

**Department of**

**Choral Activities**

**Choir Handbook**

2017-2018

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**Department**

**of Choral Activities**

Dear Choir members and parents,

I am very excited about your decision to participate in the rich heritage of musical excellence at Northwest through our school’s Choral Department! Congratulations on your decision to join what is already a great musical organization. TOGETHER, we have the opportunity to build a program that will allow us all to grow in maturity, responsibility and musical ability. The Northwest High School Choral Program will provide opportunities that encompass a wide scope of expression and allows everyone a chance to reach the highest possible level of success.

Our goals for this year are to become independent musicians and students, to use correct vocal technique, to learn to work as a team, to develop leadership skills, and to sing expressively and accurately. In order to reach these goals, we must stay focused, be prepared, and make each day count!

Parental support is strongly encouraged! Parents will have a number of opportunities to become involved in your student’s success, and I will work diligently to find ways for you to support the choral program in a way that will fit in with your home and work schedules.

The following handbook outlines how we can set ourselves up for success this year. Please read through it in its entirety, detach and return the Choral Handbook Agreement Form as well as the parent information sheet by **Friday, August 18th**. Students, by following the guidelines stated in this handbook, you can enjoy success as a singer and student while avoiding unnecessary confusion about policies and procedures.

I look forward to working with each of you! Go Vikings!

Sincerely,

Michael P. Johnson

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**Mission**

The Northwest High School Choral Department is devoted to the cultivation of the choral art, developing vocal technique, musicianship, and music literacy by studying music theory, analyzing and performing a variety of music representing numerous musical styles and genres, and by performing a variety of programs at the school and in the community, including participation in choral festivals, adjudicated events and various choral and vocal competitions.

**Goals**

* Study and perform quality literature.
* Demand a disciplined, professional approach in rehearsal and performance.
* Provide a well-rounded musical experience, including knowledge of music history, musical terminology, listening experiences in a variety of genres, and a strong foundation in music literacy.
* Integrate music into other disciplines of study.
* Properly use and take care of the vocal mechanism.
* Learn and apply performance skills, audition techniques, and concert etiquette.
* Develop leadership skills.
* Encourage and build upon students’ strengths and talents.
* Build students’ self-esteem and confidence.
* Create a friendly and accepting choral family.

**Communication**

Communication is most effective when it is proactive, collaborative, and cordial. Email is the fastest and easiest way to reach Mr. Johnson (michael.johnson@cmcss.net).

A **Gig Sheet** is usually passed out to students a week or so in advance of a concert or other performance, and will outline details for each event.

An emailed **Newsletter** is sent out periodically, more frequently in close proximity to performances.

**Remind101** is a text service you can sign up for such that allows Mr. Johnson to send reminders to students/guardians about upcoming events/policies.

**It is the student’s and parents’ responsibility** to check Remind101, email and the website regularly. If your contact information changes, please notify Mr. Johnson as soon as possible. Parents, please feel free to contact Mr. Johnson anytime about your student’s progress in class – I’m happy to discuss ways we can work together to make his/her experience a good one!

The **Website** for all Northwest High School choirs is currently under construction and should be up and running soon. This will hopefully become an excellent resource for both students and parents as it will provide rehearsal materials, upcoming dates, and any new and prevalent information that arises throughout the year.

You can locate the Choir website at: **www.nwhschoir.com**

Please take note, I fervently believe that communication is one of the most important aspects of any successful endeavor. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me in whatever way necessary if there is information that you need, or if you need to discuss something with me. I want to make sure that all lines of communication remain open at all times, for all of those involved with choir at Northwest.

**Ensembles**

**Viking Choir**

Un-auditioned – Grades 9 through 12

Viking Choir is a mixed group of freshmen through senior students. This choir is an un-auditioned choir that is open to all who are interested regardless of ability. This choir is not merely just a class offered in order to fill a slot on a schedule, but is rather meant to provide a starting point for those who are interested in simply singing in a choir, learning about how to operate in a musical ensemble, or for those students who have singing experience and are looking to advance that experience in the group setting. This choir performs three concerts throughout the school year and encourages participation in various competitions and adjudications that become available to them.

**Aria Vocal Ensemble**

Audition Only – Grades 9 through 12

The Aria Vocal Ensemble is a female only group of freshmen through seniors. This ensemble is an auditioned ensemble that seeks strong female voices capable of performing various genres of music. Aria traditionally performs in four programs throughout the school year including a show choir program alongside the Mainstream Vocal Ensemble in the Spring. All of those who participate in Aria are expected to participate in Mid-state/All-state auditions, Middle Tennessee Vocal Association adjudications and competitions, Choir Fest through Austin Peay State University, Quad State Choral Festival and the National Orpheus Vocal Competition, as well as various other festivals, competitions and adjudications deemed appropriate by the director.

**Mainstream Vocal Ensemble**

Audition Only – Grades 9 through 12

The Mainstream Vocal Ensemble is a mixed group of freshmen through seniors. This ensemble is an auditioned ensemble that seeks competent voices of various singing abilities, mainly those voices with music reading, performance, dance, and singing experience. Mainstream traditionally performs in four programs throughout the school year including a show choir program alongside the Aria Vocal Ensemble in the Spring. All of those who participate in Mainstream are expected to participate in Mid-state/All-state auditions, Middle Tennessee Vocal Association adjudications and competitions, Choir Fest through Austin Peay State University, Quad State Choral Festival and the National Orpheus Vocal Competition, as well as various other festivals, competitions and adjudications deemed appropriate my the director.

**Repertoire**

Repertoire for each ensemble will encompass all periods of music history and all styles associated with the Western Classical tradition as well as various pop, jazz, swing, and Broadway musical selections. Because choral music as a genre has its beginnings in the church, many of the texts we sing will be religious in nature. This is **NOT** in an effort to endorse nor denounce any particular theological message. Rather, all music is chosen for its ***artistic*** and ***musical*** benefits to the individual and ensemble. With this in mind, students are expected to artistically understand and perform music with texts from a variety of authors, even if they do not explicitly approve of the message.

**Classroom Materials**

All ensemble music will be provided to each choir member. All materials given to students will be assigned a value; fines will be assessed for any materials not returned at the conclusion of a performance cycle.

All students are required to purchase a **one-inch, black, three-ring binder**, required at each rehearsal. Do not purchase a folder that has sheet pockets on the outside as this provides a glare in stage performance lighting. This folder is for choral music and notes only and should not be used for other classes. With the exception of home practice and out-of-school performances, the folder is to stay in your assigned numbered slot in the choir room. Do not mark on the outside of your choral folder as we will use it for performances.

A **pencil** (not a pen) is required at each rehearsal. Mechanical pencils are preferred as they do not require sharpening. You will need some notebook paper in your choral binder for notes. It is suggested that you purchase small strips of Velcro at the beginning of the year, and permanently attach a pencil to your binder for fail-safe access.

**Choir Fees/Fundraising**

**Music Fee**

Each choir and general music student is required to pay a **$10** music fee, **due Friday, September 22nd.** This fee helps to defray costs such as the purchasing of music. Students who take advantage of a free or reduced lunch benefits must confidentially speak with Mr. Johnson to cover the required fees. Please do not hesitate to speak to me in private about this issue. Conversations of this nature remain confidential.

**Choir Fee**

An additional **$10** fee will be taken to cover production costs of show choir materials. This means that students participating in choir will pay $20 total between the **Music Fee** and the **Choir Fee.** This total is **due by Friday, September 22nd.**

**Philosophy surrounding Choir Fees**

No student will be turned away from participating in Northwest Choirs because of financial hardship or inability to pay choir fees. We adhere to an inclusive philosophy, encouraging participation and working with families to devise a plan that includes a combination of delayed payments and aggressive fundraising. Parents can confidentially and freely speak with Mr. Johnson should they have any concerns.

**Additional Fees**

Additional choral opportunities, such as MTVA auditions, participation in Honor Choirs, Choir Fest, Field Trips, festivals, competitions, etc, may require additional fees to cover participation, registration, etc.

**Money/Payments**

Checks should be made out to *Northwest High School* and will be deposited immediately in the school accounts by the NWHS bookkeeper. All money should be paid in check/money order (cash a last resort) so that appropriate records will be in place and payments can be easily tracked. If the last name on the check is different than that of the student, please put the student’s name in the “memo” line. All cash payments will receive a receipt.

**Fundraising**

The annual budget for the NWHS Choirs exceeds $7,500, so music and choir fees only account for a small portion of the moneys needed to run a program of high caliber. Therefore, it is necessary that we have fundraisers to cover these costs. Your participation in the NWHS Choirs comes with the understanding that you will help to raise these funds or make donations in lieu of fundraising.

As our program continues to take on many required costs such as purchase of sheet music, piano tuning and maintenance, as well as paying for accompanists and choreographers, the students in the department will continue to sell Butterbraid pastries, bring and sell concessions at Open Mic Night, participate in various car washes throughout the year as well as selling tickets to our Spring Cabaret show. There will be several opportunities to help with fundraising throughout this school year and I urge parents and students to do your best to do your part in raising the necessary funds to run a world class choral program.

Believe me, **ALL** of your efforts are greatly appreciated and are not taken for granted.

**Concert Attire**

One never gets a second chance to make a first impression. A uniform look contributes to the overall quality of any ensemble. Each student is expected to purchase formal concert attire for concerts and other performances. Students who are not wholly in proper and presentable performance attire will have points deducted from their grade and may not be allowed to perform.

While Choir Fees can be reduced for students on Free and Reduced Lunch, **attire expectations cannot be waived**. **Speak with Mr. Johnson to devise a plan to meet these costs if funds are not readily accessible.**

**Viking Choir Concert Attire**

Black dress shoes

Black pants or **floor length** black skirt

Black dress shirt or blouse

* Women’s shoes must have a heel **no higher** than 2 inches.
* In pursuit of visual unity, jewelry is not appropriate and should not be worn in performances. **NONE.**
* Hair should be nicely styled and secured out of the face without any distracting barrettes, bows or ribbons, etc.

**Aria and Mainstream Ensembles**

Attire will be ordered in the first few weeks of school and will be the same for each ensemble. Therefore, an investment you make as a freshman will yield benefits all four years! Specific information regarding alterations, etc. will be given during class.

For participation in October, December and May Concerts, as well as all adjudications, festivals, honor choirs, etc., the following attire is required:

**Women: Due August 28th**

Long black concert dress (provided by choir)

($35 for the school year)

Pearl necklace – 24-28 inches; 5-6mm diameter

Additional items needed by each student:

Black, closed-toe dress shoes

Black Panty Hose/Stockings

* No perfume
* No other jewelry except that mentioned above.
* Women’s shoes must have a heel **no higher** than 2 inches.
* Hair should be nicely styled and secured out of the face without any distracting barrettes, bows or ribbons, etc.
* Dresses should be hemmed to ½ inches above the floor **while** wearing the shoes you will be performing in.

\**At the conclusion of the year, women should dry-clean their dresses and return to the choir, labeled and in dry-cleaners’ plastic covering with receipt attached.*

**Men: Due August 28th**

Tuxedo (pants, coat, cummerbund, bow-tie)

($35 for the school year)

Studs and cufflinks

Additional items needed by each student:

White tuxedo shirt

Black dress shoes

Black socks

Plain white undershirt

* No cologne
* Earrings can be worn with director approval only; no hanging hoops or dangling pieces.

\**At the conclusion of the year, men should dry-clean their tuxedo and return to the choir, labeled and in dry-cleaners’ plastic covering with receipt attached.*

**Performances**

All performances are mandatory. **Failure to attend a performance or dress rehearsal will result in failing that grading period.** Notify parents, coaches, employers, etc. as soon as you are informed of a concert performance. There is no excuse for not knowing about a performance. **IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW ABOUT CONCERT DATES AND INFORM ALL PARENTS/COACHES OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS.** All efforts will be made to accommodate students with school-related conflicts, however it is imperative to notify Mr. Johnson and the sponsor of the other activity as soon as a conflict arises so a suitable alternative can be determined. Failure to notify Mr. Johnson of a conflict in a timely manner (*at least* two weeks in advance) might result in an inability to solve scheduling problems.

**Call times** are concert-specific but are usually an hour before the performance time. The scheduled call time is when *rehearsal* begins, therefore students should arrive in full concert dress at least ten minutes early for roll call. Tardiness has an extremely adverse effect on concert grades; the first minute late will result in a 15% deduction from the grade with 1% taken off for each additional minute late. Call times are in the performance location and for students only – no parents or friends, please! **Students who do not yet drive** are still held to this tardy policy, so it is your responsibility to find a ride to events. **In most cases**, the choir room will remain open after school for those wishing to stay on a weekday after school for performances only.

In short, being a part of a performing arts class involves co-curricular requirements that are a part of your grade! Be proactive in maintaining a personal calendar with your dates for family, church, sports, choir, etc! Stay on top of these things and communicate about any potential conflicts! **You’re in high school – this is your job too!**

Performance is a privilege, not a right. Mr. Johnson can forbid you from performing if you fail to meet classroom requirements of professionalism and/or musical preparation. If a student is forbidden to perform, attendance at the concert in full concert dress is still mandatory with a non-performance additional assignment required.

**Classroom Procedures**

**Rules**

1. No gum, food, or drink other than bottled water.
2. No mobile devices are to be seen or heard without the prior consent of the director.
3. Respect the rights and property of others, keeping hands and feet to yourselves.
4. Do not talk while another person, including the teacher, has the floor.
5. Maintain a respectful and accepting attitude of **ALL** people involved in the choral department. This means even respecting people who are not involved in your specific choir. We ARE a family!

**Consequences**

1. Conference with student.
2. Parent Contact.
3. One day of Supervised Study before or after school.
4. Two days of Supervised Study before or after school.
5. Administrator referral.

*Each infraction of the classroom rules will be documented.*

**Restroom Breaks**

Please take care of restroom issues during class breaks. No restroom passes will be granted for the entire class period without written documentation from a medical professional. There will be one emergency pass granted to each student per semester. All other trips to the restroom, excluding dire emergencies, will result in a possible deduction of participation points, or will require one day of supervised study before or after school.

**Grading**

Chorus grades will be composed of the following: written assignments and presentations, written tests, written and vocal quizzes, rehearsal and daily participation as well as participation in concerts.

**Grading Scale:**

A: 93-100 B: 85-92 C: 75-84 D: 70-74 F: 0-70

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

15% Written tests and quizzes

15% Vocal tests and quizzes

15% Written assignments and presentations

55% Daily participation and concert attendance

**Singing Tests**

Students will be assessed individually at least once each grading period. Students will enter a practice room individually and sing an assigned excerpt or sight-reading example with a CD/Sound File. All singing tests will be recorded during choir class and graded at a later time by Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson will be the only person to watch/listen to the videos. Practice sound files will be available for download from the choir website; all singing tests will use identical sound files to fully-prepare students for the experience. It is the student’s responsibility to request a CD copy of the sound files if a computer at home is not available to access the website.

**Final Exam**

If a student attends **all** performances AND meets the exam exemption policies outlined by NWHS, he/she can be exempt from the final exam.

**Choral Professionalism**

One of the goals of NWHS Choirs is to give students the experience of being a professional musician. This includes having all class materials, maintaining an accessible and orderly music folder, keeping proper singing posture, and encouraging a rehearsal atmosphere conducive to success. In general, we want to represent ourselves in rehearsal and performance as the world-class performing ensemble you are.

Professional musicians are expected to give 100% each day and conduct themselves according to high professional and artistic standards; students in NWHS Choirs are expected to do the same:

* Be in your seat and attentive **within one minute from the bell** with all class materials (folder/pencil) when the bell rings.
* Do not leave folders or trash in rehearsal areas.
* Maintain good posture while singing.
* Practice good rehearsal etiquette, including being respectful of the teacher and each other.
* On a trip or evening event, act in a way that represents this school, program, and yourself well.
* Be present at **ALL** required after school rehearsals.

**Individual Opportunities**

**Mid-State/All-State Choirs**

One of the most prestigious honors a high school singer can receive is an invitation to sing with the Mid-State and/or All-State Choirs. Auditions are held early in the Fall semester, with the Honor Choirs held during the Winter and Spring (see calendar for exact dates). All choir students, grades 9-12, are encouraged to audition! **Note – if you audition and are selected for the Mid-State or All-State Choirs, you are required to attend.** Sometimes this includes additional fees for hotel, transportation, or participation fees/music. Please take all dates/expenses into consideration before auditioning.

**Governor’s School for the Arts**

The Tennessee Governor’s School for the Arts is a month-long summer program for rising 11th and 12th grade students in Tennessee. Administered by the State Department of Education, GSFTA offers accelerated programs in art, dance, filmmaking, theatre, and music. Students stay on the MTSU campus at a nominal fee. See Mr. Johnson for more information. This is **not** a required endeavor.

**Additional Honors/Ensembles**

Additional Honor Choirs, such as regional and national performance opportunities through the American Choral Directors Association, will be made available as they arise. Similar policies exist for these opportunities as they exist for the honor choirs listed above; if you audition and make it, you are required to attend.

**Travel**

There will be many occasions when we travel off campus. The destinations will range from very close to very far, however student behavior is to be exemplary regardless of distance or duration. We are a class act and are expected to behave that way. Going on trips is a privilege and not a right; Mr. Johnson reserves the right to forbid any student from attending an off-campus function if the student does not exhibit the requisite maturity level needed for such responsibility.

**Student Leadership/Choir Council**

Empowering student leaders is a pivotal part of the NWHS Choral Program. Student leaders will assist in the management of the Programs, will be the public face of the Choirs, and will assist the director in the musical leadership of the ensembles.

The Choir Council will be a group of elected and appointed students fulfilling important roles. All students wishing to serve on the Choir Council must first seek the permission of Mr. Johnson, who will take professional and musical achievements into consideration. Participation at a choir-sanctioned leadership event is encouraged.

**Elected Officers:**

**President**

* At least one year of NWHS Choirs required.
* Public representative of choral program.
* Direct assistance to choral director.
* Maintains communication between director and choir.
* Works with Vice-President to organize details of concerts and trips.
* Works with Historian to advertise performances
* Oversees all other officers’ responsibilities

**Vice-President**

* At least one year of NWHS Choirs required.
* Public representative in absence of President.
* Direct assistance to President.
* Maintains communication among officers.
* Works with President to organize concerts and trips.
* Manages uniforms and monitors concert attire.

**Secretary**

* At least one year of NWHS Choirs required.
* Public representative in absence of Vice-President
* Manages attendance at concerts.
* Manages music distribution, choral library, and paperwork.

**Historian**

* At least one year of NWHS Choirs required.
* Public representative in absence of Secretary.
* Tracks dates of performances and other events
* Works with President to advertise performances in school and community
* Photographs/Videos at concerts and other events.
* Maintains historical archive of programs, details of performances/trips, etc.

**Choir Representative**

* Can also be one of the officers listed above
* Represents his/her choir class in choir council
* Manages functional duties in choir classroom, including the passing out of papers, taking up of music, etc.

**Parent Involvement**

**There will be a required meeting for all choir parents on Monday, August 28th at 6:00pm in the Choir Room.** It is my hope that, outside of a potential Trip meeting, there will be **no more required meetings** of all choir parents.

Parents, let me take this opportunity to tell you how much I personally appreciate your support of this program and for your support of your student’s involvement. I greatly respect your time and the effort that you put into managing a household, a job, and all the extra obligations that you are involved in. I do not ever want to be a waste of your time or of your resources. Please understand that you are important to the success of this program and that you play a part, in one way or another, in making this program great!

Having said that, I **CANNOT** do this without you. I am eager to talk with you to find out ways that you can be of extra help if you are interested in doing so. I am also open to suggestions and ideas that will help to make our choir program shine. Please do not hesitate to call me and talk about ways that you can be involved.

Your efforts are greatly appreciated and I thank you sincerely for allowing your student to be a part of choir at Northwest High School. It is a true honor to be their director!

**Handbook/Calendar Acknowledgement Form**

**DUE FRIDAY, AUGUST 18th, 2017**

Student Name:

Grade:

We have read the choir handbook and agree to abide by all rules and regulations.

* I, the student, understand that by signing this contract I am agreeing to uphold all expectations and accept consequences if I do not.
* I, the parent, understand by signing this contract that I will communicate with the director when necessary any problems or conflicts so they may be worked out in a timely manner.
* We have seen the choir **Event Dates Quick-Sheet**. We will do our best to avoid conflicts and know that a student’s after-school employment does not count as an excused absence. We will cross-reference all choir events with other school-related calendars and will notify Mr. Johnson and other NWHS sponsors/coaches/directors of any conflicts as soon as they arise.

We, the family, are excited about being a part of Northwest High School Choirs!

Signed,

(student) (date)

(parent/guardian) (date)

**Parent Information Form**

**DUE FRIDAY, AUGUST 18th, 2017**

**Parents, please answer:**

Is it okay to contact you during the day? **yes** **no**

If so, at what number? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What time in the evening might be best to call? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

At what number? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Email address:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

We are what we

repeatedly do.

Excellence, then,

is not an act,

but a habit.

* *Aristotle*

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