

Huffines Middle School Orchestra

Handbook

2025-2026

About the Director

Hello and welcome to the Orchestra Family at Huffines!

My name is Alexander Jaime and I am the *new* orchestra director. I look forward to continuing Mr. de Leon's hard work by cultivating a culture of hard work, respect, and celebration.

I am a proud graduate of Texas Christian University (TCU) with my degree in Instrumental Music Education. I am a professional cellist in the DFW metroplex and teach privately on the weekends. I especially love ensemble/chamber work!

This year, and every year onwards, we will work hard to essentially learn to read and write a new language - which is music! We will learn to use our ears to listen for melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. We will learn how to perform on our instruments the way professionals perform on their instruments. We will learn what it means to collaborate in a group, this will involve communication between students and questions often posed by students themselves.

I want your child to walk away from this experience fulfilled. I want them to know that music is not just performing music. I want them to understand that music is culture, art, and expression in the highest form. I want students to enjoy this art for the rest of their lives and beyond. Music existed before us and it will continue to exist after us, so let's leave a legacy.

I will send out Orchestra Newsletters that will highlight important information pertaining to your student. It might include an audio file so that you can listen to the progress. It might include pictures of proper and improper bow hold, and it will most definitely contain important dates and reminders.

I have an open door policy (when permitted), and I encourage you to reach out to me if you have any comments, questions, or concerns relating to your students' success here at Huffines. I am a resource for you and your student.

At your service,
Alexander J. Jaime
Orchestra Director, Huffines MS
jaimea@lisd.net
469-713-5990

Teaching Philosophy

As a product of the Texas public school system, my teaching philosophy is grounded in observable progression measured through a close relationship with students throughout their journey with music. I believe that learning music, and the arts, is a journey that must be nurtured via healthy physical habits as well as a positive relationship with each other, with hopes of eliminating the typical teacher-student paradigm. Educational philosophy is a deep passion of mine and has helped me gain insight as to how we learn, how our brain processes information, the learning cycle, and how memories are formed. That is why I encourage discourse among my students. I want them to think about *why* they decided to make that decision, be it musical or not. Thinking about your own thinking is known as metacognition and I call on all of my students to think this way when it pertains to music. Conversations might start out something like "Which finger feels more comfortable to use here? Or does it make more sense to shift? Extend fourth finger?" etc... I want my students to make musically sound choices that align with common practices, or if there is a genius new idea I am all ears. I also encourage students to question the purpose of any technical study. I want them to know the objective by first thinking critically about the exercise in front of them.

Principally, J.S Bach is at the forefront of my teaching. In my opinion, nothing compares to the quality and density of music like that of Bach. As a cellist I live with the Bach Cello Suites daily, as they constantly challenge even the best players in the world. Bach's music is versatile in many ways and because of that we will often read and study some of his early works. In fact, there is a lot of music that was written for choir, but rewritten for a small orchestra. We will use these "chorales" to teach intonation, harmony, and the importance of their role in the orchestra. These chorales are simple in nature, but lets us converse about different pedagogical issues (bow angles, arm weight, finger placement, posture)

My aim as an educator is to develop your students' (musical) voice through their violin, viola, cello, or bass. We all know that music speaks louder than words.

I cannot wait to meet you and your wonderful students!!

All the very best,
Alexander J. Jaime
Orchestra Director, Huffines Middle School

Filosofía de la Enseñanza

Como estudiante del sistema de escuelas públicas de Texas, mi filosofía de enseñanza se basa en el progreso observable medido a través de una estrecha relación con los estudiantes a lo largo de su trayectoria musical. Creo que el aprendizaje de la música y las artes es un viaje que debe fomentarse mediante hábitos físicos saludables, así como una relación positiva entre todos, con la esperanza de eliminar el típico paradigma profesor-alumno. La filosofía educativa es una de mis grandes pasiones y me ha ayudado a comprender cómo aprendemos, cómo procesa la información nuestro cerebro, el ciclo de aprendizaje y cómo se forman los recuerdos. Por eso fomento el diálogo entre mis alumnos. Quiero que piensen por qué tomaron esa decisión, ya sea musical o no. Pensar sobre el propio pensamiento se conoce como metacognición y animo a todos mis alumnos a pensar de esta manera cuando se trata de música. Las conversaciones pueden comenzar con preguntas como «¿Qué dedo es más cómodo usar aquí? ¿O tiene más sentido cambiar? ¿Extender el cuarto dedo?», etc. Quiero que mis alumnos tomen decisiones musicales acertadas que se ajusten a las prácticas habituales, o si hay una idea nueva y genial, soy todo oídos. También animo a los alumnos a cuestionar el propósito de cualquier estudio técnico. Quiero que conozcan el objetivo pensando primero de forma crítica sobre el ejercicio que tienen delante.

Principalmente, J. S. Bach ocupa un lugar destacado en mi enseñanza. En mi opinión, nada se compara con la calidad y la densidad de la música de Bach. Como violonchelista, convivo a diario con las Suites para violonchelo de Bach, ya que suponen un reto constante incluso para los mejores intérpretes del mundo. La música de Bach es versátil en muchos sentidos y, por eso, a menudo leemos y estudiamos algunas de sus primeras obras. De hecho, hay mucha música que fue escrita para coro, pero reescrita para una pequeña orquesta. Utilizaremos estos «corales» para enseñar la entonación, la armonía y la importancia de su papel en la orquesta. Estos corales son sencillos por naturaleza, pero nos permiten conversar sobre diferentes cuestiones pedagógicas (ángulos del arco, peso del brazo, colocación de los dedos, postura).

Mi objetivo como educadora es desarrollar la voz (musical) de sus alumnos a través del violín, la viola, el violonchelo o el contrabajo. Todos sabemos que la música habla más que las palabras.

Estoy deseando conocerles a ustedes y a sus maravillosos estudiantes!

Como siempre, todo lo mejor,
Alexander J. Jaime
Orchestra Director, Huffines Middle School

Parental Involvement

Research shows that when there is a supportive guardian encouraging students to practice or improve their abilities, they are more likely to grow faster. In the orchestra world the Suzuki Method is a tool to teach students to play music by ear first and then read notation. Yet, one overlooked aspect of Suzuki teaching is the amount of parental involvement. In this method, parents actually sit in on the lessons and learn at the same time. This helps for when students are practicing at home and still get support. The whole point of the Newsletters is to show you what we are working on so that you can look for those things at home.

I am deeply committed to creating a community here at Huffines and the only way for that to happen is if you help. I would love to see many of you join our Booster Club. This organization is a volunteer-based system that allows us to fund some of our resources, and adventures. Booster Club members can help in any fashion they want - food for the receptions after the concerts, carpooling, chaperones, etc. The list is never ending, we need your help!

Please Scan this QR Code to Read More About the Impact of Music Education



Orchestras

Symphonic

Symphonic Orchestra is the top orchestra at Huffines Middle School. This orchestra is intended for players with one or two years of experience and players who exhibit the highest level of playing. This group will learn advanced techniques such as alternate bow strokes, shifting techniques, enhanced vibrato, advanced sight-reading, advanced ear training, and advanced musical phrasing. This is our "touring" or "competition" orchestra meaning that this orchestra represents Huffines Middle School at any event we are asked to perform. This orchestra will compete in the annual UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest where they will prepare and present their hard work for adjudication.

This orchestra requires an audition for entry. This audition will contain three pre-selected cuts and a sight reading element. Results will be posted at the end of auditions and posted in the orchestra room. As this is the top orchestra, students are required to prepare the region material and are highly encouraged to audition.

Students in the varsity ensemble must participate in the LISD Solo and Ensemble Contest in the Spring. 7th Graders must form at least one ensemble. 8th Graders must prepare at least a solo.

BEFORE SCHOOL SECTIONALS ARE REQUIRED FOR THIS ENSEMBLE

MONDAY: VIOLIN

TUESDAY: VIOLA

WEDNESDAY: CELLO

THURSDAY: BASS

Philharmonic

The philharmonic orchestra is our largest ensemble with the majority being 7th and 8th graders. This ensemble will work on extending our abilities from the year before. We are looking to improve our bow strokes, intonation/pitch accuracy, musical phrases, and vibrato to name a few. This group will not tour, but they will participate in the annual UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest where they will be evaluated on their incredible efforts towards this concert.

Every student must prepare at least one solo for the LISD Solo and Ensemble Contest in the Spring. I highly encourage ensembles!!

FRIDAYS - BEFORE SCHOOL SECTIONALS MIGHT BE REQUIRED FOR THIS ENSEMBLE.

Beginners

Our beginner orchestra is for students who have little to no knowledge of music. Here we will work from the ground up, developing a holistic approach to music education. We will work towards developing aural skills (using your ears intelligently), music reading (Music Literacy), physical awareness, musical phrasing.

STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO PERFORM A SOLO OR ENSEMBLE FOR A JUDGE ON CAMPUS IN THE SPRING

Orchestra Fees :(

Beginner Orchestra:	\$40
Philharmonic Orchestra:	\$60
Symphonic Orchestra:	\$80

The orchestra fee is essential to ensure that the classroom is funded for the activities and the resources inside the classroom. Your money will go towards concert receptions, Solo and Ensemble Registration, Orchestra Shirts, and the Spring Music Festival.

The cost increases for each ensemble because our ensembles engage in more activities such as hiring UIL Clinicians for Contests, Elementary Tour Lunches, Spring Trips, T-Shirts, and Contest Entries (All-Region and UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest)

The orchestra fee is separate from the Instrument Usage Fee. Please talk to me if you have any questions or concerns.

The last day to pay for the orchestra fees is September 5th.

Instrument Rental

As we start this incredible journey of learning music, we need to have the tools to effectively play music. These tools are our BOWS, STRINGS, INSTRUMENT, AND ROSIN. In order to make pretty music we must have good instruments. Oftentimes we can't afford expensive things, and that is okay! However, in our art we have to strike a balance between "cheap/bad" and "good/expensive." Cheap instruments will not produce the same pretty sound you have in mind. When you have a nice instrument, you will want to keep playing - TRUST ME! Learning on an instrument that is not responding or producing the sound you want is incredibly frustrating.

BUT PLEASE...

There are a few rules:

1. Do not buy any instrument online (talk to me first PLEASE)
2. Do not rent/buy an instrument that is not brown or similar
3. Do not rent/buy an instrument that is not the right size
4. Consult Mr. Jaime about possible "big" purchases

I have found that Dallas Strings is the best provider of rental instruments in this area. They are the #1 rental shop in the DFW Metroplex and have an extensive relationship with LISD and partner school districts. I will communicate with parents on other options as they become available.

LISD DOES have a few instruments that they can use, but they are reserved for students who could not be in orchestra otherwise.

Classroom Rules

I have three general rules for orchestra: House Rules, Instrument Rules, and People Rule

House Rules: Be Respectful, Be Respectful, Be Respectful
Instrument Rules: Be Respectful, Be Respectful, Be Respectful
People Rules: Be Respectful, Be Respectful, Be Respectful

However, just so we are clear.

1. No food or drinks consumed while rehearsing
2. Keep Fingernails short enough to play with flat fingers
3. Do not write on the board unless asked to
4. Communicate your needs if conflicts arise
5. Must have pencils, a bow, an instrument, music and a shoulder rest if necessary
6. Maintain all of your music - bring all of your music
7. Follow all the rules pertaining to LISD Student Code of Conduct

Rehearsal Expectations

When rehearsing in a group it is important to remember that we are learning as a group and distractions to the learning process will be removed from this experience. You must come to class prepared by having your materials needed for the day.

As we are a large group, we need to ensure that the room is put back together by the end of the day. Students will help reset the classroom with the direction of Mr. Jaime.

Students are discouraged to use the bathroom during instruction, you can only learn by being present in the classroom.

Most importantly is our classroom safety, that being said backpacks will be stored outside the orchestra room in the shelves. This is to ensure that we don't trip over ourselves and break instruments or break our limbs.

Grading Policy

Student grades will be divided into four 9 weeks. In each nine-week grade will be an average of the following:

Major Grades - 40%

CONCERTS, PAPER EXAMS, PLAYING TESTS

Minor Grades - 60%

REHEARSAL READINESS, SECTIONAL ATTENDANCE, REFLECTIONS,
PARTICIPATION

Grades are not meant to punish you. If you are not happy with your grade, I will offer two attempts to improve the grade within two weeks.

Concert Attire

Informal Performances: students will wear

1. Orchestra Shirt
2. Blue Jeans
3. Any closed-toe shoe (NO CROCS, SLIDES, SANDALS, JANDALS, BIRKENSTOCKS, ETC)

Formal Performances: Students must wear all black.

Gentlemen:

1. Black slacks
2. Black long-sleeve button up
3. Black shoes
4. Black Socks

Ladies:

1. Black concert dress OR
2. Black Long-Sleeve button up
3. Black slacks
4. Closed toe black dress shoes

Concert Etiquette

While in the audience students must show respect for the ensemble performing. This means no cell phones allowed in the performing space. Talking and/or whispering of any kind are not allowed. If students need to get up during performances to use the restroom, they can do so at the end of a piece and before the next. When you hear clapping, you can get up. When you re-enter from the restroom, it must be in between pieces.

Students who disrupt a concert by not following the rules will be removed from the concert and a 50% will be awarded for the concert.

Before School Sectionals

Only Symphonic and (sometimes) Philharmonic

Before school sectional attendance is required and a large portion of your grade.

Each section will meet once a week from **7:45AM - 8:40AM**.

Due to extremely tight security on our campus, we must ensure that the door does not stay open for too long.

I will be at the door at 7:40AM and will walk away at **7:43AM**. That leaves you a 3 minute window.

Sectional grades will be **50% Punctuality** and **50% Pass-Off Completion**.

I will finalize the sectional times and dates by the end of August. Please look out for that email.

Private Lessons

Private Lessons are one of the best tools to improve individual playing. A private lesson will involve your student meeting with a professional musician of their instrument once a week for either an hour or thirty minutes. I recommend starting with 30 minute lessons as our classes are 45 minutes.

The professionals teaching our students undergo a thorough background check, fingerprinting process, and have agreed to charge the private lesson fees set by LISD.

Please visit the LISD Fine Arts Page or reach out to me via email about rates and cost of lessons.

Scholarships are available to students who are serious about learning their instrument. I highly recommend students take lessons as it will speed up their progress. Scholarships will be awarded based on the directors discretion.

Newsletters

Newsletters will be your one-stop shop to see how your students are doing in the classroom. This newsletter will be sent out via emails. Please involve yourself with these. Your students WANT to show you all their hard work.

When you care - they care.

CODA (little tail)

Yall - I am so excited to be your teacher, your mentor, your guide, and a resource for your musical journey.

We will build memories that last for a lifetime.

We will build a classroom of respect.

We will care for ourselves and for those around us.

We will encourage each other.

We will motivate each other.

IMPORTANT DATES

I will send out, in a newsletter, the information about upcoming concerts and events. Please stay tuned.

Student Signatures:

I _____ understand everything in this handbook, and will follow the house rules, instrument rules, people rules, and concert etiquette rules.

I _____ will respect my classmates, the instruments, and any professional inside the room.

Parent Signature:

I _____ have read and understand all the items inside the handbook, and if needed can contact Mr. Jaime with any questions or concerns.