

A Letter from Mrs. Persin, Orchestra Director

Dear Students and Parents,

Welcome to the McKeesport Area High School Orchestra Program! Through your participation in this program, you will not only advance your skills of playing a string instrument, but you will also work individually and as a team with other musicians to experience music preparation and performance.

There is one orchestra at McKeesport Area High School comprised of all string students in ninth through twelfth grade. Students will have orchestra one period a day. In addition to playing as a string orchestra, members of the orchestra have the opportunity to participate in other musical activities, including small ensembles, symphonic or chamber orchestra, and musical pit. This will give students from various musical ensembles the opportunity to work together to make music.

Be sure to read the handbook thoroughly to learn about the orchestra program. Once familiarizing yourself with the handbook, please return the signed form that is in the back. This form should be turned into Mrs. Persin no later than **Friday, August 31st**. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sarah Persin
McKeesport Area High School, Orchestra Director
spersin@mckasd.com
(412) 664-3650 ex. 8303

Orchestra 2018-2019 School Year Calendar

Date	Event	Time
September 11	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
September 22	Homecoming/Alumni Dinner Performance	1pm/5pm
September 24	Honors Orchestra Auditions	After School
October 9	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
October 25	SRU Music Department Performance	9:00am
November 8	Veterans' Day Program	9:30am
November 13	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
November 17	White Oak Light-Up Night	Evening
November 17-18	Honors Orchestra	All Day
Nov. or Dec. TBA	Courthouse Performance	TBA
December TBA	Festival of Trees Performance	During School
December 5	PPG Place Performance (Chamber Strings)	During School
December 11	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
December 13	Holiday Concert	7pm
December 20	Courthouse Performance	During School

Enjoy your break!

January 8	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
January 10-12	Senior High District Orchestra (10-12)	All Day
February 12	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
February 21-23	Senior High Region Orchestra (10-12)	All Day
March 5	Music in Our Schools Concert	6pm
March 12	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
March 22-23	Junior High District Orchestra	All Day
April 3-6	PMEA All-States	
April 9	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
April 11-13	Spring Musical	
May 7	Booster Meeting	6:30pm
May 9	Senior Recognition Concert	7pm

Calendar subject to change. If there are any additions or adjustments, students and parents will be notified as soon as possible.

Expectations

Everybody wants our orchestra to be the best it can be. Therefore, it is important that every member of the orchestra contributes to the best of their ability by meeting and exceeding the ensemble expectations.

1. Students arrive to class **on time** with all materials.
2. Students are **attentive** and **responsive** throughout the rehearsal.
3. Students treat one another and the teacher with **respect**.
4. Students take **proper care of instruments and binders/music**.
5. Students **practice music** outside of class.
6. Students follow all rules and policies as outlined by the school district.

Grading Policy

Your orchestra grade will be weighed as a regular course. Grades will be based on the following aspects:

- **CLASS PARTICIPATION AND PREPARATION:** 10 pts/week
 - Arrive on time with instrument, music, and a pencil.
 - Actively engage in the rehearsal: be ready to play as soon as the teacher's arms go up, mark music, and ask/answer questions.
 - Practice individual parts outside of class to ensure we can *rehearse* as an ensemble rather than *practice* as sections.
- **PLAYING TESTS:** 15-20 pts
 - Students are required to complete playing tests throughout the year.
 - Rubrics will be distributed before the playing test occurs so that students know the expectations.
 - Some playing tests will be during class, and some will be recorded.
- **BINDER CHECKS:** 5 pts
 - Every student will be issued a binder with music at the beginning of the school year.
 - Binder checks will happen throughout the year for 10 points. Student must show their binder to Mrs. Persin.
 - *If you lose your binder, please see Mrs. Persin immediately for a new one.*
- **PERFORMANCES:** 30 pts
 - Concert attendance is **mandatory** – points will be deducted for missed concerts. Please place concert dates on your personal calendars in advance.
- **EXTRA CREDIT:** up to 10 pts
 - Extra credit will be offered throughout the school year in the form of a detailed music critique. Students are able to obtain up to an extra 10 points when these assignments are offered.

10 Simple Rules for Effective Practice

1. **Identify what you need to practice.** This could be a specific piece, a set of scales, or even something general like reaching high notes. Read through the piece and make sure you understand it. Review the piece with someone who plays the instrument you play well or a teacher.
2. **If possible, listen to the piece played by someone you know or a professional musician.** This will give you an idea of what the piece should sound like, what kind of feeling the piece gives, and how fast the piece should be.
3. **Don't jump right in to the piece you want to work on; warm up with a series of scales or other warm up exercises.** There are books you can buy for your instrument with warm ups and scales.
4. **Run through the piece once, pausing to circle your mistakes with a pencil.** If this is your first time encountering a piece, start at the beginning and work slowly forward. Be aware of your mistakes and go back and correct them.
5. **After getting more familiar with the piece, target the areas that need work.** Don't start at the beginning of the piece and start playing until you reach the problem spots, but begin with those areas. Then go back and play the whole piece again once you've fixed the difficult parts.
6. **Even if you think you can play the section faster, start slowly.** Build up the tempo while paying strict attention to pitch, tone, rhythm, dynamics, and phrasing. There's no use in practicing something the wrong way.
7. **Make sure you're focusing on your mistakes!** When one makes a mistake, his or her brain is constantly ahead of what he or she is actually doing. When a mistake is made, you must go back a few notes (or better yet, a whole measure) before your mistake and play it over and over again (ideally, you'd want to play it more than ten times correctly).
8. **Build up tempo until you are at "concert" tempo, or the tempo you would play if you were doing a concert.** Start by going a little faster than your original tempo, then more, then more, and then more. You may find that old problems open up or new ones occur. Fix them as before.
9. **At the end of your practice session, go back to the beginning of the piece and play it straight through just for enjoyment.** The difficult sections will play out better and will give you a sense of accomplishment.
10. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** Your section captains and Mrs. Persin will be happy to schedule a time to meet with you either during or after school for additional help. It is your responsibility to set this up, so don't waste any time! ☺

The difference between ordinary and *extraordinary* is practice!

The McKeesport High School Band, Orchestra, and Guard Boosters

The booster organization is comprised of parents and guardians who support the band, orchestra, and guard programs. The group offers financial and motivational support which help to maintain and improve the programs for all of the students.

Here are some ways the orchestra benefits from the organization:

- Fundraising – This is a huge task and is not possible without an organization like this. Orchestra members have the opportunity to purchase a jacket, attend mini trips throughout the year, and attend the music department trip every other year. Students can fundraise money to pay for all of these items and activities.
- Scholarship – Each year, senior members of the orchestra can apply for a scholarship awarded through the boosters. The student must meet all booster requirements.
- Random Purchases – Often times throughout the year, the orchestra relies on the boosters' general fund for small purchases, such as music.
- Summer String Camp – The orchestra summer day camp is funded by the boosters.
- Senior Recognition flowers are purchased by the boosters.
- Senior gifts are purchased by the boosters and awarded to seniors at the booster banquet.
- Beginning and End of Year parties – Orchestra students are invited to attend the beginning of the school year pool party and end of the school year banquet, both events sponsored by the boosters.

The boosters meet every second Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM in the high school library. Please consider attending a meeting to learn more information and about how you can contribute.

If you have any questions about the organization, please contact Mrs. Persin (412-664-3650 x8303, spersin@mckasd.net) and I can direct you to a member of our booster executive board.

Care of Instruments and Music

It is important to remember that most of the equipment being used belongs to the school district and should be treated with the utmost care. String instruments are very fragile and need to be taken care of to ensure their quality and endurance.

- Rosin should be wiped off the instrument at the end of every rehearsal or practice session.
- Cloth should cover violins and violas so the bow does not scratch the instrument.
- Secure instrument and properly shut case before gently returning the instrument to its proper storage spot.

Students using a school instrument are required to fill out an Instrument Use Form. The student is then responsible for the care of the instrument and should treat the instrument as though it belongs to them.

Each student will be assigned a music binder. The binder and music should be treated with just as much care as the instruments. If a binder is lost, it is the student's responsibility to get a new binder and new copies of the music from the music bin. Music should be marked with PENCIL ONLY. Always bring your own music binder to class so you can mark your own part. **Random binder checks will happen throughout the year and count for 5 points toward your grade.**

Rehearsal Facilities

Food, drinks other than water, and **gum** are not allowed in the orchestra room at any time. Please keep all personal items with you at all times. Room 103 is not your locker. ☺

Concert Attire and Etiquette

Our appearance as an ensemble will affect our overall performance. It is important that we all dress the same because we are a team, not a group of individual players. The dress code for all performances (unless otherwise specified) is:

Girls – White dress top and black pants or floor length skirt. Black shoes. No excessive jewelry.

Boys – Orchestra tuxedo. Black socks and shoes.

Performances highlight all your work from the semesters. Arrive to concerts on time with all appropriate materials. **Points will be deducted for tardiness or absence.**

PMEA Events

Students in grades 9-12 have the opportunity to audition for Honors Orchestra, which is held each fall. Students in grade 9 are able to apply for Junior High District Orchestra. Students in grades 10-12 are able to apply for Senior High District Orchestra. In order to participate in either event, the student **must be a member of the orchestra**. Please see Mrs. Persin for audition music and applications.

Small Ensembles

Chamber music is an excellent way to get to know your fellow musicians better as well as share your talents with the school and community. Students may choose to form chamber groups and decide upon rehearsal times. I can supply students with music and coach chamber ensembles before or after school.

Chamber Strings is a small ensemble that students are able to join. Chamber Strings meets after school one day a week. This group performs in the community, at all of the orchestra concerts, and during some school events. Members should be prepared to set aside extra time to prepare this more challenging repertoire.

Section Captains

Section Captains are chosen in May for the following school year. These students are put through an audition and application process. Section Captain responsibilities include running sectionals, helping members of their section, holding their peers accountable, and maintaining a high level of respect and positivity throughout the year.

National Standards for Music

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Private Lessons

Although many aspects of string playing will be taught and worked on throughout the student's time in the orchestra, private lessons will enhance the student's string playing abilities. Help can be provided for finding a teacher – just ask Mrs. Persin for the list of recommended private teachers in our area. **Students hoping or intending to major in music are highly recommended to start studying privately as soon as possible.**

Handbook Agreement Form

I have **thoroughly** read the McKeesport Area High School Orchestra Handbook and know what is expected of me/my student as a member of the orchestra during the 2018-2019 school year.

Student Signature

_____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature

_____ Date _____

Please return this filled out form by Friday, August 31st.