

Palmer Middle School



Orchestra Handbook 2026-2027

Zoe Whittle- Director

Palmer Orchestra Website: <https://palmerorchestra.org/>

WELCOME AND PHILOSOPHY

Welcome to the Palmer Orchestra Program!

We are so excited that you and your child have chosen to be part of our orchestra family. We believe that music education is about so much more than learning an instrument — it encourages creativity, builds confidence, and develops discipline and teamwork.

Throughout their time in orchestra, students will develop musical skills through ensemble playing and individual performance. They will learn how to read music, understand music theory and history, develop performance skills, and grow into independent musicians who are able to enjoy and create music for a lifetime.

We truly believe that music makes us better humans. Through orchestra, students learn perseverance, responsibility, collaboration, and the importance of working toward a shared goal.

You can help support your child's musical growth by:

- Asking them about what they are learning in class
- Encouraging a consistent practice routine at home
- Helping them establish a routine of bringing their instrument home regularly
- Offering positive encouragement about their playing and involvement
- Considering private lessons as they continue to grow
- Communicating with us if you notice your child becoming frustrated or needing additional support

Please know that we are always here to support you and your child. Feel free to reach out anytime and be sure to check out the Palmer Orchestra website for updates.

We are so excited for an amazing year of making music together!

ORCHESTRA HANDBOOK FORM

The purpose of this handbook is to help each orchestra family understand the policies, procedures, and expectations of the Palmer Orchestra Program. These guidelines are designed to help create a successful, positive, and enjoyable experience for every student.

This handbook serves as a resource for both students and parents throughout the school year. Please take the time to read through the information carefully so that we can work together to support your child's growth and success in orchestra.

After reviewing the handbook, please complete the required Orchestra Handbook Form that will be sent home with your child.

NATIONAL AND GEORGIA MUSIC STANDARDS

Creating

- Improvise, compose, and arrange music within specified guidelines.

Performing

- Sing alone or with others
- Perform on instruments through a varied repertoire of music, alone and with others.
- Read and identify elements of notated music.

Responding

- Listen to, analyze, and describe music.
- Respond to music and music performances.

Connecting

- Understand relationships between music, other arts, other disciplines, and daily life.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

6th - There is no previous music study necessary for this course. Students are required to rent/buy their own instruments for practice/rehearsal and will be given a list of materials for the course. School owned instruments are available for financial needs. Basics of string instrument performance in a group and in solo situations will be studied. There are 2 performances per year.

7th - Prerequisite: at least one year of string instrument study privately and/or in a school orchestra program. Second-year performers will develop and continue the study of the bow and intonation techniques. There are 3 performances per year. Extracurricular and audition opportunities are also available.

8th - Prerequisite: at least two years of string instrument study privately and/or in a school orchestra program. Students will focus on development and continuation of bow and intonation techniques for the third-year performer. There are 3 performances per year. Extracurricular and audition opportunities are also available.

GRADING

Summative Assessment - Playing Tests/Written Test/Concert Participation.....	60%
Formative Assessment - Rehearsal Skills, Worksheets, Reflections	40%

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS AND CONDUCT POLICY

All school wide rules and expectations are in effect in the music classrooms and on any trip the students may take with the Palmer Middle School Music Department.

BEFORE CLASS

1. Bring instrument and music to the Orchestra storage room and place them in the appropriate area between 8:50 AM and 9:05 AM.
2. If you are in the music area for morning practice, you must rehearse. Do not loiter. Morning practice is from 8:15am-8:50am each morning except days when Mrs. Whittle runs FCS.

DURING CLASS

3. Enter class quickly and quietly. Do not visit with friends on the way to your seat.
4. Go directly to the storage area to get your instrument and music before reporting to your assigned seat.
5. Unpack your instrument at your seat and place the case on the left side of your chair.
6. Be prepared and seated on time. Students should be in their seat with all materials needed for class within the tardy bell.
7. Follow the directions on the board so you are prepared for class to begin.
8. Be focused and attentive during tuning and class. Absolutely no talking during tuning.
9. If the director is working with another section, silently practice fingerings or bowings.
10. Respect the right of others to learn.
11. Play only when directed to do so.
12. Raise your hand to ask/answer questions or to become involved in teacher directed discussions.
13. Talking and conversation is not acceptable during a rehearsal.
14. Follow verbal and written instructions.
15. At the end of rehearsal, clean off instrument, loosen bow, slide in endpins, and return equipment to their storage area or numbered spot. Please do not visit with friends at this time.
16. Straighten up your area (chair, stand, and trash).
17. Leave the room only after the director has dismissed you.

AFTER CLASS

18. Return at the end of the day to pick up your instrument and music for home practice if you are able to do so. All students must leave the building before 4:30pm.

OTHER

19. If an instrument cannot be brought to school due to repairs, a note will need to come to school the day the instrument is unable to be brought.
20. Have all supplies in class every day, including instrument, book, music and PENCIL.

MATERIALS

Many of these items you may already possess from previous years of performance. Please check their state to make sure they are in working condition.

- ☐ Instrument
- ☐ Shoulder rest (violins and viola only)
- ☐ Rock stop (cello and bass only, needed only for concerts and at home practice)
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Rosin
- ☐ Tuner (not online, physical tuner, can be corded or clip on)
- ☐ Soft cloth for cleaning
- ☐ Extra Strings (violin and viola only)
- ☐ Black (must be black) 1" hardcover 3 ring binder with pockets
- ☐ Clear sheet protectors (20-ish)
- ☐ Method Books:
 - ☐ 6th – Essential Elements for Strings, Book 1
 - ☐ 7th – Essential Elements for Strings, Book 2
 - ☐ 8th– method books will be provided in class (no purchase necessary)

Make sure you purchase the book with your instrument name!

PERSONAL INSTRUMENTS

Personal Instruments are defined as instruments that belong to or are rented by an individual student's family from a community music store. These instruments are not owned or insured by Palmer Middle School, Cobb County School District, or the State of Georgia. The student (and family) is responsible for maintaining the instrument in working order with the proper accessories. The orchestra directors will recommend repairs (when needed) as the student progresses through the program.

SCHOOL-OWNED INSTRUMENTS

School Instruments are defined as instruments that belong to Palmer Middle School. These typically include larger instruments: cello and string bass but also violin and viola. The school bears the responsibility of repair costs on these instruments. However, students are contractually obligated to treat them with special care so that needless and expensive repairs do not have to be made. Future students must be able to use these instruments. Obvious damage to school instruments will be considered vandalism and will be dealt with in the manner outlined by Cobb County Schools. To ease transportation and increase home practice (for cello and bass players), it would help your child if you could rent one of these instruments to keep at home (although not required).

INSTRUMENT STORAGE

VIOLINS/VIOLA: Each student will be assigned a school orchestra locker. Students will receive this assignment during the first week of school. Personal instruments and school instruments must be stored in the proper place. Students will lose participation points if they fail to put away materials.

- Put your name on your case, book, shoulder rest
- Keep a soft cloth in your case.
- Each student is responsible for putting away his/her instrument and music at the end of class.
- If locks are not being used properly, they will be removed. Personal locks are not allowed and will be removed.
- Only items for orchestra class should be kept in the locker (including music, instrument, instrument accessories and binder)

CELLO/BASS: Each student will be given a cubby space to keep their orchestra binder. I recommend having a pencil pouch that clips into the binder to hold your rock stop, rosin and pencil. Students are welcome to leave their binder here each day. Cello and bass players do not get a locker and are not allowed in the orchestra locker room. Students will put in their end pin and return the instrument to the instrument racks with their assigned number. When setting the instrument down, it will always go to the left side of the chair.

CONCERT ATTIRE

Orchestra polo shirt tucked in, black slacks, black belt (if wearing a belt), long black socks, black dress shoes.

No sandals, flip-flops, open-toed shoes, white sneakers, white socks or black jeans!

Orchestra concerts are considered formal events for our students, and it is very important that students look their best for each performance. Please address uniform issues before the concert

date. If you have a problem obtaining an outfit, please contact us immediately so we can work together to resolve this matter.

CONCERT ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend all performances unless a director has approved an acceptable excuse two weeks prior to the performance. Students who do not attend the performance must submit a recording of the concert music on the next school day following the concert. Students who fail to submit a recording will have points deducted from their Playing Test grade.

Our performances are intended to showcase the orchestra students' hard work and are also designed to teach stage and audience etiquette. Therefore, students are expected to behave in a courteous and professional manner before, during, and after the performance.

***Performance attendance is required for students attending any orchestra field trips. Students who do not meet these requirements will be asked not to participate in these special events. Field trips are a reward (and not a privilege) for the hard work these students put forth throughout the year and their dedication to the orchestra program.

ADDITIONAL HELP SESSIONS

Help sessions are available throughout the week outside of class time for students. This time may be used for playing test completions, concert makeup, open practice time, or for any additional assistance that may be needed.

Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday: 8:15am-8:50am (not available on Thursdays)

PRIVATE LESSONS

Private lessons provide students with valuable one-on-one instruction. Students taking private lessons experience significant growth in their playing ability regardless of age level. While not required, each family is encouraged to consider private music lessons to compliment the instruction received at school. If interested, please email zoe.whittle@cobbk12.org to be put into touch with private instructors in the area. Private lesson instructors can also be found at local music stores.

ORCHESTRA FUNDRAISERS

Orchestra Fundraisers help us with vital education enhancements not provided by CCSD. These include:

Clinicians (professional musicians), county instrument repair/maintenance, Large Group Performance Evaluation fees, t-shirts, rewards, transportation, sheet music, recruitment, Kell

transition activities, recording fees, website maintenance, music commissions, and professional development.

Thank you for your generous support!

TRIPS AND PARENT VOLUNTEERS

One of the perks of orchestra is travel, and we're excited to continue our trips this year! Traveling with the Orchestra requires great conduct, digital citizenship, and academic integrity. When we travel, our students represent the Orchestra program and PMS.

*Administrative Referrals may lead to removal from trip rosters.

*Absences from concerts and rehearsals may also lead to removal from trip rosters.

Parents are an integral part of a strong orchestra program. Without parent support, the orchestra cannot function smoothly. Parents are needed to assist in the following areas: chaperones for trips, helping with fundraisers, and help at concerts. As the year continues, please keep an eye out for emails/sign-ups via CTLS to volunteer with us!

YEAR-LONG COMMITMENT

Orchestra is a year-long commitment. Our connection class does not change throughout the year. Email zoe.whittle@cobbk12.org with any concerns.

CALENDAR

The calendar for the 2026-2027 can be found on the orchestra website or on your students' CTLS announcements page. Please put these dates on your calendar immediately! Please note the required dates.

Orchestra website: <https://palmerorchestra.org/>

If you need a hard copy of the calendar, please email zoe.whittle@cobbk12.org.