



*Garcia Middle School
Orchestra Handbook
2025-2026*

MR. GIOVANNI FUENTES
&
MS. SARA HOLTGREWE
DIRECTORS

18550 OLD RICHMOND RD.
SUGAR LAND, TX 77498

Garcia Middle School Gator Orchestra Handbook

2025-2026

Dear Parents and Students:

Welcome to a new school year with the GMS Orchestra! The Garcia Middle School Orchestras enjoyed tremendous success last year. We earned repeated high marks and judges' commendations at each competition we entered, our beginner students earned top marks at all their beginner festivals, and we entered numerous contests as an orchestra. We also had record numbers of students earn placements in all-region! We believe Garcia orchestra students will continue this tradition with hard work and the support of the school, community, and most importantly parents. It is our earnest hope that your child will develop not only the skills and the understanding necessary to perform on a string instrument but that they will also come to value the joy of music and create lifelong memories of their orchestra experiences.

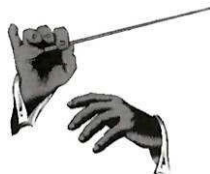
The purpose of this handbook is to provide a written policy on the organization and operation of the Orchestra Program here at GMS. It contains important information for both students and parents. **Please read each page carefully.** This handbook will be electronically accessible on the district website, the orchestra's website, and our Schoology site; however, you may request a printed copy.

Orchestra offers much more than just an opportunity to perform in concerts, and it will teach you many things besides how to play a G major scale in tune. Orchestra teaches self-discipline, self-confidence, time management skills, leadership, the ability to set your own goals and the determination it takes to reach them, and the list goes on! Students will be challenged both physically and mentally in ways unique to musical experience, stimulating their intellectual and social capabilities to grow and reach their utmost potential. But in addition to all the hard work and time we put into trying to be the best orchestra we can be, students in the orchestra get to have a lot of fun as well.

We would like to encourage parents to GET INVOLVED! Your encouragement at home, your help as volunteers, and your attendance at concerts are necessary ingredients for the orchestra's success. If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to call or e-mail us at the information provided below. We will not answer the office phone during scheduled classes, but feel free to leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible. We look forward to working with all of you, parents, and students.

Sincerely,

Mr. Giovanni Fuentes
Director of Orchestras
Garcia Middle School
giovanni.fuentes@fortbendisd.gov



Ms. Sara Holtgrewe
Director of Orchestras
Garcia Middle School
sara.holtgrewe@fortbendisd.gov

GMS Orchestra Mission Statement:

The Garcia Middle School Orchestra exists to inspire artistry and equip students to reach their full potential, thus creating opportunities without boundaries, both in music, and in life.

GMS Orchestra Goals:

It is the goal of the Garcia Orchestra program to provide a learning environment that fosters self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, competition, a desire for learning, and an appreciation for the Fine Arts, so that students can become assets to and productive citizens of society.

- f* Develop a sense of the Importance of music in the life of each student.
- f* Develop self-confidence and self-discipline in each student through positive Interaction with teachers and peers.
- f* Develop the musical potential of each student to the fullest.
- f* Develop student understanding of stylistic traits of different periods of music.
- f* Develop self-expression and creativity through practice and performance.
- f* Develop the ability to work in a group as a team for a common goal.
- f* Develop an appreciation for music from different cultures and styles.
- f* Represent our school and community in a positive manner.

GRADING AND ATTENDANCE

Students in the Garcia Middle School Orchestra program will be graded as follows, in accordance with the FBISD grading policy.

Learning objectives are based on performance skills, responsibility, and participation. Therefore, students are expected to fulfill individual as well as group responsibilities. Since the orchestra is a performance-based course and consists of different team activities, all students are required to attend all performances and rehearsals. Therefore, students may have points deducted as follows:

Unexcused absence from rehearsals that are extensions of classroom activities such as section rehearsals = **double daily grade**

Unexcused absence from a performance that is an extension of classroom activities, such as school concerts, which do not meet the definition of extracurricular = **double major grade**

Nine weeks grades will reflect an average of the following areas:

Daily Grades (50%)

1. Participation - This grade reflects a student's contribution to classroom activities and discussions, behavior, and having the supplies required for class. Points will be deducted when these criteria are not met.
2. Practice Logs - Practicing is the single most important factor in the development of your performance skills; without consistent, quality practice, your performance skills will never develop to their fullest potential. Used wisely, practice time will result in higher Major Grades when playing tests and long-term projects are assigned.
3. Written Assignments - There will be some written assignments in every grading period working on concepts in music theory, or aural evaluations of rehearsals and performances.
4. Rehearsals - Rehearsals and sectionals, as an extension of classroom activities, will equal 2 daily grades. Scheduling conflicts will not be considered excused, unless approved by a director at least **one week** in advance of the occasion. Unexcused absences will result in a zero.
5. Playing Quiz - A playing quiz will constitute one daily grade. These grades may be announced or unannounced in the schedule. As in other classes, students in orchestra practice as their homework. A playing quiz is a means of checking their homework.

Major Grades (50%)

1. Performances and Concerts - Performances and concerts are an extension of classroom activities and are counted as a double major grade per FBISD policy. An unexcused absence from concerts will result in two major grades of zero. An excused absence will only be given for emergency situations; scheduling conflicts will not be considered excused. In accordance with FBISD policy, all excused absences will be honored with no grade penalty. This will include:
 - a. Medical emergency or illness
 - b. Death in the family
 - c. Family emergency
 - d. Religious holiday (as noted on the FBISD calendar)
2. Clinics, Playing Tests (individual or section), Written Tests. Co-curricular Performances and Special Projects - These items are an extension of classroom activities and will count as one major grade each. An excused absence will only be given for emergency situations; scheduling conflicts will not be considered excused, unless approved by a director at least **one week** in advance of the occasion.

Beginner Test Rubric

Playing Test Rubric: Beginners

	Exceeds Expectations (5/5)	Distinguished (4/5)	Proficient (3/5)	Developing (2/5)	Emerging (1/5)
Posture/position (bow hold and left hand)	Student consistently plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are curved.	Student mostly plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are curved.	Student mostly plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are trying to be curved.	Student sometimes plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is chin level (violin/viola). Fingers are straight and not contacting string correctly.	Student does not perform with best posture and elbows are touching the sides. Fingers are straight and not contacting string correctly.
Intonation	All pitches are correct and in tune. (90%-100%)	Most pitches are correct and in tune. (80%-90%) Adjusting is taking place when needed.	Most pitches are correct and in tune. (70%-80%) Adjusting not taking place when needed.	Some pitches are correct and in tune. (50%-75%)	Pitch needs attention and focus for accuracy and playing in tune. (Below 50%)
Tone Production	Tone production is strong and full. The student uses the appropriate amount of bow distribution. VIBRATO IS ADDED SUCCESSFULLY.	Tone production is mostly strong and full with a few inconsistencies in sound. The student uses appropriate amount of bow distribution.	Tone production is mostly strong and full with a few inconsistencies in sound. The student usually uses appropriate bow distribution.	Tone production is usually strong and full with multiple inconsistencies. Bow distribution does not exist.	Tone production is unclear. The student uses very little bow.
Musicality	Student observes and effectively communicates all dynamics.	Student observes and communicates some dynamics—not always effectively.	Student observes dynamics and shows little effort to achieve them.	Student does not observe or achieve dynamics.	Student plays at one volume and does not show musicality.
Rhythm/ Bow accuracy	All rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (90%-100%) Student is feeling metronome pulse.	Most rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (80%-90%) Student is mostly feeling metronome pulse.	Most rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (70%-80%) Student mostly feeling metronome pulse.	Some rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (50%-75%) Metronome pulse is not there.	Rhythms need attention and focus for accuracy and tempo. (Below 50%)
Preparation	Student clearly practiced and prepared with practice techniques.	Student practiced and prepared, maybe without specific practice techniques.	Student mostly practiced and prepared.	Student somewhat practiced and prepared.	Student did not practice and prepare.

Comments:

Playing Test Rubric: Advanced

Advanced Test Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations (5/5)	Distinguished (4/5)	Proficient (3/5)	Developing (2/5)	Emerging (1/5)
Posture/position (bow hold and left hand)	Student consistently plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are curved.	Student mostly plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are curved.	Student mostly plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is eye level (violin/viola). Fingers are trying to be curved.	Student sometimes plays with good left hand posture and bow hold. Scroll is chin level (violin/viola). Fingers are straight and not contacting string correctly.	Student does not perform with best posture and elbows are touching the sides. Fingers are straight and not contacting string correctly.
Intonation	All pitches are correct and in tune. (90%-100%)	Most pitches are correct and in tune. (80%-90%) Adjusting is taking place when needed.	Most pitches are correct and in tune. (70%-80%) Adjusting not taking place when needed.	Some pitches are correct and in tune. (50%-75%)	Pitch needs attention and focus for accuracy and playing in tune. (Below 50%)
Tone Production	Tone production is strong and full. The student uses the appropriate amount of bow distribution. VIBRATO IS ADDED SUCCESSFULLY.	Tone production is mostly strong and full with a few inconsistencies in sound. The student uses appropriate amount of bow distribution.	Tone production is mostly strong and full with a few inconsistencies in sound. The student usually uses appropriate bow distribution.	Tone production is usually strong and full with multiple inconsistencies. Bow distribution does not exist.	Tone production is unclear. The student uses very little bow.
Musicality	Student observes and effectively communicates all dynamics.	Student observes and communicates some dynamics — not always effectively.	Student observes dynamics and shows little effort to achieve them.	Student does not observe or achieve dynamics.	Student plays at one volume and does not show musicality.
Rhythm	All rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (90%-100%) Student is feeling metronome pulse.	Most rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (80%-90%) Student is mostly feeling metronome pulse.	Most rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (70%-80%) Student mostly feeling metronome pulse.	Some rhythms are in tempo and accurate. (50%-75%) Metronome pulse is not there.	Rhythms need attention and focus for accuracy and tempo. (Below 50%)
Preparation	Student clearly practiced and prepared with practice techniques.	Student practiced and prepared, maybe without specific practice techniques.	Student mostly practiced and prepared.	Student somewhat practiced and prepared.	Student did not practice and prepare.
Note and bow accuracy	Student performs 100% of notes and bowings correctly.	Student performs 80%-90% of notes and bowings correctly.	Student performs 70%-80% of notes and bowings correctly.	Student performs 50%-70% of notes and bowings correctly.	Student performs fewer than 50% of notes and bowings correctly.
Audience Member	Learner was attentive at all times.				Learner was speaking during others' exams.

Comments:

Total: ____/____

Attendance

Students will attend all scheduled rehearsals, sectionals and performances held outside of the school day. The Fort Bend I.S.D. Extra-Curricular Handbook contains the official district procedure for attendance at all co-curricular and extra-curricular events.

1. A calendar of events is handed out at the beginning of each school year. A current calendar is always available on our Cut Time and Schoology websites. Please try to schedule other activities and appointments around the designated dates and times.
2. Attendance is required for orchestra students at ALL rehearsals, sectionals, concerts and contests because these are designated as co-curricular. These activities are co-curricular because they are an extension of the orchestra class and grades may be given during this time.
3. At rare times, an absence at a scheduled event is inevitable. In such cases written notice must be given to the director at least one week in advance using the "Notice of Absence" form included in this handbook (also found on Cut Time and Schoology). Not all absences will be excused, but this form will allow for record keeping and notification. In case of emergencies, please contact the director by e-mail or phone.
4. Unexcused absences will result in a "zero".

We are very aware of the many demands placed on our students' schedules: academic, social, and familial, and are aware that success in one area positively influences the others. Knowing the busy schedule of students and parents, we try to get as complete of a calendar of events out to each family at the beginning of the year as possible. While not 100% complete, this calendar is a fairly accurate indicator of what activities the orchestras will be participating in throughout the year.

Orchestra is a "Team" event, and all students are important and necessary to the success of the group. Please be assured that we will work with the student and parents as closely as possible to help resolve any situations in the student's best interest.

Academic Eligibility Rules (No Pass-No Play)

House Bill 72, which became law in 1984, mandates that a student be suspended from participating in ALL extracurricular activities (athletics, orchestra, band, choir, clubs, etc.) sponsored or sanctioned by the school district during the three-week period following a nine-week grading period in which the student received a grade lower than 70 in any class. This suspension continues for at least three weeks, and academic eligibility is not regained during the school year until such time as the student's grade in ALL CLASSES is 70 or higher at grade check time (typically at the end of each three-week interval) or at the end of a nine-week grading period. **A student will continue to practice or rehearse with other students for an extracurricular activity, but he/she may not participate in an extracurricular performance (or game) until the suspension is lifted.** A suspended student may regain academic eligibility:

- seven days after the nine-week grading period ends or
- seven days after the three-week progress or waiting period, provided that he/she is passing ALL subjects with a 70 or higher.

The school district maintains a calendar with these dates of loss of eligibility/regain of eligibility. The Garcia MS faculty has established procedures for checking the academic eligibility status of students. (See FBISD Extracurricular Handbook.)

If a student receives a comment on a progress report indicating that he/she is failing and that student is currently eligible, the student will remain eligible until seven days after a failing grade is verified on the nine-week report card.

Tryout/Audition Procedures

Prior to the academic school year, ALL students entering seventh and eighth grade will audition for placement in one of the orchestras. This placement will be determined by an audition on music materials selected by the director and on the student's past performance. NO STUDENT WILL BE ENROLLED IN ANY ORCHESTRA UNTIL THIS AUDITION IS COMPLETED.

The audition is only one-fifth of what is considered when placing a student in any orchestra. Below is a list of the five areas that are considered for placement:

1. Audition Score: each orchestra has a performance standard
2. Grades
 - a. Students who have a history of not passing all classes will not be placed in a competing orchestra (varsity/non-varsity) because they will not be able to participate at UIL if they are failing
3. Work Ethic: Orchestra takes a lot of hard work from every individual and students who have demonstrated this will be considered for honors and advanced. Students who do not demonstrate this will be placed in an intermediate orchestra. Below are some ways in which students can demonstrate this:
 - a. Practice logs
 - b. Chair test and Playing test scores
 - c. Playing quizzes
 - d. Always having required supplies (pencil, binder, instrument)
 - e. Always communicating with director when conflicts arise
4. Interpersonal skills/Behavior: Students who disrupted rehearsals will not be allowed in the varsity/non-varsity Orchestra.
5. Instrumentation: To be competitive, the Varsity and Non-varsity (sub-non-varsity) Orchestras must have balanced instrumentation. A group with 30 violins and 1 cello will not sound good and will not do well at contest.

Audio/Video Recording

Throughout the year, the orchestra will make audio and video recordings of rehearsals and concerts. These recordings are in compliance with the Texas Education Code, Sec 26.009 subsection (b) which states:

(b) An employee of a school district is not required to obtain the consent of a child's parent before the employee may make a videotape of a child or authorize the recording of a child's voice if the videotape or voice recording is to be used only for:

- (1) purposes of safety, including the maintenance of order and discipline in common areas of the school or on school buses;
- (2) a purpose related to a co-curricular or extracurricular activity;
- (3) a purpose related to regular classroom instruction; or
- (4) media coverage of the school.

TRANSPORTATION

Several times during the year the orchestra must travel to events such as contests or a spring trip. For each of these events, a letter and permission form will be sent out. It is extremely important that the permission form be filled out for each event and that medical information is included on the form. Furthermore, itineraries will be distributed for all Garcia Orchestra events. Parents, please make arrangements to pick up your orchestra student at their scheduled times. While on a field trip, all members represent Garcia Middle School, Fort Bend ISD, and the community. As such, when traveling to other locations on district transportation, all students are expected to:

- Be on time.
- Dress as directed (see Uniforms section below for a description)
- Avoid excessive noise on the bus to and from the places we go.
- Travel on the same bus for all segments of the trip.
- Return equipment to its proper storage place upon returning to school.

If a student is required to leave an off-campus event or activity, the student's parent or legal guardian must provide written notification to the director at least 24 hours before the event, and the student may leave **ONLY** with their parent or legal guardian. This policy is meant to protect the student, not to inconvenience the parent



LATE PICK UP FROM EVENTS

It is important that all students are picked up on time after any orchestra activity (parties, rehearsals, performances, etc.). Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the occurrence of students being picked up late.

The GMS fine arts department is implementing a policy this year to help with this problem. If your child is not picked up 15 minutes after the activity's end time, FBISD law enforcement will be called to wait with the student in question and ticket the parent for negligence.

Class Fees and Payments

Fees	Details	Payment Method & Payment Deadline	Total
Annual Orchestra Fee	This covers the orchestra T-shirt, some class supplies, bus transportation, clinicians, socials, parties, pizza, snacks, etc.	Presto Deadline: 09/01/2025	\$50
Accessories/Supplies	Instrument-specific supplies such as shoulder rest, rosin, rock stop, cleaning cloth, metronome, tuner, etc.	Rent on your own – Lisle, Fishburn, Katy Violin Shop <i>(See attached handbook or website for materials)</i>	Varied – On your own
School-Owned Instrument Use Fee	Maintenance and use of school-owned instruments (Required for cello, bass, and harp students)	Presto Deadline: 9/5/2025	\$100
Region Orchestra Entry Fee	Entry fee for all students auditioning for Region Orchestra (Required for Chamber students and other select students)	Presto Deadline: 09/26/2025	\$20
Black Dress Pants, Black Socks, Black Shoes	Remainder of all black formal uniform	Purchase on your own. Deadline: 9/26/2025	Varied – On your own
Houston Symphony Trip	Optional field trip for beginner orchestra members. This trip will take place on November 2025. The fee includes an admission ticket, transportation, and lunch.	Presto Deadline: October TBD	\$30
String Fling	Required for all beginner students!	Presto	\$10
Solo Accompanist Fee	Payment for solo contest piano accompanist. Required for ALL students.	Cash ONLY, paid directly to the accompanist. Deadline: First accompanist rehearsal in April	Beginner Solos: \$25 Advanced Solos: \$40
Solo/Ensemble Entry Fee	Payment for Entering the Contest (mandatory)	Presto	\$10 per event
Spring Trip/Social Event	Optional – Details TBD	Presto	TBD

Concert Orchestra Uniforms

Beginners

Concert Uniform:

Black slacks or skirt past the knees for girls
Black dress shoes (closed toes, low or no heel)
Black dress socks or hose
Nice White blouse/shirt/top/button up

No:  Jeans
 Tennis shoes

All Orchestra students will order the GMS Orchestra T-shirt at the beginning of the school year. Sizes are collected through student **REVTRAK** accounts. Students must pay for this item.

Informal Uniform:

Boys/Girls: ☒ GMS Orchestra T-shirts
☒ **Blue** denim jeans

Students must purchase the GMS Orchestra T-shirt every year, as the design changes annually. This is part of the Orchestra Fee

The appearance of the Garcia Middle School Orchestra students is a source of great pride and an important first step to any successful concert performance.



Thank you for your help with our uniforms.

Performing Orchestra Uniforms:

Non-Beginners

Formal Uniform:

- Boys:** ☒ **Black slacks**
☒ **Black** dress shoes and socks
☒ **Black** orchestra uniform button down
(purchased through school)
- Girls:** ☒ **Black** slacks or black skirt (must be past the knees)
☒ **Black** dress shoes and hose/socks
☒ **Black** orchestra uniform button down
(purchased through school)

- No:  Jeans
 Tennis shoes

All students **beyond** beginners **will be** fitted in class for a white tuxedo shirt and vest/bow tie set at the beginning of the school year. Students must pay for these items.

Informal Uniform:

- Boys/Girls: ☒ GMS Orchestra T-shirt
☒ Blue denim jeans

Students must purchase the GMS Orchestra T-shirt every year, as the design changes annually.

The appearance of the Garcia Middle School Orchestra students is a source of great pride and an important first step to any successful concert performance.

Thank you for your help with our uniforms.

How TO PRACTICE

**Make practice a habit and you will be successful. Your enjoyment of playing your instrument is related to how much effort you put into it. Your brain and your fingers must exercise together every day to become limber and quick acting. Skills are perfected only when practiced correctly and carefully each day.*

Students are expected to take their instrument home each day. Meaningful home practice is essential to a student's continued progress in orchestra. It is a consideration on orchestra placement for future years.

The keys to progress on a musical instrument include *teacher instruction* and *correct repetitions* of that instruction by the student. The most common hindrances from steady progress are lack of student practice, student practice with improper technique/posture, and insufficient practice repetitions. It takes some students more repetition than others to master a certain technique. Practice records are required to assist in the student's development of a regular practice habit.

1. Keep your orchestra binder in order! This keeps you from wasting time looking for your music.
2. Find a quiet place to concentrate and hear your sound.
3. Have a specific practice time each day to create a routine! You should be alone or helped by a quiet parent. This is not the time you talk or share with someone else. Your focus should be only on your set goals for that practice time.
4. Make sure that you have all supplies that you need to practice at home. Everyone needs a music stand to hold your music, your orchestra binder, and your instrument. Cello and Harp players need a proper chair, one that allows you to sit and play with proper position. Bass players need a stool to practice on - make sure it is the correct height for you.
5. Check your practice chart for your assignments! Know what your goal is for that practice time. Write down your goal for the day and grade yourself at the end of your practice session. This helps you plan your next day's practice goal or goals.
6. Work on the one specific thing that you have set as your practice goal! Isolate sections of the music that are difficult and carefully practice them. Use practice techniques discussed in class for efficient practicing. Playing pieces over and over from start to finish does not accomplish much and may in fact be harmful to your growth as a musician. Using a metronome at a slower tempo then gradually increasing the speed is very useful in many practice situations.
7. Always play with excellent position! Hold your instrument the correct way the entire time while playing. Be sure that your fingers are correctly placed on the strings and on the bow. Make sure that your body and arm positions are always correct.
8. Work on playing all the notes with a good sound and in tune. Work out rhythms by clapping, counting and shadow bowing. You can practice as little as one or two notes at a time to get them in tune, with a good sound and proper bowings.

Orchestra Objective:

To play correctly



in time



in tune



in balance

in the correct style with uniform bowings and a good work attitude.

Beginner Practice Record

Page 1

Name _____

GMS Beginner Orchestra

Practice Record

Please fill out each box for each day that you practice. Make sure that you know what you're trying to accomplish and how you will do it before you begin practicing. You will turn in a copy of this form every **THURSDAY**.

Grading: 210 min.=100, 180 min.=99, 150 min.=90, 120 min.=80, 90 min.=70, 60 min.=60, all other totals are a 0.

Thursday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Friday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Saturday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Sunday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Beginner Practice Record Page 2

Monday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Tuesday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Wednesday, ____/____

Homework	Goals	How will I accomplish it?	# of min.

Parent Signature _____ **TOTAL NUMBER OF MINUTES PRACTICED:**

--

Advanced Practice Planner

Name: _____

Page 1

Due Date: _____

Practice Planner and Record

Date: ____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Date: ____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Date: ____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Date: ____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Advanced Practice Planner

Page 2

Name: _____

Due Date: _____

Date: ____/____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Date: ____/____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Date: ____/____/____

Time: _____

Tune	
Warm Up	
Practice	

Parent Signature: _____

Date: _____