

Dear Orchestra Parents,

Welcome to the SCUC ISD orchestra program! You have chosen a great ensemble of which to be a member! Working together, we will ensure both individual and group success as we all learn and have fun at the same time!

Thank you for supporting your child's desire to be part of our orchestra family. Students are learning more in orchestra than how to play an instrument. They are developing life skills of discipline, teamwork, responsibility, and self-confidence, as well as social skills and critical thinking skills. As your child begins their venture into the orchestral world, I hope to share my love of music with them providing a strong foundation in the music education. If your child already plays an instrument, I am thrilled that he or she wishes to continue this endeavor as a member of the orchestra program.

As we begin our year, I believe that communication and understanding, as well as parent involvement, is critical to our success. By being a parent of an orchestra student, you have automatically become a part of the SCUC ISD orchestra team.

The guidelines in this handbook will help you in giving your child the best support possible for his or her musical endeavors. If I can ever be of any assistance to you, please feel free to contact me. We are going to have a great year as we launch orchestra at the intermediate level!

Sincerely,  
Andrew Sutton

Dobie JH and Steele High School director of Orchestras

My email address: [asutton@scuc.txed.net](mailto:asutton@scuc.txed.net)

The first step is to make sure we can communicate with each other easily. I use Remind for sending home communications. My goal is 100% of parents signed up so I know things are getting to you.

Please sign up for Remind:

The Class Code for my Remind (if you already have an account) is: @dobieorc or @steeleorc (THIS IS DIFFERENT THAN LAST YEAR'S!!! Please sign up for these!!!)

Expectations

- Enter the classroom quietly, in an orderly fashion.

- Bring all materials daily – instrument, bow, music, rosin, pencil, shoulder rest, etc.
- Be on time.
- No food, drink, or gum in the orchestra room.
- Mobile devices and tablets should not be used beyond the tuning period on regular rehearsal days.
- Respect the rights and properties of other people.
- Follow all school rules.
- Daily participation in rehearsal. Orchestra is a team effort, which requires everyone cooperating and listening at all times to be successful.

Failure to observe one or more of the rules above will result in one or more of the following disciplinary actions: verbal warnings, written notices to parents, phone calls to parents, student/teacher conferences, lower conduct/participation grades, lower seating, detention halls, office referrals, etc.

The purpose of rehearsal is to learn everyone else's part, NEVER your own. Your own preparation is your welcoming gift to your classmates.

#### Required Materials

- Instrument with bow
- Shoulder Rest (only violin and viola)
- Pencils
- Rosin
- Soft Cloth (A piece of an old t-shirt works great)
- Rock-Stop/Floor Strap (only cello and bass).
- Extra strings

#### String Orchestra Program

The string program will offer instruction for violin, viola, cello, and double bass. Students will be responsible for furnishing their instruments. The school offers a very limited supply of instruments that

may be rented for a nominal maintenance fee (\$80). This fee covers minor repair, string replacement, bow rehairs, etc. Priority for these instruments are need-based, then first come, first serve. If you do not currently have your own instrument, it is recommended that you rent from a music store. Many offer rent to own type packages and offer insurance against damage.

Some local instrument shops are:

- Alamo City Strings, 12255 West Ave. #4, San Antonio, TX, (210) 341-0500
- Antonio Strad Violin, 10288 San Pedro Ave., San Antonio, TX, (210) 349-9788
- Duckworth Violin Shop, 301 W San Antonio St. #111, New Braunfels, TX, (830) 627-1778
- High School Music, 2121 NW Military Hwy, San Antonio, TX, (210) 349-2775
- Music and Arts, 8206 Agora Pkwy, Selma, TX, (210) 566-1920
- Terra Nova Violins, 6983 Blanco Rd., San Antonio, TX (210) 349-4700

This list of instrument brands has been recommended by many teachers and private instructors. Please consult the orchestra director or another string teacher for help with sizing. Caution should be noted when purchasing an instrument online or in pawn shops as the quality can be poor and therefore disadvantaging to students.

Some suggestions for instruments include: Klaus Mueller, Knilling, Scherl & Roth, Lewis, Glaesel, Becker, Antonio Strad, Terra Nova, Eastman, and other German brands.

We will be charging a \$25 fee for those who use a school instrument at school. These instruments often see more wear and tear in a year than a home based instrument used and cared for by one student. This will help cover strings, bow rehairs and minor repairs for those instruments.

Formal Concert Attire:

Formal Concert Attire will be reserved for Pre-UIL and UIL Contest in the Spring. All other concerts will be casual.

For Steele High School:

Formal Concert Attire will be tuxedo outfits for males and "concert black" for females.

Steele HS will provide the following:

Males – Tuxedo Pants, Jacket

Students must provide:

Males – Black dress shoes, Black socks, white undershirt, Tuxedo Shirt, Bow Tie, Cummerbund (An Amazon Link will be sent out well in advance for the Tuxedo Shirt, bow tie and cummerbund set)

Females -- Concert Black attire. We will discuss this in detail later but so long as it is all black (not faded black) and conforms to dress code and modesty standards while playing sitting, it is very easy to throw together (and inexpensive)

For Dobie Junior High:

Formal Concert attire will be White Tuxedo Shirt, Bow tie and Black Pants for males, Concert Black for Females.

No uniform pieces will be provided.

Orchestra Fees

High School students will be required to pay a \$30 membership fee. Junior High Students will be required to pay a \$25 membership fee. This fee covers the cost of the orchestra t-shirt, a portion of the uniform cleaning charges and gives us some wiggle room for costs associated with events such as orchestra get-togethers and end of the year activities. Additional orchestra merchandise is considered optional. This will be paid through My School Bucks. More information will be sent out very soon

Grading & Assignments

Grades consist of: playing grades, concert grades, rehearsal grades, and written/project grades

9 week grading cycle:

- Summative – includes major playing tests, concert performances, concert rehearsals, and written tests or projects. These are scheduled in advance, allowing students ample preparation time.

Concerts and any rehearsals outside of school will be scheduled in advance and are MANDATORY, with limited exception. Arrange all transportation needs in well in advance of major events.

- Rehearsal – weekly grades for overall participation in rehearsal. Failure to actively participate in rehearsal, including not bringing your instrument daily can result in a deduction for the weekly grade. Issues with instruments (in the repair shop, broken bridge, etc.) should be related to the director so as to not affect rehearsal grades. Students who do not have their instrument at school on a particular day are still expected to participate in as many aspects of rehearsal as possible (singing lines of music, counting rhythms, etc.). These students may not work on other work, read, draw, etc.
- Playing Quizzes/Play Offs – recurring assignments that are used to gauge individual student progress and help determine chair order for seating. Students must demonstrate that they can accurately perform all aspects of the music. Students may choose a live performance in front of the director or may submit a video recording to the director. Specific details regarding submission will be discussed in class. Ask the director if you need help.

#### Concert Policy:

Missing concerts or UIL without a legitimate excuse is grounds for being placed in a lower orchestra class for the next semester. If there is a scheduling conflict, please communicate with me ASAP. This is how schedule conflicts need to be resolved:

1. Concerts trump practices (ie: Orchestra concert is on the same night as a club soccer practice)
2. The first date committed to is the one you go to. (My Concert Calendar is already available)
3. The one that gets a grade for participation is the priority

For approved concert absences, there will be a significant makeup assignment. This could be to help write program notes or present to their peers about a composer. This will be based on need as well as when the teacher has been informed and approved of the absence.

#### Seating

Chair order will be primarily based on student grades from playing quizzes and tests. It will be reevaluated for every concert. Students may be asked to rotate seating until the final chair order is determined. Violins have the unique quality of having two separate parts (first and second). Each part is crucial to the overall completeness of the music and must have quality players. Violinists may be assigned to rotate between parts throughout the year, depending upon individual strengths, needs of particular works, technique needs of individual students, etc. Although violinists may be assigned to play

second part, it should not be assumed that those players are inferior in any way to those assigned first part.

Principal players must assume responsibility and leadership for their individual section. The director has the discretion to require those wishing to serve as a principal to complete additional playing exams, particularly for works that have a solo. Principals are expected to know the music and assist members of their respective sections with basic questions such as bowings, bow placement, fingerings, etc. Principal players that fail to be adequate section leaders may be reassigned after all attempts to rectify the situation have been exhausted (teacher-student meeting, parent communication, etc.). The expectation is that this should be unnecessary.

### Extra-Curricular Events

In order to participate in any extra-curricular events, students must be academically eligible according to the guidelines set by UIL. This does NOT apply to regularly scheduled concerts which are considered extensions of the orchestra class. In addition, failure to follow orchestra class expectations and guidelines may result in ineligibility to participate.

These events are:

- TMEA Region Orchestra – an orchestra made up of students from Region 12 who are selected by competitive audition.
- TMEA All-State Orchestra – an orchestra made up of students from the State of Texas who are selected by competitive audition.
- UIL Solo & Ensemble – individual or small ensemble performance that is evaluated by a judge. Students who meet certain qualifications may advance to the state competition.
- UIL Concert & Sight Reading Evaluation – an ensemble evaluation on prepared music and sight reading skills.

### Extra Rehearsals

Occasionally it may be necessary to have extra rehearsals/dress rehearsals before concert performances.

The rehearsals are mandatory.

Please arrange to attend and arrive promptly so that we can tune and warm up. Students will receive advanced notification of extra rehearsal dates.

### Rehearsal Absence Policy:

There will be grades assigned to mandatory after school rehearsals. Alternate work will be assigned if a student is excused from a rehearsal PRIOR to the rehearsal date. This means communication is a MUST for this grade to not be a 0 for not participating in the rehearsal.

### Letterman Jackets

Students have the opportunity to earn a Varsity Letterman Jacket upon successful completion of the following:

- Enrolled in Varsity-level orchestra
- Attendance at ALL concerts
- Participation in ALL contests: TMEA Region auditions, UIL Solo & Ensemble Contest, UIL Concert & Sight Reading Contest
- Maintain passing grades (70 and above) in ALL classes
- Positive contribution to all rehearsals and show behavior worthy of earning a Letterman.

EVERY Orchestra student is expected to see one performance they are not playing in per semester. This will count towards their summative grade and is equal to participating in their own concerts in terms of importance. The concert must be a classical concert representing strings, wind ensembles, full orchestra or it may be a "pop" (rock, country, etc) concert if the student's chosen instrument is featured. Some Examples:

The San Antonio Symphony (Yes, the Star Wars concert counts!)

Youth Orchestra of San Antonio

San Antonio Youth Wind Ensemble,

Junior High or High school concert band concert

Staying for the High School Concerts (for Junior High Students)

Piano Guys if the student is a cellist

Charlie Daniels for violinists and violists

Rockabilly like the Brian Setzer Orchestra would be acceptable for basses.

There are a number of civic orchestras in San Antonio now as well including: Symphony Viva (I play in this group), South Texas Symphony and Sonido Barroco (I also play in this group). All three of these groups put on 4-5 concerts a year and are a much less expensive option than the San Antonio Symphony. I highly recommend liking their Facebook pages to see when their concerts are.

The high school marching at halftime, unfortunately, will not suffice. (Going to their concert in an auditorium would though!)

Getting there early and watching Junior High Perform DOES Count. Staying for High School if you are in Junior High DOES count! The region orchestra performance would be another excellent concert opportunity as well.

In light of Covid-19, the option to watch streaming concerts live or pre-recorded is now a reality as well. This will likely be the first semester's de-facto option for this requirement. I will offer listening assignment options via our Learning Management System as a easy way to make this requirement.

#### Orchestra Officers

The Steele Orchestra will have an executive council for the school year who will be leaders and advocates for the program. The offices will be President, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, Marketing/PR, Historian, and Freshman Representative. Students interested in running for office must meet the following criteria:

- Member of Steele Orchestra for one year (exception for Freshman Representative)
- President & Vice President must be a Junior or Senior
- Commitment to recurring after school meetings (dates to be decided)
- Commitment to being present at all extra rehearsals, concerts, and events (limited exceptions may apply)

#### Duties of officers

##### President

- Main representative for orchestra at Steele, SCUC ISD, and the community
- Presides over and directs all meetings



- Assists the director in seeking out opportunities for Steele Orchestra community involvement

#### Vice President

- Fulfills the duties of the President in the President's absence
- Takes attendance at all concerts and extra rehearsals
- Maintains the Steele Orchestra library

#### Secretary/Treasurer

- Records the minutes of each meeting
- Assists the director with writing receipts for incoming monies
- Assists the director with accounting for student paperwork, where appropriate

#### Marketing/Public Relations

- Creates banners, flyers, concert programs, etc. for Steele Orchestra events
- Creates PowerPoint slides for inclusion in daily announcements slideshow
- Creates verbal announcements for 2nd Period School Wide Announcements

#### Historian

- Manages the Steele Orchestra social media accounts
- Takes photos/arranges for photo help at Steele events
- Creates end of year slide show for banquet and/or final concert

#### Freshman Representative

- Serves on the executive council
- Chair for orchestra social events
- Assists with maintaining the orchestra library

#### Selection of officers

Students wishing to run for office must complete the following:

- Provide a letter of recommendation from a Steele employee (teacher, principal, etc.) that addresses your leadership skills, ability to successfully fulfill the roles of the office, and any other details (s)he feels are relevant. [Does not apply for Freshman Representative]
- Submit a formal letter of intent to the director describing why you are best fit for that office, ideas you have for Steele Orchestra, and any other information you feel is important.
- Present a brief presentation to the orchestra that outlines the information in your formal letter and any other pertinent information. The presentations will be held after school within the first two weeks of classes. Students running for office must attend.
- Demonstrate leadership qualities during class and at all Steele Orchestra events.

Candidates who meet all the qualifications by the deadline as set by the director will have their names placed on the voting ballot. The candidate with the majority of votes will assume the office to which (s)he has been chosen.

#### Dereliction of Duty

Any officer who is not fulfilling the duties of her/his office may be removed by the director. This will be a last resort after multiple attempts to rectify the problem (student-director meeting, parent communication, etc.). As all officers are expected to be committed to the Steele Orchestra, the likelihood of this happening is slim. In the event that an officer resigns from her/his position, the director will appoint a replacement for the remainder of the year.

Practice is an integral part of performing on any instrument. There will not be practice logs at this time but the director reserves the right to assign them in the future if students are not showing the right work ethic on their own.

Time based practice is NOT the right way to approach things. Goal based is and practice will be assigned based on goals. As a rule, your child should be practicing 5-6 days a week. Some days it may be 15 minutes; others an hour, no different than how long math or language arts homework might take.

With @home learning, there must be music happening every school day just as there would be if your student is in class. If you are having issues with this, please let me know so I can work with the student on setting goals for practice. Its MUCH EASIER to practice when there are goal posts set for what needs to get accomplished.

Each student has to be able to now play their part on their own. There's no ability to listen to a group of students until we are back in person. That is additional pressure for success but everyone has or will have the tools to be successful in my class. The Zoom times are class specific and are designed for students to come get help. I can do breakout rooms in Zoom and assign students to work together or pop into them so students don't have to play in front of their peers. The point here: Please ask for help!

When we get back to in-class, please remember:

Class time should be for REHEARSAL as a group, not for learning one's part, especially after the first couple weeks of learning a piece.