



East Jackson Middle School Chorus '10-'11

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Chorus Handbook

Welcome to the East Jackson Middle School Chorus!

Inside this handbook, there is a lot of information that will help you have a fun, meaningful, and educational year. However, the most important thing that will guarantee that you will have fun is the **attitude** you bring to Chorus. If you decide now that you are willing to work hard, stay positive, and support your fellow singers, I can guarantee you will enjoy your year!

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

These goals apply to all three grade level choirs, and will be posted in the classroom. They guide our progress as we move through the year:

1. To learn to read, understand, and create music symbols.
2. To understand and demonstrate professional concert etiquette and performance practice.
3. To develop a "musician's ear," allowing us to understand what our ears are telling us, and to sing what we see on the page.
4. To learn to work as a team for the success of the group.
5. To understand how the body makes sound, and how to turn that sound into music.
6. To listen with open ears to music that isn't familiar or popular, and understand all music better as a result.
7. To represent our friends, families, school and community through excellence in music performance.

Everything we do in class and in performance this year will aim for one or more of these goals. The only way we meet them is together.

EXPECTATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES (GOOD AND BAD)

Expectations

Whether you succeed in chorus depends on how hard you are willing to work. That is true of you individually, and as a group. I have lots of knowledge and experience to share with you, and I'm going to do everything I can to make learning, singing, and performing *really* fun, but ultimately YOU are the ones who will be on stage. That means it's up to YOU to make sure YOU attend every rehearsal, come prepared, follow all the rules, and work hard. I have high hopes for our work together, which means I have high expectations for you (and me!). Some of these expectations are listed here:

- ❖ *Follow all the rules of behavior in your agenda.*
Respect and courtesy for others are the most important rules in my classroom – I will not tolerate rudeness, meanness, or lack of respect for others and their property. No exceptions. I consider it bullying, and you will be referred immediately. Please, no food, drinks, or gum in class (water is fine, though). Also, I will only call on and recognize students sitting in their chair with their hand raised.
- ❖ *Treat our music and materials with care, caution, and respect.*
Every dollar the chorus spends on replacing sheet music, chairs, risers, or other things is a dollar we didn't spend on trips, new music, new materials and posters, nicer folders...you get the picture. Most importantly, be careful with your music – more on how to do that when I pass it out. Please keep your feet off the chairs (and each other), and do not use chorus room equipment (such as the piano or computers) without permission.
- ❖ *Come to class quickly, quietly, and ready to work.*
Always bring a pencil (not a pen) and your thinking cap. Come right in, get your music, put it in the order of rehearsal (on the board), and read the board for instructions.

❖ *Attend ALL performances.*

There's not much point to being in chorus if you don't show up on the big day. The attendance policy is discussed further on.

❖ *Sing out!*

I can only work with what I hear. In other words, if I can't hear you, I can't help you. Chorus is a safe place to learn to sing, and I can't wait to teach you, but YOU have to get fired up about making some noise! I promise, no matter what you sound like, *you have a unique sound* to contribute to this chorus, and I want to hear it!!

❖ *Trust your director.*

I may sometimes ask you to do things that may sound strange at first. Those of you who have had chorus before know what I mean. Learning to sing is hard because your instrument *is you*, and because we don't always sing the same way we talk. Making matters worse, your voice sounds *completely different* to you than it does to everyone else! (If you've ever recorded your voice on a computer or a tape, you know what I mean!) I promise, I will not let you as individuals or as a group sound bad on stage, but you must meet me halfway, and you have to trust that I won't let you down.

Consequences

If you live up to the expectations above:

I can all but guarantee you will have LOTS of fun this year. You will be confident on stage because you have learned your music well. You will enjoy the friendship and support of your fellow chorus members. You may make your non-chorus classmates jealous. You will learn to read music and to sing in a healthy, natural way. You will have memories that will stay with you forever. Most importantly, because your voice and your fellow chorus members' voices are *uniquely yours*, you will be a part of something that is one-of-a-kind, unlike any sound anywhere else in the universe!

If you neglect to meet these expectations:

Chances are good you will not have fun. Disrupting rehearsal, tardiness, not being respectful or courteous, and other similar behavior will mean applying the school discipline plan. In addition, these behaviors will lower your participation grade, and may mean you don't get to participate in chorus in the future.

GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS

In this class, **no one will be graded on the quality of their singing voice.** Each of us has a unique voice to contribute to chorus, and each of us learns at a different rate. This is even truer with singing. What is most important is how hard we are willing to work. So, chorus grades are based on written and sung assignments, concert attendance, and class participation. Class participation is decided according to a "rubric" which I've put below.

Written assignments will usually mean take-home worksheets (these will usually be easy) and a listening journal that you will keep in class. Sung assignments will include sight-singing exercises and repertoire/part tests. We'll talk more about what those mean when we get to them in class. Concert attendance is a **vital** part of your grade in this class. For 8th graders, your semester average will be lowered one letter grade for each required performance you miss without a valid excuse. For 6th and 7th graders, you will not have met the standards required by the class, and

your report cards will show that. There is a calendar in this handbook that lists all required concerts, so there is no excuse for missing them unless there is an emergency. More importantly, participating in chorus is like joining a sports team – we only do our best work when we’re all together. You wouldn’t join a baseball or softball team, attend all the practices, and then never show up for the game. The same should be true for chorus.

Classroom behavior is measured using a rubric. The rubric is a list of behaviors that are expected every day, and you will be given a grade out of 10 points for each behavior whenever I take a participation grade, for a maximum of 100 points. I will not tell you when I am taking a grade, so you will have to be giving your best every day. Here are the behaviors:

1. Comes to class on time (is seated before the bell).
2. Comes to class prepared (has a pencil, music, and homework).
3. Stays in or in front of seat unless otherwise instructed.
4. Leaves drama, arguments, and negativity outside the classroom.
5. Does not bring food or drink (other than water) into the room.
6. When singing, uses correct posture.
7. When singing, uses tall vowels and crisp consonants.
8. Sings with energy, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude at all times (no matter how you’re feeling inside).
9. Shows support to fellow chorus members.
10. Is respectful to the director, chorus property, and chorus members.

ATTENDANCE AND TARDINESS

When you join chorus, you become an instrument in a band made up of voices. If you take one instrument away, the band sounds different. If a band member arrives late, and misses information, the result is that the band doesn’t play as well as it could or should. It works the same as on a sports team. Can you imagine a baseball team whose short stop didn’t show up for the game? Would the team *win* many games? Definitely not. Joining chorus is a commitment you make to every other member. Don’t let them down by being late to rehearsal, absent from concerts, or giving less than your best in practice.

If you are tardy to class **more than twice** in a 9-week period, I will apply the school discipline plan. Each tardy after that will take you one step further down the plan. Absence from concerts is discussed in the ‘Grades and Assignments’ section above. Bottom line: don’t miss concerts.

BEHAVIOR POLICY

Behavior problems will be handled using the school discipline plan. Additional consequences for unacceptable behavior might be not getting to go on trips or enjoy rewards earned by the chorus. Also, your grade might suffer (your participation behavior in class is discussed in ‘Grades and Assignments’ above).

PERFORMANCES

A big part of chorus is performing for our community. Together, we will sing a Winter Holiday concert and a Spring Concert at the end of the year. In addition, we will all participate in the Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA) annual Large Group Performance Evaluation (LGPE) in Lawrenceville in March. These three concerts are required for all three grade level choruses. In addition to these, the 7th and 8th Grade choruses will sing a Fall Concert in October, and the 8th grade will sing in Atlanta in April. Each of these is listed in the calendar later on. More information about these performances will be given out before each one happens. See the section further on called "Extra Opportunities" for more exciting choral activities that are optional!

Large Group Performance Evaluation

The Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA) is the Georgia branch of the National Association for Music Education (MENC – I know, the acronym is weird, but it's a long boring story). Each year, GMEA sponsors a festival for group and solo music performances at all levels, for all types of groups (band, choruses, orchestras, etc.). During the festival, each group sings prepared music, performs a collective sight reading exam, and gets to see other groups at their age level perform. We receive feedback and scores from a panel of expert judges, and we use that information to help guide our program. Hundreds of schools from all over the country participate in these festivals, and they are a large part of our musical year. Students typically miss most of the day of school to participate, but are responsible for missed work, and benefit immensely from the comments and the opportunity to see and hear other groups like them. Last year, our 6th grade chorus received "Excellent" ratings their first year out, and it's my goal to have all choirs receive "Excellent" or "Superior ratings," each year. Registration and transportation cost the chorus a significant amount of money, which is why I have asked for it in the 'Chorus Fee' outlined below. Please contact me if you have any questions about this beneficial event.

ATTIRE

Believe it or not, how we look makes a difference in what people think of our singing. So, it is traditional and helpful for us to have a consistent appearance on stage. You are free to follow the dress code for daily practice in school. Most of what is required for performance can be found in consignment, Goodwill, or Walmart, for those who are concerned about costs. Here is what is required for each performance:

- ❖ Chorus polo (T-shirt for 6th grade), **tucked in**.
- ❖ Khaki pants (long khaki skirt is fine for girls). These can be any material, as long as they are tan/beige/khaki of some kind in color.
- ❖ Dark socks (brown or black).
- ❖ Dark shoes. Tennis shoes are fine, as are dock shoes (Sperrys), but they **must** be dark (preferably brown or black). No sandals, flip-flops, or open-toed shoes are permitted. Also, no heels and no crocs. All these can be dangerous on performance risers.
- ❖ No jewelry is allowed. Not only does it keep us from looking consistent, it might catch the bright stage lights and distract audience members. This includes earrings, necklaces, rings, bracelets, and any other visible jewelry of any kind.

This is important: if you arrive to a performance without following the rules above, you will not be allowed to sing, and you will receive the same grade for that performance as you would if you had just not shown up.

FEES AND MONEY

Money Matters

At times during the year, chorus parents may need to send money to the chorus program. This could be to pay the fee (see below), to turn in fund raiser money, to pay for the 8th Grade Atlanta trip, to buy a t-shirt or a hoodie, to pay for an activity or event that is outside the chorus (Honor Chorus, All-State, etc.). The funds need to be in cash, money orders, or in checks made out to "EJMS Chorus."

In years past, county tax dollars have helped support the music programs at all Jackson County schools. Unfortunately, as a result of our hard economic times and the district's lack of funds, that support is not available to us for the foreseeable future. Using last year's expenditures, I have estimated the cost of our basic expenses for this coming year, and broken them down below. I am asking each chorus student to pay his or her share of this cost in order to participate; however, **no student will be turned away from Chorus for financial reasons.** For those of you who are rightfully wondering, our fund raiser dollars go toward new music, mid- and long-term capital (music cabinets, posture chairs, etc.), and classroom enhancements like software, wall posters, etc; in other words, toward educational materials. The fees below simply cover our regular "operating expenses" for the year.

If you have difficulty meeting this request, please contact me, and we will work something out. My goal is for every student who wants to participate to have a full, meaningful, and fun year with us. I am available to answer any questions you may have about what each fee covers.

6th Grade Fees

Source of Cost	Fee
Personal Equipment (Pencils, worksheet folder, music folder, etc.)	\$3.00
Large Group Performance Evaluation Annual evaluation (See LGPE in handbook)	\$8.00
Uniform T-shirt Required for most performances	\$10.00
Total:	\$21.00

7th/8th Grade Fees

Source of Cost	Fee
Personal Equipment (Pencils, worksheet folder, music folder, etc.)	\$3.00
Large Group Performance Evaluation Annual evaluation (See LGPE in handbook)	\$8.00
Uniform Polo Required for most performances	\$14.00
Total:	\$25.00

NOTE: Returning 8th Grade Chorus students who still have a fitting performance polo in good condition can omit that portion of the fee schedule. That means, if your shirt is okay, your fee is only **\$11.**

Please submit this fee when you return the signed confirmation page on the front of this handbook. Remember to make checks out to "EJMS Chorus."

FUNDRAISING

Our Fall Fund Raiser kicks off on August 19th. The goal of the fundraiser will be to provide money for new music, software, recording equipment, classroom educational materials and other similar items. It will also help support students whose families may not be able to pay the full chorus fee this year. There are some **much more exciting incentives** this year, and a great product line from Great American. We raised over \$1300 last year, and I expect us to do even better this year. Our county cannot support our program beyond paying the director's salary, so we need support from our community. Our goal for each student will be to sell 5 items. If each student sells at least that many, we will far surpass last year's effort, and ensure that we have the best music and up-to-date learning materials for our year. I will send more information home about the fund raiser in the next week or so.

WEBSITE

Good news! The chorus has a website. It won't be much at first, but it will become a powerful communication and learning tool, and hopefully a fun place for chorus students to go to learn about what's happening in the chorus world. My plan is to post rehearsal tracks (mp3s) for our songs, concert information, help with homework, links to cool sights and choral performances on the web, and plain ol' fun stuff related to music. Check it out here:

<http://www.ejmschorus.wordpress.com>

EXTRA OPPORTUNITIES

Over the course of the year, there are several opportunities for singers in all grades to participate in special events. For instance, 6th graders will be allowed to audition for the GMEA 6th Grade Statewide Honor Chorus in February – I will send the 3 students with the strongest audition. Similarly, 7th and 8th Grade students will have the chance to audition for the GMEA Middle School All-State Chorus in Spring. These students will spend two Saturdays in the Fall audition before expert judges for the chance to be part of that Chorus, and believe me it's worth it! Other opportunities include the District 13 Honor Chorus in October and the 8th Grade trip. Of course, more information will be sent home about all these events as the time for each of them gets closer. Most of them will involve extra costs, but please don't let that discourage you from participating – we have a very supportive community, and for some of these events, the cost is minimal. I hope all chorus students find at least one extra event to go for – the experience alone is worth the effort!

SCHEDULE/IMPORTANT DATES - 2009

We have a busy and exciting year ahead of us. **Please** put these dates on your family calendar:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Required/Optional</u>	<u>Location</u>
Tuesday, August 17	Parents' Meeting	Strongly recommended	6:00 pm – EJMS Cafeteria
Thursday, August 19	Fundraiser Kickoff	Required (students only, in class)	EJMS Chorus Room
Saturday, October 16	All-State 1 st Auditions (7 th , 8 th only)	Optional	Mountain View HS, Lawrenceville
Date TBD	Fall Concert (7 th , 8 th only)	Required (7 th , 8 th only)	Time TBD - EJCHS
Fri-Sat, October 30-31	District Honor Chorus	Optional	Classic Center - Athens, GA
Monday, December 6	Winter Concert I	Required (6 th and 7 th only)	7:00 pm – EJCHS
Thursday, December 9	Winter Concert II	Required (8 th only, with HS)	7:00 - EJCHS
Saturday, January 8	All-State Final Auditions (7 th , 8 th)	Optional	TBD
Fri-Sat, February 5-6	Statewide Honor Chorus (6 th only)	Optional	Clayton County Schools PAC
Thur-Sat, February 25-27 (?)	All-State	Optional	Savannah, GA
Tue-Wed, March 16-17	LGPE	Required (All)	1 st United Methodist, Lawrenceville
Fri-Sat Apr 29-30	Spring Trip (8 th only)	Optional, but awesome	Atlanta, GA
Thursday, May 13	Spring Concert	Required (All)	7:00 pm - EJCHS

Please note that all of the events, times, and locations are subject to change and/or cancellation. I will give plenty of notice in the event of any changes that may need to happen.

PARENT/STUDENT AGREEMENT

It's important for the success of the choral program that all students agree to these expectations and goals. Parents and students, please take time to read the syllabus together and talk about what it means for you. Then, **sign this page and return it to class with payment by Friday, August 27th**. Students who have not returned this agreement will lose participation points for each day it is late!

Student, please complete:

I have read this handbook, and agree to abide by the rules and expectations it contains. I promise to work as hard as I am able, and have fun in the process.

(Print student name)

(Student Signature)

Parent, please complete:

I have read this handbook, and agree to support Mr. Kissel and my child in chorus participation this year. I agree to the expectations for my child, and the consequences determined by the quality of their participation, as outlined above. I commit that my child will be present when required according to the calendar and performance schedule.

(Print parent name)

(Parent signature)

(Parent phone)

(Parent email)

I encourage you to provide both phone and email address, because I often will send information home through students as well as email, and I would like to be able to call with any questions, concerns, or positive comments regarding your child. Thanks!

Chorus Fee & Shirt (6th Grade will automatically receive a T-shirt. All others, a polo.):

Amount enclosed (see page6): _____
(Checks payable to 'EJMS Chorus')

Shirt size: _____
(choose one: Child M, L, Adult S, M, L, XL)

Please help if you are able:

I would like to volunteer to provide support to the choral program in the following way:

Please list any special needs or questions: _____

