

Creekside Intermediate Orchestra

2025-2026 Student/Parent Handbook



I. Course Scopes and Goals

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce the fundamental principles of musicianship and instrumental technique. Through this course students will develop an understanding of musical terminology, musical literature, playing technique, ensemble performance, and concert etiquette. Students will be challenged to carefully examine their own musical ability and strive to improve upon the skills they currently have.

Goals of the Orchestra Program

1. To participate in the actual performance of music and learn the skills of playing an instrument, which will result in the feeling of doing something well.
2. To attain a mastery of the instrument and feel the satisfaction of achieving something worthwhile through concentrated effort.
3. To awaken a sense of creativeness and provide an avenue for self-expression.
4. To develop performance skills necessary for independence as a string player.
5. To elevate students to achieve and surpass the National Music Standards and State Benchmarks set forth by the Music Educators National Conference and the State of Texas.
6. To identify and authentically perform the musical styles which developed throughout history.
7. To develop attitudes enabling one to continue participating in musical experiences throughout one's life.

Statement on Student Success

To succeed in orchestra, each student must demonstrate two things:

- A willingness to improve their musical skills each day
- A work ethic that will improve the entire orchestra and themselves

Diversity Statement

If any student feels that our classroom is in any way uncomfortable, they are strongly encouraged to speak with Mr. Ramsey as soon as possible. Together, we will create an environment in which each of us can grow and learn in a safe place for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, class, level, or physical or mental ability.

Orchestra Ensembles:

Beginning students (1st year players) start in 6th grade after choosing an instrument: violin, viola, cello, or bass. Beginner classes are split by instrument (all violins and violas together, cellos and bass together) and the course focuses on the fundamentals of each specific instrument, how to read and comprehend music, and the historical and cultural impacts of music.

Symphony Orchestra picks up where the beginner class ended the previous year. The orchestra includes all instruments and focuses on concert music and the method book. Students begin to

develop ensemble skills, improve tone and bow control, and refine their fundamental skills. This group will also go to the UIL Concert and Sight Reading contest.

Chamber Orchestra focuses on refining more advanced musical and technical skills. Sometimes, advanced 6th and 7th grade students may be placed in this ensemble because they exhibit the technical skills, musical maturity, and work ethic needed to be in this ensemble. Students are encouraged to try out for region and play solos. This group goes to the UIL Concert and Sight Reading contest.

Note: Students must demonstrate that they can uphold their standing in their respective orchestra class both musically and behaviorally. If the student is not successful, the student may be removed from the orchestra or placed in a different orchestra class at the director's discretion.

II. Classroom Conduct and Operating Procedures

Rules and Expectations

In addition to the rules listed in the Creekside Intermediate handbook, students are expected to demonstrate excellent Musicianship and Rehearsal Etiquette. This includes:

Posture and technique

- Tall spine
- front of chair with feet flat on the floor
- Correct playing technique (Instrument, Bow, Motion)

Rehearsal Etiquette

- Actively works towards ensemble improvement
- Quickly follows spoken and unspoken directions
- Politely helps others (leadership)

Musical Contributions

- Plays their best the entire rehearsal
- Works on individual and ensemble musical details
- Plays many of the notes and rhythms correctly
- Comes prepared with required materials (Ex: Shoulder rest, Music, Pencil)

The following behaviors will receive an immediate consequence and be recorded in the accountability binder:

- Missing instrument (for reasons other than instrument damage/repair)
- Horseplay and throwing objects
- Chewing gum (after warning) and eating/drinking (water is ok)
- Any disrespect towards other students/staff/guests

Consequences include:

- Recording of offense in the accountability binder
- Warning and discussion
- Call/email home
- Detention
- Office referral
- Behavior Contract signed by student, parent, and teacher
- In addition, points may be taken off from the student's bi-weekly Musicianship & Rehearsal Skills grade (see Part III, Musicianship & Rehearsal Skills Grade)

Severe offenses will be handled according to the CIS Student Handbook

Attendance Policy

Orchestra members are required to attend all scheduled rehearsals and performances to maintain an exceptional performance standard. As a cocurricular course, rehearsals and performances are part of the educational process. Absences and tardiness affect not only the individual who is absent but the entire ensemble as well. An absence necessitates repeating educational instruction when the student returns.

An absence will be excused under the following conditions:

- Illness or family emergency with communication in a timely manner (no more than 48 hours after).
- A conflict between two Creekside sponsored activities of the same level (ex: finals game vs. concert)
- For conflicts between Creekside sponsored activities and outside organization events, please contact Mr. Ramsey well in advance to figure out a plan of action.

Before/After School Rehearsal Attendance Policy

*Only before school and after school rehearsals are affected by the attendance policy. For absences during the school day, parents should follow CIS protocol to get an excused absence.

Unexcused absence from rehearsal will result in the student receiving zero points for that rehearsal. Multiple unexcused absences may result in being placed further back in the section or not being allowed to perform at a given concert (an alternate assignment will be given).

An excused absence from rehearsal will require parents to email Mr. Ramsey at least 24 hours before the absence or, in the case of an emergency, within 48 hours following the event. Only an email from a parent will get their student an excused absence.

A student's absence hampers the group's ability to progress as a unified performing ensemble. Therefore, even if excused, one or more absences may result in a lower grade being assigned, the student being placed further back in the section, or the student not being allowed to

perform at a given concert. Mr. Ramsey may decide on appropriate make-up work to help redeem lowered grades.

Performance Attendance Policy

If a student knows they will be absent for a performance, the parent must email Mr. Ramsey at least one week before the absence. Students who have an excused/pre-arranged absence from an orchestra event will receive an alternate assignment that will be due after one week. Students that become ill or have a family emergency within a week of a concert must have their parent email Mr. Ramsey within 48 hours after the concert to have their absence be considered excused. Full credit is extended only to students who arrive no later than the assigned call time, are in the proper uniform, perform at the required performance standard, remain polite and courteous to all who are designated as chaperones/leadership, and who remain in attendance for the entire performance.

An unexcused absence from a mandatory performance will result in a zero in the gradebook. Students will have the opportunity to receive an alternate assignment that is due one week after the absence for half credit.

ISS/OSS/AEP Attendance Policy

If a student is unable to attend a graded rehearsal or performance due to In-School Suspension (ISS) or Out-of-School Suspension (OSS), a parent or guardian must email Mr. Ramsey in order for the absence to be excused. Students assigned to ISS or OSS are not permitted to participate in any orchestra rehearsals, performances, or events until the end of the school day marking the completion of their disciplinary placement.

Students placed in Alternative Education Placement (AEP) will be provided an online curriculum with weekly assignments. While certain assignments may be excused, students will be given alternate assignments for any major grades missed during their placement.

Seating/Chair Placement

Students are seated according to the Advancement Placement Seating (APS) system, which ensures that advanced players are distributed throughout the orchestra to support musical growth and balance. Section leaders are selected not only for their musical ability, but also for their leadership, reliability, and character. In addition to performing at a high level, they serve as role models and take on extra responsibilities. Selection is based on a combination of orchestra and academic grades, work ethic, attitude, and punctuality. Mr. Ramsey reserves the right to adjust seating at any time.

Academic Plans and Behavior Contracts

Students who do not meet academic requirements for the class will be placed on an Academic Plan. The plan details what the student needs to do to meet their individual goals and at what time they will need to show mastery. This plan is meant to assist struggling students and will not show up on any school disciplinary or education record.

Students that consistently do not meet behavioral requirements for the class will be placed on a Behavior contract. Behavior contracts identify specific behaviors students need to change and outline specific consequences for those behaviors. A parent, the student, and Mr. Ramsey will need to attend a conference to sign the behavior contract.

Chamber Orchestra Eligibility Policy

Because Chamber Orchestra performs frequently and for a wide range of audiences and events, its members serve as representatives of the CIS Orchestra program, Creekside Intermediate, and CCISD. As such, students in Chamber Orchestra are held to a higher standard and are expected to consistently demonstrate exemplary behavior, responsibility, and leadership. Any Chamber Orchestra student who fails to meet the expectations outlined in the Behavior Contract—or is assigned to the Alternative Education Program (AEP) for any reason—will face the following consequences:

- Reassignment to Symphony Orchestra at the start of the second semester *or* removal from performance opportunities for the current or upcoming concert cycle.
- The student will be ineligible to attend orchestra field trips and social events for the remainder of the school year.

Additionally, certain performances require students to maintain academic eligibility. Students who are not academically eligible at the time of these events—such as the Winter Tour—will not be permitted to perform and may be assigned an alternative project or written work in its place.

III. Grading Procedures

Grades

A student's nine weeks grade will be determined by a combination of points that they have earned during the grading period. Points will be given in the following three areas. Please note that each area is weighted differently.

Major Grades – 45%

Playing Quizzes

- Playing quizzes provide specific feedback on areas that need improvement. These are more focused and have less criteria than a playing test but serve to prepare students for the playing tests.

Playing Tests

- Each playing test has a standard grading rubric. The students will receive specific feedback on areas needed for improvement on the next test.

Concerts & Performances

- Arrive on time with required supplies and in required dress to receive full credit.

Written Tests

- These tests will assess the knowledge of specific musical facts or other important information in the class.

Long-Term Projects

- These special projects will vary in topic and length. Detailed guidelines of expectations for the project will be given and reviewed in class. If possible, class time will be given to help students complete the assignments. Alternate assignments will be offered when applicable.

Daily Grades: 50%

Playing Check

- Playing checks provide specific feedback on areas that need improvement. These are pass/fail tests. Students will have up to 2 attempts to pass.

Bi-Weekly Musicianship & Rehearsal Skills (MRS) Grade:

- Students receive 100 points every 2 weeks for demonstrating mastery of MRS criteria.
- preparation, participation, and contribution are major factors for MRS grade.

Home Practice Assignments:

- May include goal setting, journal reflection or self-evaluations.
- Canvas Practice Videos

Written Assignments

- Assigned written class work, written homework assignments, written quiz
- Any form or permission slip that must be signed and returned
- Any rehearsal slips that must be signed and returned

Reading - 5%

- Literacy based assignments, vocabulary, and other reading assignments.

Playing Quizzes and Tests

Playing quizzes and tests are designed to assess improvement of the skills and techniques that are taught in class and in preparation for performances. By the time of a given performance, any student who does not achieve the appropriate skill or performance level, as determined by the instructor, may be denied the privilege of performing. If this decision is made, a make-up assignment will be given.

Musicianship & Rehearsal Skills (MRS) Grade

Students earn 100 points every 2 weeks for exhibiting mastery of MRS criteria. You earn 10 points per day (10 points x 5 days x 2 weeks = 100 points). Students must demonstrate the following criteria to receive points:

Posture and technique (3 points)

- Tall spine
- front of chair with feel flat on the floor

- Correct playing technique (Instrument, Bow, Motion)

Rehearsal Etiquette (4 Points)

- Actively works towards ensemble improvement
- Quickly follows spoken and unspoken directions
- Politely helps others (leadership)

Musical Contributions (3 Points)

- Plays their best the entire rehearsal
- Works on individual and ensemble musical details
- Plays many of the notes and rhythms correctly
- Comes prepared with required materials (Ex: Shoulder rest, Music, Pencil)

Students will lose daily points for repeatedly failing to demonstrate mastery of MRS criteria. Each infraction will be recorded in Mr. Ramsey's Accountability Binder. Students are allowed up to three infractions per grading period before disciplinary consequences are assigned, which may include detention, a referral, or placement on a behavior contract.

The following behaviors will receive an immediate consequence and be recorded in the accountability binder:

- Missing instrument (for reasons other than instrument damage/repair)
- Horseplay and throwing objects
- Chewing gum (after warning) and eating/drinking (water is ok)
- Any disrespect towards other students/staff/guests

Fingernail Length

It is a daily expectation that students keep their fingernails trimmed short enough to be able to place their fingertips on the string. Long nails may result in the student being asked to trim their nails in class. With prior notice, if a student must have false nails for a special event, there will be a 2-day grace period before and 2 days after the event. For contests and competitions, long nails will be unacceptable (no exceptions). Maintaining trimmed nails is an essential part of being prepared as a musician. Students who consistently arrive with long nails will lose their "Musical Contribution" MRS points each day until the issue is corrected.

Home Practice

Every student enrolled in the Creekside Intermediate Orchestra program is expected to practice all lessons, skills, techniques, concepts, and concert music taught in class. The minimum acceptable time every student should devote to at-home practice is twenty to thirty minutes per day, 5 days a week. Of course, more practice is always welcome!!!

Late Assignments

The Creekside orchestra program believes punctuality and responsibility are important skills. For assignments that are received after the due date/time, the students will receive 75% of the

original grade for assignments that are received up to two class days after the established due date. Late work received on or after the third-class day will receive no credit (zero).

Students who are absent are given the same amount of time as students who were in class the day of the assignment when they return from the absence.

Extra Help

Mr. Ramsey is available to students in need of assistance. Peer tutoring may also be an option for students who would like extra instruction. Students are encouraged to ask for help or to request appointments for time before/after school or during advisory to obtain any needed assistance.

Academic Eligibility

A student who receives a grade below a 70 at the end of any grading period (after the first nine weeks of the school year) in any academic class (other than an advanced class) or a student with disabilities who fails to meet the standards in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) may not participate in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities include socials, non-graded performances/trips, and honors events. An ineligible student may attend rehearsals and required performances (any event that is graded). The student regains eligibility when the principal and teachers determined that he or she has: (1) earned a passing grade (70 or above) in all academic classes other than advanced placement classes and (2) completed the three weeks of ineligibility and the seven calendar day waiting period. (Please refer to the academic eligibility calendar for these grading periods.)

Other Notes

Students will be expected to maintain knowledge of previously learned music, information, and all performance skills and techniques. After learning is achieved in these areas, the student will be expected to use these skills as a necessary and essential foundation to enhance future learning. Extra credit assignments will be given at the discretion of the instructor.

IV. Materials

Required Items

Items with an * must be brought to class everyday

- *Instrument and bow in good working condition
- *Instrument case with name tag attached
- *Microfiber cleaning cloth
- *Your music and method books
- *3-ring binder (1 inch) for your music
- 25 clear sheet protectors (optional)
- *Two pencils (mechanical is fine)
- Highlighters (optional)
- Rock stop (cellos and bass only)

- *Shoulder rest (violins and violas only)
- *Rosin
- Pencil case/pouch for binder (optional)
- Loose leaf paper in the three-ring binder
- Music stand for home practice
- Metronome (machine or app)
- Tuner (machine or app)

Instrument Care

Students are responsible for taking their instrument home every day to practice. During the day, instruments will be kept in assigned cubbies. Students are expected to care for their instruments and reduce the chance of damages. See the [Instrument Care Guide](#) to see how to keep your instrument safe. Please see Mr. Ramsey if your instrument becomes damaged, sounds weird, or if you are unsure if your instrument is 100% well.

Accessories and Strings

Students are expected to buy their own rosin, shoulder rests, and rock stops. The Creekside orchestra program has extra accessories for emergency use; however students will be charged for these.

Cubbies and Storage

All students will be assigned a cubby at the beginning of the year. Students may only store their instruments and orchestra supplies in these lockers. Please do not store food, shoes, gym clothes or other items not related to orchestra in the storage areas. Note: CCISD does not provide insurance to cover lost or stolen property. Please check with your homeowner's insurance company to inquire about personal instrument insurance.

Performance Attire

All students will be required to purchase an orchestra t-shirt each year. This t-shirt will be the required dress at some concerts and performances. Symphony and Chamber students will wear formal attire to select performances. Ladies will be provided a dress. Ladies will need to supply their own black dress shoes (flats only, no heels). Gentlemen will be provided a suite jacket, cummerbund, and bow tie. Gentleman will need to supply their own white dress shirt, black dress slacks, black socks, and black dress shoes.

It is the student's responsibility to maintain their dress clothes. Formal wear is bought by the program and provided to the students for free. Lost or damaged formal wear will mean diverting funds spent on other aspects of the program to replace the clothes. Please contact Mr. Ramsey if you have uniform problems or need a different size.

V. Miscellaneous (But Important) Items

Private Lessons

Although not required, private lessons give students the opportunity to get more individualized attention on their instrument. With individualized instruction, a student can build the technical skills necessary to become a very proficient performer both alone and in a group. It's amazing to see what students can accomplish with private lessons! Students that take private lessons accel twice as fast as their peers that do not take private lessons. Every student in the Creekside Intermediate program is encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to study privately. You can obtain a list of teachers from the director; please ask Mr. Ramsey for more information.

Luke Yeager Memorial Private Lesson Scholarship

The CIS Orchestra Program is proud to offer the Luke Yeager Memorial Scholarship, a merit-based award that helps cover the cost of private lessons. To apply, students must submit a completed application during the designated window. Recipients are selected by the scholarship committee based on merit, commitment to musical growth, and academic achievement.

- Application opens in August for *Symphony* and *Chamber* students.
- Application opens in November for *Beginner* students.

Orchestra Leadership Program

Both professional and student orchestras function best when there is a “triangular” leadership system in place, with the conductor at the tip of the triangle, and a handful of musicians taking on supportive leadership roles. The purpose of the Orchestra Leadership Program is to provide musical and logistical support to each ensemble and to foster a student-led program that functions at the highest levels of musical excellence and rehearsal efficiency. To apply, students must submit an application and are selected through a peer voting process. Elected members assist with the day-to-day operations of the orchestra program and help organize and run social events.

Student Property/Valuables

Students are not to bring large amounts of money, radios, tape players, cameras, etc. to orchestra. It is the students' responsibility to keep track of glasses, watches, and any other jewelry. Students are responsible for their personal items in the rehearsal area. While not in their hands, instruments should be stored in the appropriate location. Clear Creek Independent School District does not have insurance or any plan that will cover damage, theft, or loss of privately owned equipment. If that equipment is to be covered, it must be through the parents' personal insurance, such as a homeowner's policy, etc. In addition, the director and the school are not responsible for missing or damaged property.

Finances and Fundraising

Each year, the orchestra requires funding for new music, instruments, repairs, classroom supplies, and teaching aids. Only a portion of this budget is funded by the school. The remaining portion of our budget comes in the form of fund-raising and donations. For this reason, it is very essential that each of the members “pull their own weight” financially by participating in the fund-raising activities. Monetary donations are welcome and are fully tax deductible. When paying money to the orchestra, please write the student’s name on each check or envelope.

Each year the orchestra will host a few fundraisers for our students and parents to take advantage of. These opportunities are designed to assist the orchestra to purchase new instruments, repair old instruments, purchase music and educational materials. This may also be used to raise money for special events and trips. Keep in mind that fundraising is not mandatory, but it is highly encouraged since everyone uses school equipment and supplies.

Orchestra Trips

These are fun opportunities for the top orchestras to enjoy both educational and recreational activities outside the classroom. ***These trips are considered a privilege and must be earned by the students.*** A trip will only be scheduled if the director feels that the students have been working to their potential both musically and behaviorally for the entire year. Students who wish to participate in this activity must have a good academic and citizenship record in every class. **Students must earn passing grades and satisfactory behavior EVERY NINE WEEKS.** Students who do not meet these requirements, have shown a record of discipline problems, have missed any required orchestra activities, or owe money to the orchestra will not be allowed to participate. **All decisions about the trip are at the discretion of the director.** Trips are usually scheduled in the spring. Policies regarding travel will be given out prior to any trip.

VI. Parent Involvement

CONGRATULATIONS!!

Your decision to provide your child with a quality education in music is an investment in your child's future. In making it possible for your child to play a musical instrument, you are providing the opportunity for self-expression, creativity and achievement. Numerous studies indicate that parental attitude, support and involvement are important factors in a child's ability to successfully learn to play and enjoy music. Like any skill, interest counts far more than talent. With strong support from you, playing music will become a natural part of your child's life.

Benefits - For the student, music participation enhances: Problem solving, Goal-Setting, Physical Coordination, Self-confidence and esteem, Poise, Teamwork, Self-expression, Memory skills, Concentration, and much more!

For the family, music participation offers opportunities for shared family experiences, including:

musical event attendance, family music making, performing for, and with, family and friends, learning about the lives of composers and the cultural heritage of many civilizations, a sense of accomplishment and pride for the entire family.

How to fit in - Always keep in mind that your support is an essential element in your child's success with music study.

Schedule Practice Times - Music achievement requires effort *over a period of time*. The time in orchestra rehearsal is limited. New concepts learned at school need daily personal practice time by your child at home in order for these new skills to be developed. You can help your child by:

- Providing a quiet place in which to practice
- Remaining nearby during practice times as often as possible
- Scheduling a consistent daily time for practice
- Praising your child's efforts and achievements.

What to do - To give your child the best possible support, you should:

- Remind your child to bring instrument and music to orchestra class
- Encourage your child to play for family and friends
- Offer compliments and encouragement regularly
- Expose your child to a wide variety of music, including concerts and recitals
- Encourage your child to talk with you about classes
- Make sure your child's instrument is always well maintained
- Listen to your child practice, and acknowledge improvement
- Help your child build a personal music library
- Make certain that your child is on time for all school rehearsals and performances
- Encourage your child to make a commitment to his or her music studies
- If at all possible, obtain private lessons with a qualified instructor
- Get to know your child's teachers

What to avoid

- Using practice as a punishment
- Insisting your child play for others when he/she doesn't want to
- Ridiculing or making fun of mistakes of less-than-perfect playing

To maintain your child's interest

- Talk with your child if his or her interest begins to decline
- Increase your enthusiasm and involvement in your child's playing

Parent Volunteers and Chaperones

The orchestra is always looking for parents to help with fundraisers, concerts, receptions, uniforms, video taping, etc. If you are available to volunteer, please sign up for our new "String Squad" at Parent Night, or send us an email of interest. All parent volunteers all year must have cleared the CCISD volunteer database available at: <https://www.ccisd.net/volunteer-mentor>

VII. Calendar of Events

The calendar of events and rehearsal calendar can be found on Canvas. Additional events may be added. Mr. Ramsey will notify orchestra families when events are added to the calendar. Thank you for your flexibility.

VIII. Communication

All information will be sent through skyward. Please make sure you have an updated email address in skyward.

Communication

Mr. Liam Ramsey-White
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Creekside Intermediate

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