

# **Westfield High School Choral Department 2015-16 Student and Parent Handbook**



Welcome to the Westfield High School Choral Department! This handbook is designed to outline student expectations, clarify procedures, and help you get the most out of your choral music experience at WHS.

The WHS Choral Music Department website is [westfieldchoir.org](http://westfieldchoir.org). Feel free to visit our website where you can see this information as well as other media, like recordings, photos, and video of the choir.

Looking forward to a great year!

-Mr. Brzozowski  
Westfield High School Choral Director

## I. COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

### **WHS Mixed Chorus**

The *WHS Mixed Chorus* is a choral music class open to students in grades 9-12 who are interested in learning about the fundamentals of singing and musicianship. Students will sing a variety of repertoire in accordance with the State and National standards of music that reflect variety of music styles, cultures, and historical periods. Students are responsible for performing in two concerts throughout the year - one concert in December and one concert in May.

### **WHS Bella Cora**

The *WHS Bella Cora* is a treble chorus consisting of singers selected from Mixed Chorus, grades 10-12. Singers will be introduced to advanced choral techniques, refining choral blend, musicianship, and vocal technique. Students in *WHS Bella Cora* are responsible for performing in a minimum of two concerts during the year - one concert in the winter and one in the spring. The *WHS Bella Cora* will combine with the *WHS Concert Choir Treble Chorus* for winter and spring concerts.

### **WHS Mens Chorus**

The *WHS Mens Chorus* is an extra-curricular, non-auditioned mens chorus consisting of students who are enrolled in any WHS chorus, band, or orchestra. Students will sing a variety of mens chorus literature from traditional to popular. The WHS Mens Chorus will perform at the winter and spring concerts as well as choir recruitment events. Ensemble members will meet once a month in the evening from 7-8:30 PM as well as scheduled 7 AM rehearsals. More after school rehearsals will be scheduled closer to the concerts.

### **WHS Concert Choir**

The *WHS Concert Choir* is an advanced mixed choir consisting of selected students in grades 10-12. Students in this ensemble are introduced to advanced repertoire, performing various styles of world music, classical music, folk music, and more. Students are expected to maintain a high level of musicianship, and are responsible for their individual part learning. Attention to choral phrasing, intonation, and blend are a main focus. Students are responsible for performing at two WHS concerts in December and May as well as various community, school, and outside of school events throughout the school year. The *WHS Concert Choir* will attend the ACDA Spring Choral Festival this year.

## **WHS Treble Chorus**

The *WHS Treble Chorus* is comprised of treble singers who participate in either *Bella Cora* or *WHS Concert Choir*. Students will learn music in their respective classes and combine for several after school and in-school rehearsals (TBA) as we get closer to the each concert. The *WHS Treble Chorus* will attend the ACDA Spring Choral Festival this year.

## **WHS Chorale Choraleers**

The *WHS Chorale Choraleers* will learn and perform a variety of repertoire ranging from Renaissance Madrigals, Carols, and Motets to Vocal Jazz and Contemporary A Cappella music. Students must be concurrently enrolled in Concert Choir. Students will be exposed to diverse and challenging repertoire. Because of the difficulty and the amount of music learned throughout the academic year, singers in this ensemble must demonstrate high levels of musicianship, their ability to learn parts quickly, and being able to blend appropriately in a small group setting. In addition to the WHS December and May concerts, students are responsible for singing at various outside of school events as well community and outreach performances. After school supplemental rehearsals will be scheduled throughout the year (TBA).

## **II. CLASS PROCEDURES/EXPECTATIONS**

1. Students are expected to sit in assigned seats and have their folder and a pencil ready prior to the bell.
2. Students are responsible for the proper maintenance of their folder with music marked appropriately in pencil and all pages of music accounted for.
3. Food and drink (other than water) is not permitted during rehearsals. (Certain exceptions apply for students who are opting out of lunch to take a music ensemble.) No gum please!
4. Students are expected to be respectful to teacher, peers, and school materials.
5. Bathroom - Please ask to use the restroom at the very beginning of the period prior to warmups. Retrieve your folder and put your bag/books at your seat first. If you must use the restroom during classroom activities, please raise you hand and be discreet about leaving the rehearsal.
6. Cell Phones - The only time cell phones are permitted in class are if they are being directly used for classroom activities. Other than this exception, phones should be out of sight and their use are not permitted at any time during rehearsal.

First offense - warning

Second offense - Phone will be taken for the day and will need to be picked up after school.

Third offense - Phone will be taken to Office A. Parents will need to retrieve cell phone.

### III. GRADING

#### **Participation (60% of MP Grade)**

Positive participation is not only one of the defining factors contributing to a successful individual music experience, but for the success of the entire music ensemble. At the end of each week in a marking period, students are given a weekly participation grade. Weekly participation grades are based on three factors: Responsibility, Attitude, and Effort. Students will be assessed weekly and receive a grade according to the items in the rubric on the next page. This rubric can also be found on *Genesis*.

#### **Concert Grade (15% of MP Grade)**

Students are given a number grade (0-5) for each scheduled in school or after school rehearsals that occur *outside* their regularly scheduled class period. Performances, such as the winter and spring concerts, are graded on a (0-10) point scale. Please know that all scheduled rehearsals and performances are a mandatory part of the classes for which the student is enrolled and that unexcused absences from these rehearsals will result in a “0” for that portion of a students’ grade. An **unexcused absence from a mandatory performance** will result in the **dropping of one full letter grade** for the marking period.

#### **Assignments (15% of MP Grade)**

Students will periodically be required to complete in-class and at-home assignments. Grading will be based according to each individual assignment.

#### **Evaluations (10% of MP Grade)**

At least once a marking period, students will be individually checked for their understanding of classroom repertoire as well as vocal techniques. These practical tests will take place during classroom time and provide an opportunity for teacher feedback.

#### **Choir Performance Evaluation Rubric**

	<b>Excellent (90-100)</b>	<b>Inconsistent/Satisfactory (80-89)</b>	<b>Needs Improvement (70-79)</b>
<b>Independence of Part Singing</b>	Approximately 90% or better notes sung on pitch, and rhythm correct	Between 80-90% of notes sung on pitch, and most rhythmic passages correct	Less than 80% notes not sung on pitch, and/or rhythmic passages correct
<b>Vocal Quality</b>	Student sings with warmth and evenness throughout range. Tone is free of any physical tension.	Voice shows some changes within register, some warmth present. Some tightness in sound particularly on high notes.	Tone quality is forced and/or strident

## Some tips for having a great year in choir...

**Be open-minded and positive towards new things.** You will sing styles of music that might be unfamiliar to you and different than anything you've ever heard. In fact, my goal is to expose you to many of the wonderful ways that music has been written for choirs! You may be required to sing in different languages, be required to add synchronized or individual movement, add vocal percussion, scat, shouts, etc. This is the joy of singing in a choir - that we experience new and different ways of using our voices. Let your open-mindedness towards classroom activities allow you to enjoy your experience more fully.

**“Keeping it 100.”** Singing in a choir is a collaborative experience and successful performance is reliant on *complete investment*, even if we are doing something a bit outside the box (or even silly!). Every choir member must be 100% invested in our work in order to create the best possible performance of a particular work.

***The Four Agreements.*** We all have bad days, maybe might have disagreements with friends or family, or simply don't feel motivated on a particular day. It is important that, even if we feel less than our best, we do our best for that day. As you interact with your choir “family” try to reflect about how your actions and words might be influencing your experience and the experience for those around you.

## THE FOUR AGREEMENTS By Don Miguel Ruiz

### **Be Impeccable with your Word.**

Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean.

Avoid using the Word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your Word in the direction of truth and love.

### **2. Don't Take Anything Personally**

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

### **3. Don't Make Assumptions**

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want.

Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

### **4. Always Do Your Best**

Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick.

Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret.

## Weekly Choir Participation Rubric

	<b>Excellent (3)</b>	<b>Inconsistent (2)</b>	<b>Needs Improvement (1)</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is on time to class and at their seat with folder/materials at the bell.</li> <li>• Student takes care of all classroom materials.</li> <li>• Student keeps an organized folder with name and folder number marked on the front of each octavo in pencil.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is sometimes tardy to class and/or needs to be reminded to be at seat with folder/materials at the bell.</li> <li>• Student can be careless or forgetful with classroom materials.</li> <li>• Student has some of the appropriate markings their music but may be missing some items.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is frequently tardy to class and reminded to find their seat or get folder/materials by the bell.</li> <li>• Student is frequently misplacing or mistreating classroom materials.</li> <li>• Student rarely/never has appropriate markings in their music.</li> </ul>
<b>Attitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is respectful to teacher and peers.</li> <li>• Student is never a distraction in class and always treats the rehearsal and musical process with respect (i.e. not talking while other sections are rehearsing, etc.).</li> <li>• Student displays a positive attitude towards the class and classroom activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is sometimes disrespectful towards teacher and/or peers.</li> <li>• Student sometimes speaks out of turn, or makes inappropriate remarks in class.</li> <li>• Student sometimes displays a negative attitude towards classroom activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student frequently is disrespectful to teacher and/or peers.</li> <li>• Student frequently speaks out of turn, or makes inappropriate remarks in class.</li> <li>• Student frequently displays a negative attitude towards classroom activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Effort</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is fully invested in the attention to warmups, vocal technique, and demonstrates the use of physical gestures or Curwen hand signs where appropriate.</li> <li>• Student is consistently working towards their best overall vocal sound situated within the group.</li> <li>• Student sings with an audible tone to the best of their ability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is inconsistent in their attention to warmups, vocal technique, or use of physical gestures as it relates to singing.</li> <li>• Student shows inconsistency in regards to working towards their best overall vocal sound.</li> <li>• Student sometimes sings with an audible tone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is lacking in their attention to warmups, vocal technique, or use of physical gestures.</li> <li>• Student shows lack of effort in regards to working towards their best overall vocal sound.</li> <li>• Student rarely/never sings with an audible tone.</li> </ul>
		<b>Weekly Total</b>	<b>/ 9</b>

## IV. CONCERT ATTIRE

Singers in *Mixed Chorus* are required to wear the following for evening performances:

Boys: Dress pants (khaki, black, or grey), dress shoes with dress socks, long sleeve dress shirt, tie, jacket (optional).

Girls: Cocktail dress (which falls over the knee) or dress pants/blouse. Dress shoes (low heel), minimal jewelry (optional). Conservative holiday/spring colors are ok.

Singers in *Bella Cora, Concert Choir, and Chorale* are required to purchase a dress or tuxedo from *Southeastern Performance Apparel*. Information for ordering attire is distributed at the beginning of the school year.

Boys: Tuxedo pants and jacket ordered from *Southeastern Performance Apparel*, tuxedo shirt with wing tip collar, black dress shoes and black dress socks.

Girls: Concert gown ordered from *Southeastern Performance Apparel*, closed-toe black dress shoes with minimal heel. No high heels, wedges, or boots. No excessive jewelry. Hair must be out of face and any hair accessories should only be black, silver, or gold.

**Students in Choraleers:** Classy and coordinated with hints of individualism. We will talk more about the direction of where we want to go with this in class.

\* How we look as a choir can say a lot about who we are as an ensemble before we sing our first note! The uniformity of our look should make a statement of our solidarity and respect for our ensemble. In considering this, any student that is not appropriately dressed for a particular concert event will not be permitted to perform.

## V. REGIONAL CHOIR/ALL STATE CHOIR

The WHS Choral Department sponsors students to audition to be a part of two prestigious extra-curricular choral ensembles, the **CJMEA Region II Mixed and Treble Chorus** and the **NJMEA All State Mixed and Treble Chorus**. Students are permitted to audition for these groups at the discretion of Mr. Brzozowski and must be in good standing at WHS. Singers must also have demonstrated responsibility, citizenship, and positive behavior in their music ensemble(s).

**The CJMEA Region II Mixed and Treble Choirs** consist of selected students from around the central New Jersey area. Applications are due at the end of October and auditions take place at the beginning of December at J.P. Stevens High School (in Edison). Rehearsals take place over the course of four weekends in January (alternating

Friday evenings and Saturday mornings) with a culminating performance the last Sunday of January or first Sunday in February (TBA).

**The NJMEA All State Mixed and Treble Choirs** consist of selected students from across the state of New Jersey. Auditions take place at the end of March or early April (location TBA). If selected into the All State Mixed Chorus, students will be required to attend approximately four rehearsals, one rehearsal in June and three in the fall. There are two culminating performances in November, one performance at the Atlantic City Convention Center over Teacher Convention weekend, and one performance the following week at NJPAC. If selected into the All State Women's Chorus, students will hold a similar rehearsal schedule but their performance will take place at NJPAC in February.

\* It is recommended that, if eligible, students audition at least once for one of these ensembles during their time in the choirs at WHS. The experience of auditioning is one that can carry over into other aspects of life (such as college or job interviews). The experience of being in one of these groups allows you the opportunity to work with other directors and sing a variety of incredible choral music in an a high performing singing ensemble.

## VI. AUDITIONING FOR WHS SELECT GROUPS

Around the end of January, all 9-11 grade students will have the opportunity to audition for future WHS select choral groups (Bella Cora, Concert Choir, Chorale). It is recommended (but not required) that students get a head start on practicing the audition material on their own, set up meeting times with Mr. Brzozowski to go over audition material, and/or review your material with a private lesson teacher.

Auditions for the WHS choral groups have a prescribed set of music and singing elements that are based on the NJMEA All State Chorus audition process. In class in January, all choir students will be introduced to this audition material. **A more detailed packet with audition specifics, music examples, and scoring rubric is available upon request.**

### I. High and Low Diatonic Scales

Diatonic Scales start on the following pitches and are sung on the vowel sound "ah." Please sing at quarter note = 80. Depending on your voice part, either ascend or descend first, take a breath, and return in the opposite direction.

### II. Solo

The solo is "Shenandoah" Please sing a cappella at approximately quarter note = 120. A copy is available from Mr. Brzozowski upon request.

### III. Tonal Memory

You will hear a four-bar melody played twice on the piano. Sing the melody you are hearing a capella on the vowel sound “la.”

IV. **Quintet** (*The Lord Bless You and Keep You*, by Peter Lutkin). Only for incoming 11th and 12th grade students interested in auditioning for *Chorale Choraleers*.

\*Students who score high enough, will attend an after school callback audition (TBA) for *Choraleers*. The audition will consist of singing a lead sheet of a familiar jazz standard (TBA).

## VI. PRIVATE LESSONS/WORKSHOPS

Since chorus is a group experience, much of the daily feedback in regards to sound production is given to the group, not the individual. While there are brief private sessions where individual feedback is given, unfortunately their just is not enough time to reinforce individual student vocal technique. **Please see me if you have any interest in pursuing voice lessons, classes, or summer workshops. I can provide a list of teachers and/or workshops that can fit your needs.**

## VII. STUDENT LEADERSHIP

### WHS Choir Leadership Council

Who is the choir leadership council and what do they do?

The WHS Choir Leadership council is a group students that work to advocate for the entire choral program and have a vested interest in the success of the choir. The focus of the leadership council is strengthening we/us mindset which is crucial to our choir’s success. The leadership council will be involved in decision making throughout the year that will help towards this end.

- Singers must be in 10-12th graders enrolled in the *WHS Concert Choir*
- Must be in “good standing” in choir and at WHS
- Must display a positive attitude and demonstrate leadership skills.
- Elections for executive positions and the opportunity to apply to the leadership council will occur in the spring.

Students must have served on leadership council for at least one year to be eligible for the following positions:

***WHS Choir President and Vice President (11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade)*** – Elected by leadership council in the spring. The Concert Choir President and Vice President are figureheads of

the WHS Choral Department. Duties include: acting as a liaison between choir members and the director, representing the choir in community performance and recruiting events, and assisting the director. They are responsible for upholding a positive student image of the choral program and maintaining the positive energy and participation of the ensemble throughout the year. Responsible for running periodic early morning meetings with the leadership council.

***WHS Choir Secretary/Treasurer (11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade)*** - Elected by leadership council in the spring. Duties include: Acting as a liaison between choir members and the director, representing the choir in community performance and recruiting events, and assisting the director particularly in terms of the collection of money and forms for various events throughout the year. Periodic early morning meetings will be held to discuss choir department events. Responsible for taking attendance and recording minutes at morning meetings. Also responsible for publicity (Westfield Patch, Morning Announcements, and writing Arts a la Carte articles) and getting these approved by Mr. Brzozowski.

### ***Choir Jobs (appointed by Mr. Brzozowski)***

- ***Choir Historian(s) 10-12<sup>th</sup> grade*** - Any student in Concert Choir that would be responsible for chronicling (collecting press releases, taking pictures, etc.) the year's events for all choirs.
- ***Choir Librarian(s) 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade*** - Any student in Concert Choir that would be responsible for organizing the music library and choir robes.
- ***Choir Manager(s) 10-12<sup>th</sup> grade*** - Primarily responsible for taking attendance and delegating students to take attendance in absence.
- ***Choir Website Manager(s)***- Collaborate with Historian to update photos. Imbed calendar with important dates. Assist Mr. B with technological needs.
- ***Choir Section Leader(s)/Assistant Director(s)*** - Responsible for running sectionals or running rehearsal in Mr. B's absence. Must have proficiency in piano playing.

### ***\*Possible Committees (Delegated by Choir President and Vice President)***

Night of Love Songs  
Recruitment  
Christmas Tree Pickup

\*Committees may be formed through out the course of next year depending on events that come up.

### **Student Leadership in Mixed Chorus/Bella Cora**

Leading stretches  
Organizing folders/music  
Taking Attendance  
Class Representatives

## VIII. CONCERTS AND REHEARSALS

As part of the course of study for WHS Choral classes, all choral students are required to participate in two concerts, a winter concert and a spring concert. Attendance at these concerts will count towards a portion of their overall grade for the class for the marking period (See “III. Grading”). It is expected that school concerts take precedence over any outside of school events. It is recommended that students look ahead at the performance schedule as to avoid any potential conflicts.

Most of the choral ensembles at WHS meet during the day for rehearsal, however **there are times throughout the year that will require additional rehearsals.** These rehearsals may occur after school and during other periods in the school day other than students’ regularly scheduled music period. Attendance at these rehearsals will count towards a students’ concert grade.

**Students in auditioned choral groups (*Bella Cora, Chorale Choraleers and Concert Choir*) as well as *WHS Mens Chorus* will often have additional performance responsibilities.** Performances may be scheduled as the year progresses. Performances scheduled more than a month in advance of the performance date are considered mandatory and attendance will count towards a students’ concert grade. A detailed performance/rehearsal calendar will be distributed early in the year once most dates are finalized.

\*To avoid any potential conflicts with our concert schedule, be sure to sit down with your parents and talk about your commitments throughout the year.

## IX. COMMUNICATION

The WHS music department utilizes a music administration software program called *Charms Office* that aids in the communication, management, and dissemination of important information to students and parents. At the beginning of the year, all students will be required to update or create a profile in *Charms*.

Having this profile gives the music teacher the ability to create and organize group lists, correspond with parents/students, post materials, and give assignments. There is even an area that the students can record themselves and receive feedback from the teacher! **It is expected that all students have and maintain a valid email address and that they check this email regularly.** Students are also responsible for updating all of their profile information as it changes throughout the year. Instructions for updating student profiles on Charms can be found on the WHS Choral Department website, [westfieldchoir.org](http://westfieldchoir.org)

\* Emailing is a professional way of corresponding with your teachers. Remember to use proper punctuation, greetings, closings, etc. when writing this type of professional correspondence.

## **X. SCHOLARSHIPS**

For current year seniors there are two monetary scholarships that the Choir Department offers, the *Concert Choir Award* and the *Esprit d'Corps Award*. Scholarship applications and information will be given out in January.

## **XI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

I am more than willing to write recommendations for students who need them for college, summer programs, etc. Some tips/guidelines for recommendations are below:

1. It is best to ask in person for the recommendation and as early as possible. If you have to email (in the summer, for example), be sure to follow up in person.
2. Be sure to give a clear deadline for when you need the recommendation letter submitted. It is also helpful to include a list of things that you would like me to include in your recommendation letter.
3. Remember that if I am writing you a recommendation it is because I care about your academic success and future plans. Be sure to follow up with an update on schools, or programs that you are accepted into.

## **FINALE**

I know this is a lot of information but these are some of the items that will help our class run smoothly and have the best year of music making possible. Hopefully this handbook can serve as a guideline to help you make the most out of your year and help us aspire to be a choir program that we can all be proud of!

Throughout the school year, if there are any questions or concerns, I can be reached by email at: [jbrzozowski@westfieldnj12.org](mailto:jbrzozowski@westfieldnj12.org) and by phone during school hours at 908-789-4500 X4549.

Sincerely,

Mr. Brzozowski

“Music exists for the purpose of growing an admirable heart” - Dr. Suzuki



Please sign below and return to Mr. Brzozowski

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**I have read and understand the policies, procedures, and expectations set forth in the Westfield High School Choral Music Handbook.**

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_