

# Northwestern Middle School Band

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I would like to welcome you and your son/daughter to the Northwestern Band program. After all of last year's craziness I am very excited about getting more back to normal, working with your children and making music together. There are many talented students in our school, and I am confident that despite any challenges the pandemic might still throw our way we will be able to pull together and our band will once again live up to the amazing Northwestern band tradition that has lasted for more than 60 years. Music is such a vital part of our culture, and the joy of making music together is something that is so important for us all right now as we begin to return to normal! I realize that many incoming 7th grade parents do not have experience with our program, but I hope that you will quickly come to see how valuable being in band can be for your child both now and in the long term.

This packet has quite a bit of information for your review – please go through it carefully. Some things are obviously subject to change based on state guidelines and best recommendations for safety while playing in band, and this coming year we will all still need to be flexible. **Please be assured that the music department will continue to do everything possible to keep your child safe.** We had a very safe and successful year last year, and things should only get better!

## Social Distancing/Masks/Safety

Current state guidelines, as well as scientific research, show wind instruments need 6 feet of social distancing indoors, as well as bell covers and masks with slits in them to ensure adequate protection from the Corona virus. This is how we safely ended the last school year.

Playing a wind instrument produces a fair amount of aerosol, so although I can't predict what the state will advise for the fall, I would anticipate that we will still be using bell covers and masks with slits in them while playing. The school will purchase all bell covers as needed, but families will need to supply masks. Before school starts I will send out more information on what PPE we will be using and what families will need to provide.

## SmartMusic

One big change between elementary band and middle school band is the use of the computer program SmartMusic. SmartMusic is an online practice/assessment program for all instruments that gives instant feedback on a student's performance, thus allowing for more growth at home during practice. **The school will be purchasing your subscriptions for home use,** and information about how to sign up for this will be given out at the start of the school year. Students can use chromebooks, iPads, or computers (laptops or desktops) to use this program, and typically the built in microphones in most devices work fine. If you would like more information about SmartMusic, go to their website to check it out: [smartmusic.com](http://smartmusic.com).

## Instruments/Mouthpieces/Reeds

All instrument cases must be labeled with a student's name very clearly visible on the case. Between the MS and HS we have over 200 instruments in the band area and some of the cases look very similar. There will be absolutely NO sharing of instruments this year, so clearly marking cases is important. I would also recommend making your case look distinctive by putting some stickers on it, tying a scarf around the handle, etc - anything so that it doesn't look like everyone else's case. Percussionists should make sure their sticks are also clearly labeled by personalizing them with markers/tape/etc. Every student will also have an instrument locker in the band area which they will label, and they can use this anytime during the day or overnight when they aren't taking the instrument home to practice.

If you have not sent your instrument out to be cleaned or repaired in over a year I would recommend doing so soon. We send our school instruments to Stevens Instrument Repair in Harwinton - Jamin McIntyre, 860-459-8792, or [s.instrumentrepair@icloud.com](mailto:s.instrumentrepair@icloud.com).

Clarinet and saxophone players should consider upgrading to a better mouthpiece and reeds. For around \$100, an excellent mouthpiece can be purchased that would improve a player's tone quality and range. These mouthpieces will be highly encouraged in High School, so investing in one a year or two early gives your child the advantage of an earlier adjustment period and more chance for improvement. Clarinet players should consider purchasing a Vandoren 5RV Lyre with a Rovner dark ligature (the thing which holds the reed onto the mouthpiece). Saxophone players should consider purchasing a Vandoren Optimum AL3 mouthpiece with a Rovner dark ligature. **\*If these are too expensive a good, cheaper alternative would be for clarinet players to purchase a JD Hite Premier mouthpiece and saxophone players to purchase a Yamaha 4C mouthpiece.** Although not as good as the ones listed above, they are still better than what came with your instrument. These mouthpieces cost \$20-\$30 so if you are unsure if you want to invest in a great mouthpiece they make solid alternatives.

Also, all clarinet players should buy either Mitchell Lurie reeds (consistent, inexpensive), Mitchell Lurie Premium reeds, Vandoren reeds (good, medium priced), or D'Addario Reserve Classic reeds (good, more expensive). All saxophone players should be playing on Vandoren or D'Addario Reserve reeds. All of these are of better quality than the Rico reeds most beginners use, and make it easier to play the instrument with a better sound and improved range. Many parents like to buy Rico reeds because they are inexpensive, but what many don't realize is that they don't usually last as long and some of the new reeds in the box won't play well at all and will end up being thrown away after only a few minutes of use. When you factor those two things in, the reeds I recommended aren't any more expensive in the long run.

## Practice

Practice is the key to a successful band experience. One cannot develop and grow as a musician only through band rehearsals. Just as homework in math, science, etc., is vital to fully understand and retain information in these subjects, practice on an instrument is the only way to make meaningful progress in music. The average middle school band student should be practicing 20-30 minutes/day, 3-5 days/week. Many of our most successful students practice more than this. For about half of our students, the practice and completion of their SmartMusic assignments constitutes their practice. About half of our students do more than this so they can make quicker improvements in their playing.

### **Charms**

Charms is an on-line music management system that we use in the music department. The two primary functions we will use it for are email communication to students and parents, and for keeping track of finances and making online payments for fees and trips. I will use the information in Powerschool to create accounts for new students at the beginning of next year, then will email home detailed information on how to finish setting up your account and make online payments. I will also be demonstrating Charms at the Open House in September (depending on social distancing guidelines).

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at [jlesieur@nwr7.org](mailto:jlesieur@nwr7.org) or call me at school (379-7243 x2627). During the summer please email me as I check my email frequently but do not check voice mail at all over the summer. I am looking forward to hopefully seeing you at the Open House in September. Together, we will make this a great year!

Musically Yours,

**Jim Lesieur**

Jim Lesieur

# Northwestern Middle School Band

## *2021 – 2022 POLICIES & PROCEDURES*

### Grading Procedure

#### 50% - PARTICIPATION

Students' active participation during band rehearsals is the most important factor in their success. Students will be given a weekly participation grade to reflect the work they do during class as well as for showing up prepared with their instrument, music and a pencil.

#### 20% -- ATTENDANCE

Students will have a group band lesson once every rotation (eight school days). Attendance is mandatory at all lessons unless absent from school. If a student is involved with something in class that cannot be made up (project, chapter test, lab, etc.), a form is available in the band room that must be filled out, signed by the classroom teacher, and returned to Mr. Lesieur to be excused from the lesson. If a student is not at a lesson, is not absent from school, and this form is not returned to Mr. Lesieur, that student will be considered unexcused from the lesson. Students do not need to make up excused lessons unless they feel they need/want to. Unexcused lessons can be made up before/after school but students will only be given  $\frac{3}{4}$  **credit (75%)**.

\*Concerts and parades are the culmination of months of hard work, dedication and practice. They are opportunities for us to show the public what we have learned and how we have grown. **All** students are important, and their attendance is necessary to ensure our success. For musicians, these performances are the equivalent of a major exam. Therefore, **attendance at all concerts and parades is mandatory. Students with an unexcused absence from a performance will have their grade for that quarter lowered by two full letter grades.** Excused absences from performances include such things as illness or a death in the family. Unexcused absences include such things as orthodontist appointments and vacations planned after our calendar came out. If you feel that you have a legitimate reason to miss a performance, you must call/email Mr. Lesieur **in advance**. Students may be asked to complete an alternate assignment for excused absences.

#### 20% -- SMARTMUSIC ASSIGNMENTS/TESTS

Students will have short bi-weekly SmartMusic assignments to complete, as well as occasional tests on sections of their band music. These assignments will include things such as scales, technical exercises, and band method book assignments.

#### 10% -- TONE/POSTURE

A student's posture while playing their instrument is a major influence on the sound (tone) that they will be able to produce. It is vital that at all times students try their best to be sitting up straight with their instrument in the correct playing position. Posture will be graded daily during rehearsals, and during students' lessons. Tone (the sound that students produce on their instrument) will be graded during students' lessons when I can listen more individually.

### EXTRA CREDIT

There are four ways for a student to receive extra credit in Band:

- 1). Auditioning for the Northern Regional Middle School Music Festival
- 2). Attendance at a college or professional concert (Band, Jazz, Orchestra, Choral, Chamber Music, etc.)

-a short paragraph about the concert must be handed into Mr. Lesieur, along with a program if there was one. The paragraph should include what you heard, what you liked/did not like, and any overall thoughts you had about the concert.

- 3). Participation in an outside instrumental ensemble (GWYS, Hartt Concert Ensemble)
- 4). Participation in private music lessons on their band instrument with a qualified instructor. Extra credit will be given for each quarter that a student takes lessons – summer lessons will count towards the first quarter. **It is the student's responsibility to email Mr. Lesieur of their lessons at the end of each quarter in order to receive credit.**

## **Concert Dress**

Boys – white dress shirt (no tie), black dress pants, black socks, black shoes \*(see note about shoes below under Uniforms at Parades)

Girls – white blouse, black pants/skirt (skirt **must** be longer than knee length, preferably ankle length)

## **Uniforms at Parades**

Uniforms will be distributed in the spring and are to be worn at all parades, along with black socks and black shoes. During the year all students will be given the option to purchase marching shoes that will also be required for all high school marching events. For eighth graders moving on into the high school band it is easier to get your marching shoes in December or May and have them for the start of high school. Seventh graders and those eighth graders not moving on into the high school band may choose to wear regular black dress shoes. \*However, the marching shoes are suitable to be worn as dress shoes during concerts and are extremely comfortable for marching, so investing the \$35 for marching shoes might be worth it for most band members. I will be sending home an order form for marching shoes twice during the year – once before the winter concert, and once before the spring concert/spring marching events.

There is a \$35 uniform fee, which will be collected at the beginning of the year with the other fees - see attached fee list. **This fee also includes having the uniform dry cleaned by the school.** Uniforms will be collected dirty the week after the Memorial Day parades and sent out to a local dry cleaner. Please see attached fee list.

## **Rehearsals**

Students are expected to come prepared for all rehearsals (instrument, music and a pencil). Students who forget their instrument regularly will receive additional SmartMusic assignments to make up for the playing time missed during school.

## **Instruments**

Students are expected to supply their own instruments, except for the following: bass clarinet, tenor sax, baritone sax, bassoon, french horn, euphonium and tuba. There are a very limited number of flutes, clarinets, alto saxes, trumpets and trombones available for rent as well for those who need them. There will be a yearly rental fee of \$75 charged for the use of school owned instruments. Those who receive multiple school instruments (one at home, one at school or one for concerts and one for marching) only need to pay the \$75 fee once. **All school instruments are to be cleaned and/or serviced by a reputable music store before the end of the year or over the summer.**

Students will be responsible for the maintenance/repair of the instrument due to deliberate mishandling of the instrument, however the music department will pay for any repairs that are a normal part of that instrument's repair cycle.

# Northwestern Middle School Band

## Calendar of Events – 2021-2022

Revised 6/21

\* could change due to evolving social distancing guidelines\*

- December 9 -** Thursday – MS Band/Jazz Ensemble//MS Chorus Winter Concert  
7:00 PM – Auditorium
- TBA – Northern Region Music Festival Auditions  
-virtual, students prepare video audition*
- TBA - ASBDA 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Band Day  
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM – Torrington MS – more info coming*
- March 1 - Tuesday – Mardi-Gras Jazz Concert  
7 PM – St. John’s Episcopal Church, Pine Meadow*
- March 8 -** Tuesday – Band Clinics  
6:30-8:00 PM – Band Room
- TBA – Friday/Saturday - Northern Region Music Festival  
Wethersfield High School*
- April 13 –** Wednesday – MS Band/Jazz Ensemble Spring Concert  
7:00 PM – Gymnasium
- May 6 -** Friday – Music Festival/Six Flags Field Trip  
-More Info Coming
- May 21 –** Saturday – Pet Parade  
2:00 PM – Winsted  
(11:00 AM – students at school for practice)
- May 30 –** Monday – Memorial Day Parades  
9:00 AM & 11:30 PM – Norfolk/Winsted  
(report to school at 8:00 AM or Norfolk Town Hall at 8:30 AM)

**\*\*NOTE: DATES IN BOLD ARE MANDATORY FOR ALL BAND MEMBERS. DATES IN ITALICS ARE EITHER FOR JAZZ ENSEMBLE MEMBERS OR FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO AUDITION FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC FESTIVAL OR PARTICIPATE IN THE ASBDA 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE BAND DAY.**

# Northwestern Middle School Band

## *Band Fees*

*\*Student fees should be paid by credit card through our student management system located at [www.charmsoffice.com](http://www.charmsoffice.com). Once every new student has been inputted into Charms I will email home a detailed instruction sheet on how to make on-line credit card payments. This will happen in late September. If you would prefer to pay by check, checks should be made out to "RSD7".\**

### STUDENT FEES

**Uniform Usage/Cleaning Fee:** \$35 for ALL students in band

**Clinic Fee:** \$15 for ALL students in band

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**Stick/Mallet Fee:** \$25 for ALL percussionists

**Instrument Rental Fee:** \$75 ONLY for students using school owned instruments (not percussion) – please note that if you use more than one school instrument you only need to pay the rental fee once

## Payment Due by Friday, October 8, 2021

Fees may be paid either all at once, or you may pay some fees by October 8<sup>th</sup> and the remainder throughout the year, whichever is easier and more convenient for you. Every few months a financial statement will be emailed to you so you know if/what you still owe.

**\*If you need financial assistance with your fees please contact me at the BEGINNING of the school year - [jlesieur@nwr7.org](mailto:jlesieur@nwr7.org).**

# MS Band Student Contract

## STUDENT CONTRACT:

I am aware that I am required to be at all rehearsals and concerts and will make appropriate arrangements with my parents to attend all after school events.

I am responsible for learning my assigned material with correct rhythms, pitches, fingerings/stickings, and phrasing, doing so with the best tone quality possible. Should I have difficulty with particular musical elements, I will speak with Mr. Lesieur or a private teacher to help make improvement.

I intend to make practice a regular part of my weekly habits, as it is a necessary part of participation in this class, just as homework is assigned in other classes.

I have read and agree to adhere to all policies outlined in the Middle School Band 2021-2022 Policies and Procedures.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Parents:

I agree to help my child do his/her best and to fulfill their responsibilities.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

This form must be signed and returned to Mr. Lesieur in an envelope marked "Band Contract" by Friday, September 24, 2021