing will be able to compare with the satisfaction your child will gain by being a part of the school orchestra!

Statement of Commitment

I have read this handbook and agree to abide by all policies and procedures stated herein. I will commit to giving my very best effort both for my own personal satisfaction and enjoyment and for the Mason Intermediate Orchestra.

Student Signature

Date

My child has my permission to participate in Mason Intermediate's Orchestra Program. I understand that a year long commitment is strongly advised and that the class will involve two evening concerts. I have read this handbook and agree to support and abide by all policies and procedures stated herein. I understand that I will need to provide an instrument for the class.

Parent Signature

Date

For Director's Information:

Please fill out completely and print clearly. ☺

Student Name: _____

Instrument: _____

Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Relation: _____

Daytime Phone Number: _____ Evening Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Relation: _____

Daytime Phone Number: _____ Evening Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

To Parents:

Would you be interested in helping at any concerts, rehearsals, or special events during the year? Yes No

If yes, when would be a good time to reach you? _____

RETURN THIS FORM TO MISS ZEMANEK BY FRIDAY, August 31th!!!

Thank You!! I am looking forward to a *great* year!! ☺