

Hightower Trail Middle School



2025-2026 Orchestra Handbook

Michael R. Tompkins, Jr., Director
Paul O'Keefe, Assistant Director

Dr. Hannah Polk, *Principal*
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WELCOME

Dear Orchestra Families,

Welcome to the HTMS Orchestra Program! We are very happy that you and your child have chosen to be a part of our program. Playing in the orchestra encourages creativity and helps students learn discipline and focus. The College Board determined in a recent study that students who study instrumental music score an average of 110 points higher on the SAT. Students' adult lives are filled with successes, often attributed to skills gained through the orchestra experience: self-discipline, work ethic, attention to detail, teamwork, confidence, and leadership skills. We hope each student will take advantage of the many opportunities available through the orchestra program and continue music as a lifelong pursuit.

We truly believe that music education makes us better humans. You can support your child's music education by: asking them about class; establishing a daily practice routine; establishing a routine of bringing an instrument home; saying only POSITIVE comments about their playing and involvement; seeking out [private lessons](#); and communicating with the directors if you notice frustration.

Please feel free to connect with us anytime, and check the Orchestra Website often for updates:

<https://www.htmsorchestra.org>

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Orchestra Handbook Form

The purpose of this handbook is to provide each orchestra family with an understanding of the policies and procedures that govern the Hightower Trail Middle School Orchestra Program. These guidelines exist to ensure success for all, and to serve as a resource for students and parents. Both students and parents should take the time to thoroughly read this handbook. When finished, please complete the required Orchestra Handbook Form: [htmsorchestra.org](https://www.htmsorchestra.org)

National and Georgia Standards for Music Education

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.

Grading

Summative Assessment - Playing Tests/Pass-offs/Written Test/Video Assessments	40%
Formative Assessment - Rehearsal Participation, worksheets, reflections	60%

Materials

Orchestra Instrument:

Make sure the store's repair shop provides loaner instruments for students in orchestra class.

Method Books:

Sixth Grade – Essential Elements Interactive for Strings - Book 1

Seventh Grade – Essential Elements Interactive for Strings – Book 2

Eighth Grade – method books will be provided in class (no purchase necessary)

Make sure you purchase the book with your instrument name!

Orchestra Supplies:

Case, well identified with name and pod.

Rosin

Soft Cloth

Shoulder rest for violins and violas (You should try with your instrument before buying)

Endpin stop (rock stop) for cellos and basses-**for concerts and home use only.**

Black 1” hardcover 3 ring binder with pockets

Clear sheet protectors

20 sheets of lined notebook paper.

Pencil-keep in your case, binder, or locker

Music stand for home practice/field trips (folding wire stand)

Metronome/Tuner-for home use only

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 Hightower Trail 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 Hightower Trail Middle School. These typically include larger instruments: Cello and String Bass. 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 in the HTMS Student Handbook. To ease transportation and increase home practice, it would help your child if you could rent one of these instruments to keep at home. We encourage school instrument users to contribute to the Orchestra Fundraiser and pursue private lessons.

Instrument Storage

Each student will be assigned a school 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, and endpin stop.*
- *Violins and violas keep a soft cloth in your case.*
- *Keep your case on the left side of your chair. Make sure it is closed!*
- *Each student is responsible for putting away his/her instrument and music at the end of class.*

Locker Information:

- All violin/viola students will be assigned a locker to place their instruments.
- Locks available upon request. (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).

Classroom Expectations and Conduct

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

1. Students are expected to enter the orchestra room on time and in an orderly fashion.
2. Students are expected to unpack their instruments promptly.
3. Students are expected to handle their instruments and all orchestra property with respect.
4. Each student will ONLY hold or play his/her own instrument.
5. Students are expected to treat everyone with respect (Teachers, Substitute Teachers, School Staff, Administrators, and Peers). Be a good human!
6. No food, gum, or snack in the orchestra room.
7. Students are responsible for the proper storage of their own instrument. This includes making sure your locker is locked. If it is not locked, we cannot ensure the security of your belongings

Performance Attire

6th Grade	Orchestra Shirts/Blue Jeans/Casual Shoes (no sandals) (Please indicate shirt size on student info form)
7th/8th	Orchestra Polo Shirt Boys: Black slacks, black belt, long black socks, black dress shoes Girls: Black slacks, black hose, black ballet flats 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 long before the concert date. Students who arrive for a concert without acceptable clothing will not be allowed to participate in the event. If you have a problem obtaining an outfit, please contact us immediately so we can work together to resolve this matter.

Performance 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 and make-ups are 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 pass-off completions, concert makeup, open practice time, or for any additional assistance that may be needed.

Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday: 8:15am-9:00am

Tuesday/Thursday: 4:15-5:00pm- Students must be picked up promptly at 5pm!

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. Each family is encouraged to consider private music lessons to compliment the instruction received at school.

We would love to get you in touch with a Private Instructor. A list of private instructors can also be found on our website. <https://htmsorchestra.org/private-teachers>

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, awards, rewards, transportation, sheet music, recruitment, Pope transition activities, recording fees, website maintenance, music commissions, and professional development.

Thank you for your generous support!

Trips

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 HTMS.

*Administrative Referrals may lead to removal from trip rosters

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

Year Long Commitment

Orchestra is a year-long commitment. Each May, administration issues a Commitment Form where parents can indicate if they remain in the orchestra the following school year.

Awards & Achievements

Orchestra Program

- GMEA Music Program of the Year (2019)
- GMEA Exemplary Performance Award (2015, 2022)

8th Grade and Chamber Orchestra

- GMEA In-Service Conference in Savannah & Athens (2013, 2019, 2025)
- ASTA National Orchestra Festival in Atlanta (2018)
- Kennesaw State University Orchestra Invitational (2024)
- Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago (2004)

6th Grade Calendar

Date	Event	Location / Time
Fri. 8/15	Due: Orchestra Handbook Form (online), Uniform Shirt Fee (MPP, Cash/Check)	http://www.htmsorchestra.org/MyPaymentsPlus
Tues. 8/19	Bring Instruments and required materials! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>School Instrument Check-Out Form (online) needed for use of school instruments.</i> 	Orchestra Room
Mon. 8/25	Orchestra Fundraiser!	Online
Thurs. 12/4	6 th Grade Winter Concert	HTMS Theater 6-1-6:30pm 6-2 7:30pm
Sat. 2/7	Honor Orchestra Auditions	TBA
Thurs. 3/5 – Sat. 3/7	All-State Orchestra weekend	Athens, GA
Mon. 3/9	6 th Grade String Jamboree	Pope HS/7:00pm
Fri. 3/13– Sat. 3/14	District Honor Orchestra	Wheeler HS, assigned day/time TBA
Thurs. 4/23	Night of the Arts	HTMS, 6-8 pm
Tues. 4/28	Spring Concert: 6 th /7 th Grade Orchestras	Pope HS 6 th Grade-6:30pm 7 th Grade-7:30pm

7th Grade Calendar

Date	Event	Location / Time
Wed. 8/6	Bring Instruments and required materials! <i>School Instrument Check-Out Form (online) needed for use of school instruments.</i>	Orchestra Room
Fri. 8/8	Due: Orchestra Handbook Form (online), Uniform Shirt Fee (MPP, Cash/Check)	www.htmsorchestra.org/MyPaymentsPlus
Tues. 8/12	Chamber Orchestra Auditions	Orchestra Room
Fri. 8/29	Sign-Ups & Fees Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo & Ensemble • All-State Orchestra Auditions 	class
Mon. 8/25	Orchestra Fundraiser Kickoff!	Online
Sat. 10/25	All-State Orchestra Audition	Pope HS/TBA
Sat. 11/1	Solo & Ensemble Festival	Osborne HS assigned times TBA
Tues. 11/6	7 th Grade Fall Concert	HTMS Theater/7:00pm
Fri. 12/12	Pope Holiday Showcase	Pope, during class
Sat. 1/10	All-State Orchestra– 2 nd round audition	Riverwood HS
Tues. 1/27	Pre-LGPE Concert	HTMS Theater/5:00pm
Sat. 2/7	Honor Orchestra Auditions	TBA
Mon. 2/9– Wed. 2/11	LGPE (Large Group Performance Evaluation)	Walton HS
Thurs. 3/5 – Sat. 3/7	All-State Orchestra weekend	Athens, GA
Fri. 3/13– Sat. 3/14	District Honor Orchestra	Wheeler HS, assigned day/time TBA
Thurs. 4/23	Night of the Arts	HTMS, 6-8 pm
Tues. 4/28	Spring Concert: 6 th /7 th Grade Orchestras	Pope HS 6 th Grade-6:30pm 7 th Grade-7:30pm

8th Grade Calendar

Date	Event	Location / Time
Wed. 8/6	Bring Instruments and required materials! <i>School Instrument Check-Out Form (online) needed for use of school instruments.</i>	Orchestra Room
Fri. 8/8	Due: Orchestra Handbook Form (online), Uniform Shirt Fee (MPP, Cash/Check)	www.htmsorchestra.org/MyPaymentsPlus
Tues. 8/12	Chamber Orchestra Auditions	Orchestra Room
Fri. 8/29	Sign-Ups & Fees Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo & Ensemble • All-State Orchestra Auditions 	class
Mon. 8/25	Orchestra Fundraiser Kickoff!	Online
Thurs. 10/9	8 th Grade Fall Concert	HTMS Theater/7:00pm
Sat. 10/25	All-State Orchestra Audition	Pope HS/TBA
Thurs. 10/30	Solo & Ensemble Recital	HTMS Theater/6:30pm
Sat. 11/1	Solo & Ensemble Festival	Osborne HS assigned times TBA
Tues. 12/16	8 th Grade Winter Concert	HTMS Theater/7:00pm
Sat. 1/10	All-State Orchestra– 2 nd round audition	Riverwood International Charter School/TBA
Sun. 1/11- Wed. 1/14	8 th Grade Music Universal/Florida Trip	TBA
Wed. 1/28	Pre-LGPE Concert	HTMS Theater/5:00pm
Sat. 2/7	Honor Orchestra Auditions	TBA
Mon. 2/9- Wed. 2/11	LGPE (Large Group Performance Evaluation)	Walton HS
Thurs. 3/5 – Sat. 3/7	All-State Orchestra weekend	Athens, GA
Fri. 3/13– Sat. 3/14	District Honor Orchestra	Wheeler HS, assigned day/time TBA
Thurs. 4/23	Night of the Arts	HTMS, 6-8 pm
Mon. 5/11	Spring Concert: 8 th Grade Orchestra	HTMS Theater/7:00pm

