

Downing MS Choir Handbook

Let me take this opportunity to welcome all of our students and their parents to an exciting school year in choir. I want to assure you that I am committed to providing a successful and well-rounded choral experience for your child. Downing Choir has established a history of excellence, and I know this year we will build upon that with future success!

Although this will be a busy and challenging year, I know it will be rewarding to all involved. Participation in the DMS choir program will provide your child with a well-rounded foundation of vocal technique, music theory, and sight-reading skills. Our students will learn both challenging and fun choral literature in a variety of styles, and will have chances to compete in festivals both in and outside of LISD.

This handbook is designed to introduce you to my expectations and to provide you with information regarding the procedures, grading, eligibility, private lessons, uniforms, fees, fundraising, festivals, and a calendar of activities and concerts. Take the time to read this as a family, and then keep this as a reference throughout the year. Please understand there is a lot of information in this handbook, but it is all very important, so take the time to read it *thoroughly*. As the year progresses, any additions or changes will be provided to you via your child, e-mails, and the choir website.

Thank you so much for your support of music education and fine arts. You are a valued part of this choral program and I know your involvement is one of our greatest assets. Your first opportunity to support your child and our program is our Parent and Booster Club meeting on **Thursday, August 31st, from 6:30- 7:00 p.m.** in the DMS choir room. We will be reviewing the year's events and answering questions that you might have. I hope to see all of you there!

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to direct and get to know such wonderful and talented young people.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Rybowicz, Director
rybowiczk@lisd.net
972-350-1457
www.downingchoir.org

Purpose

The Downing Middle School Choirs are yearlong credit courses. They are open to all students who are interested in singing. Choir will provide them with a foundation for vocal technique, music theory, and sight-reading skills. Our desire is to instill a life-long love for all music.

Goals

1. To promote, provide, and encourage interest and participation in choral music.
2. To develop individual vocal skills and technique, and understand its relation to the choral ensemble.
3. To increase confidence in creative self-expression.
4. To promote the value of effort, cooperation, teamwork, dedication, and self-discipline.
5. To promote a sense of pride in the school and choir program.
6. To help our students become better people both inside and outside of school through character building in the choir classroom.
7. To promote the use of technology in the arts.

We will spend time focusing on values and guidelines such as respect, teamwork, self-discipline, self-motivation, responsibility, integrity, kindness, hard work, and trust. Choir is about much more than singing; it is about developing our students' character and becoming great citizens.

Classroom Guidelines

Although I will be going over these rules with your child, I want to make you aware of the expectations for behavior in the DMS choral program. It is my belief that any organization that strives to be successful must also have high expectations for behavior. These expectations are a priority in all activities.

1. Be in your seat with your materials when the bell rings.
2. Gum, food, candy, or drinks are for designated special occasions only.
3. Leave all bags, purses, etc. in the designated area inside the choir room. These items are NOT to be taken onto the risers.
4. No grooming in the choir room.
5. Get water and go to the bathroom before class begins. Students should always expect to be able to use the bathroom in an emergency, but frequent absence from class could affect their grade. Please use the bathroom before class during your passing periods. Plan ahead! If I can do that, so can you.
6. Stay in your place during class, unless you have asked permission to get up from your seat. Getting up without permission is both disrespectful and distracting.

7. Do not talk when the director or any other adult is talking.
8. The equipment and items inside the choir office and choir room are not for your use without permission. No student should be in the fine arts area including the choir room, storage room, and choir office without the director present.
9. All other rules and policies as outlined in the LISD student code of conduct handbook.

I have high expectations that choir students will practice courtesy and respect in dealing with other students, the directors, and our choir music/supplies.

Consequences

If a student fails to follow one or more classroom rules, the director is assuming they have **temporarily forgotten** what the rules are. The director is more than willing to remind students of what they have forgotten. After several reminders, however, it becomes apparent to the director that a student's "I forgot" is really an "I don't care."

Be aware that repeated reminders will be viewed by the director as an "I don't care" and could result in parent conferences, detention, disciplinary referrals, removal from choir trips and activities, and permanent removal from the choir program at the discretion of the director and principal.

Music and Folder Responsibilities

1. Take care of your folder and music appropriately. Do not tear up your choir folder or music, as it will be viewed as destruction of school property. Regular wear and tear is expected.
2. Specific iPad apps are used in choir. Remain vigilant in using and keeping these apps on your iPad.
3. Keeping track of your music and keeping your materials organized is a part of being a responsible musician. Materials in your folder should be neat and organized.
4. Don't remove or look through anyone else's binder, and never write on anyone else's binder or music.
5. Keep track of your pencil and highlighter- these should remain inside your folder.
6. Only use pencil when marking music, never pen or marker.
7. Highlighters *may* be used on photocopies.
8. Folders will be put away in an assigned slot at the end of every rehearsal. A choir folder is NOT to go home with a student unless given specific permission. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of the folder and its contents.
9. Materials left out will result in a consequence. As responsible students, you are expected to do your part to keep the choir room clean and to respect our facilities.

10. Random folder and iPad checks will occur at the director's discretion for a grade, and consequences will be given for missing music and apps, inappropriate care of the music, or inappropriate marks inside the folder or on music.

Eligibility

Certain activities are classified as eligibility activities. The DMS staff enforces all eligibility policies. Texas Education Agency has a specific list of activities that are eligibility activities, which include competitions, activities that charge an admission fee, and pep rallies. For more information about eligibility see UIL-TEA side-by-side which can be viewed through the TEA website or the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) website (www.tmea.org).

Maintaining eligibility is the student's responsibility. Students must have a grade of 70 or above in all classes, including P.E., athletics, electives and academic classes on both their progress reports and report cards to remain eligible. Students who are ineligible will continue to rehearse during their choir class, before and after school, and participate in curricular performances to earn their choir grade. *Ineligible students may not travel with the choir or participate in extracurricular activities.*

Grading/Absence Policies

LISD has established district-wide instructional objectives that relate to the mandated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for grade levels subjects and courses. These objectives are aligned to address the academic skills needed for successful performance in the next grade or course in a sequence of courses. All of our assignments, tests, projects, classroom activities and concerts are designed so that the student's performance indicates the level of mastery of the designated District objectives. The student's mastery level of these objectives is a major factor in determining the grade they earn.

In accordance to LISD policy, all "excused" absences will be honored with no grade penalty. "Unexcused" absences from a sectional, rehearsal, or performance will lower a student's course grade as follows:

1. Rehearsals and sectionals are course requirements that require interaction from members of a group and cannot be made up. Therefore an "unexcused" absence from a before or after school rehearsal will effect your grade. These rehearsals are not scheduled often, and you will be provided with information for these rehearsals well in advance. I will try to keep these rehearsals to an absolute minimum. I am very conscious of your busy schedule and the inconvenience that these rehearsals may create. *Working ahead of time with the directors of your other activities, especially outside of school, will greatly help eliminate conflicts.*

2. Performances are a culmination of group course requirements and cannot be made up. Therefore, an “unexcused” absence from a scheduled performance will reflect a grade of “zero” to be averaged into the student’s nine weeks performance grade. If a student is consistently absent, he/she may receive a failing grade for the course. *An “excused” absence may be made up with another assignment.*

Communication between the director, student, and parents can prevent misunderstandings. Please notify me at the **earliest** possible time of any expected absence or emergency that might prevent your child from being at scheduled activities.

1. Written notice from parents is required for all absences from required choir activities. Email IS acceptable and is the quickest way to communicate; verbal or student written notices will not be acceptable.
2. Advance notice is required if you already have prior commitments. A prior commitment is defined as a date already committed to before the choir schedule/handbook is released. A notice of such a commitment should be sent to the director as soon as the schedule/handbook is received.
3. Great effort will be made to assure that choir performances and rehearsals do not conflict with other school activities. Some of these conflicts cannot be avoided, but we will try to keep them to a minimum. If these conflicts should arise, the sponsors of each activity will do our best to make adjustments as necessary.
4. In the case of illness and/or family emergency, the parents should send a written notice to the director as soon as they are aware that a situation exists. Illness that does not result in an absence from school will be excused at the director’s discretion. If there is a family emergency situation that happens at a time when appropriate notice is impossible, please follow up with a written note as soon as possible. This is the **ONLY** category where absences will be excused the same day, or after the event.
5. Students who have an *excused* absence from a performance will be given the opportunity to do a make-up assignment provided by the director.

The student’s grade will be averaged as follows:

1. 50 % - Daily Grade and Participation (Weekly)
 - The student will be on task and focused during rehearsals.
 - The student will have folder, music and pencil.
 - The student will give an effort expected of the director so that the student will be successful in learning his/her part.
 - The student will mark music and take notes as needed.

Examples for common deductions are, but are not limited to:

- food, gum, candy, drinks at unacceptable times
- tardiness
- not having music/folder/pencil/iPad with required apps
- not putting folder in in designated spot at the end of class
- talking
- misbehaving
- excessive redirection
- inappropriate attitude

2. 40 % - Performances and Rehearsals

- The student will receive a grade for each performance during a grading period. If no public performance occurs during a grading period, the performance grade will be based upon classroom performances determined by the director.
- Performances will be counted as exams.
- An unexcused absence will cause a dramatic reduction in the student's grade.

3. 10 %- Assignments/ Tests

- Assignments are varied throughout the year.
- A major component of this is sight-reading which will be tested and documented throughout the year. The student is expected to make improvement in sight-reading as the year progresses as deemed acceptable by the director.

Sacred Music

The American Choral Directors Association, in conjunction with legal professionals, has addressed the selection of sacred music in public schools in a policy statement. All choral music selected at Downing Middle School conforms to this statement. This statement is available upon request. When selected, sacred music is studied and performed for its inherent beauty of structure and form; its' purpose in study is learning for the sake of developing artistic understanding and responsiveness.

Videos

Movies, musicals, performances, and documentaries may be shown periodically throughout the year. These videos are either to reinforce material being covered in class, or for the student to benefit from seeing another musical style.

Medical Release

All students must complete the Downing medical release form.

Choir Website

We have a choir website! I will post resources and information on our choral program, as well as weekly updates on what we are doing. I would like to post pictures of our choir students on our website. Please fill out the form in the back of the handbook indicating your preference on your child's picture being posted. Check us out!

www.downingchoir.org

Uniforms

Uniforms are worn for all performances and all students are expected to perform in **complete uniform**. If for any reason you are not able to afford the uniform requirements, please contact the director.

6TH GRADE GIRLS AND 6TH GRADE GUYS CHOIRS

- Black skirt (at or below knee), black dress pants, or black gauchos. (Provided by student)
- No jeans (unless specifically allowed)
- White short-sleeved or long-sleeved shirt (not a t-shirt, and not sleeveless) (Provided by student)
- Black shoes (no flip-flops)
- No jewelry

7/8TH GRADE MEN'S CHOIRS

- Black dress pants
- Black dress shirt (\$20). We will order the shirt when school begins.
- Black tie (\$5). We will order the shirt when school begins.
- Black socks, black dress shoes, and black belt.
- No jewelry
- No cologne

7/8TH GRADE WOMEN'S CHOIRS

- Black Concert Dresses (\$35). We will rent these when school begins.
- Black dress shoes with a back, or a back strap. Please avoid heels that are higher than 2".
- Nude hose, if any
- No jewelry

*** Each student will receive a DMS choir t-shirt to be worn for special events and our spring show. When we wear these t-shirts, they will be required to wear jeans.

Choir Officers

Choir officers are elected by their classmates on the basis of leadership, service, and participation in the choir program. These students are expected to exhibit outstanding behavior, excellent leadership, and a positive attitude at all times. In choosing your officers, remember that popularity is not the most important criteria! Your student leaders should above all exhibit a desire to serve the needs of our choirs. Each class will have at least 2 officers to represent their choir.

1. President- (must be an 8th grader)
 - represent the choir in all school functions
 - serve as the "right-hand" to the director
 - is willing to help the director in accomplishing tasks to help the choir program run smoothly
 - may be asked to speak at choir concerts, or be given other tasks to help at concerts and events
2. Vice-President- (one for each class)
 - help the Director and President accomplish tasks to help the choir program run smoothly
 - serve as a representative for their class
 - in charge of in-class activities (big sister/ little sister, etc)
3. Secretary- (one for each class)
 - help with all clerical work involved with their class
 - keep track of tardies and absences from class and other choir functions
 - check for ID's
4. Historian- (one for each class)
 - responsible for taking pictures of all choir groups, which means attending all choir functions
 - help prepare a scrapbook to showcase our year
5. Stage Crew- (3-5 total)
 - responsible for setting up and tearing down of choir concerts
 - must be able to handle all equipment with care and respect
6. Section Leaders- (chosen by the Director)

- lead sectionals as needed- especially during District/Region rehearsals during class
- act as a leader during any contest/competition for their section

*Remember that being an officer is a privilege and responsibility, not a right. Therefore, the director may remove and replace any officer at their discretion for inappropriate behavior or attitude. Do not accept an officer position unless you are committed for the year.

Group Activities

Concerts

Choir concerts demonstrate what the students have learned in class, and are the culminating event of a unit of study. Parent attendance is very important, and I invite you to come to all of our choir events. The choir is greatly affected when even one member is absent, therefore, every student is expected and required to be at all rehearsals, concerts and contests throughout the year. Please refer to the absence policy if you have any questions.

U.I.L. Choral Competition

The choirs in each region compete for a rating, dependent upon a standard of excellence in both a stage performance with learned repertoire, and sight-reading with a piece of music they will read for the first time.

Bel Canto Sectional Attendance

Bel Canto Choir members will attend one section rehearsal per week. Attendance is mandatory and will be graded based on punctuality and participation. Students will often be tested on music and other assignments during this time. Points will be deducted from a student's sectional grade for tardiness. A student will be counted as late if they are not seated in their chair and are warming up at the designated time.

Individual Activities

Private Voice Lessons

In addition to individual choir classes, students may elect to participate in private voice lessons with an expert teacher. These lessons are an enrichment activity designed to further individual vocal skills, and prepare for both District and Region choir activities and Solo and Ensemble competition. I *highly encourage* you to consider taking advantage of this opportunity. Most lessons occur during class, but you can choose to have a before or after school lesson. The costs are as follows:

Degreed Teacher - \$ 20.00 (30 min. lesson)

\$ 17.00 (22 min. lesson during class)

We endeavor to offer voice lessons to all students; therefore financial assistance is available to those with need it at a 60/40 rate. If interested, please contact Mrs. Rybowicz for a voice lessons financial assistance form.

Solo & Ensemble Contest

Students who choose this activity will perform a solo in a closed setting for a judge and receive a helpful critique and rating. *There is a small entry fee to participate in this event.* This activity is open to all choir students, and students can prepare in class and/or in their voice lessons. More information on this contest will be sent home in the spring.

All-District and All-Region Choir

Students who choose this activity will audition before a panel of judges in a *blind* audition with a pre-determined set of songs. Students will have time before the audition to prepare the songs. The judges will rank the students anonymously, and the top students will be selected for the All-District (6th grade) or All-Region (7th/8th grade) Choir. This is a great opportunity for the students to be rewarded for their hard work, and to perform on a concert with the top singers in the area.

*** Music will be provided for each audition.

Choir Booster Club

Downing MS is fortunate to have booster clubs supporting our athletics and fine arts departments. The Choir Booster Club this year will be an important and integral part of our success. Our board consists of:

Marsha Fields - President
Mary Davis - Vice President
Mike Davis - Treasurer
Elizabeth Wells - Secretary
Lara Golwas - Uniform Committee
Christina McIntyre – Hospitality Committee
Nicki Henry – Fundraising Committee

We need several parent volunteers who would be willing to take control of some Booster Club responsibilities:

Audit Committee

If you are willing to help in other ways, please contact us immediately.

In addition to the Booster Club, we will need support from parent volunteers throughout the year for various events, including chaperoning contests and trips and concert support. If you are interested in any of these volunteer positions, please complete the Volunteer form included. I hope you will consider making this year a success by offering your help.

Fundraising

With the reality of our budget needs, fundraising is a necessity. The primary need of our choir fees are to fund the spring trips and contests, however, money from our fees also help pay for contest fees, equipment, scholarships, uniforms, purchasing music for the choral library, and other fees that are incurred throughout the school year.

There will be other opportunities to earn money throughout the year, but they will not involve a brochure sale of products. You will be notified of these events throughout the year via your child. **Any ideas or suggestions are welcome!**

Choir Fees

A financial commitment is essential from each student for a successful year in choir. Below is a list of items that the choir fee helps to cover.

Choir fees will be **\$90 per student**. \$45 is due on September 8th, and the remaining \$45 will be due on October 6th, or you may pay it in full. It is extremely important to pay the choir fees in order for the choir to function. We have financial aid available for students who can't meet this requirement. Please contact Mrs. Rybowicz immediately if financial costs are a concern. Money will never be a reason for your child to not be as involved as they want! ALL CHECKS SHOULD BE MADE TO: Downing Choir Boosters

Your choir fee covers the following:

1. T-shirt
2. Folder/ music/ pencil
3. Operating expenses
4. Accompanist fees
5. Clinicians
6. Buses
7. All- District fees and music
8. All- Region fees and music
9. UIL competition fees
10. Financial help with extracurricular activities
11. Six Flags trip (partial)
12. Sandy Lake Trip
13. iPad apps