



2020-2021 FALL EDITION: CHORAL HANDBOOK

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Message From the Director

Greetings! My name is Brad Bensen and I am the Director of Choirs and AP music theory courses at Panther Creek High School. I feel blessed to be teaching the students in this program and am quite sure that the time they invest with me this year will be well spent as they perform quality literature, learn more about music and also develop lasting friendships.

For the 2020-2021 school year, tremendous change remains upon us. This document is an attempt to cover relevant information that is current at the time of writing. As the school year progresses and academic formats evolve, updates will be made and shared, as appropriate. At this point, this handbook deals ONLY with the **first semester** of the school year. Because of the virtual start to the year, a variety of typical chorus events will either be put off or cancelled altogether.

Typically, this program incorporates a wide variety of live performances, field trips, student extracurricular music activities, extension learning opportunities, social events, etc. However, due to the virtual start, choral classes will be mostly limited to virtual rehearsal and curricular instructional activities. Because of this limitation, our budget for student events is highly cut back; we also recognize potential current economic impacts to our families and thus will **not be charging the annual FairShare** program commitment fee that is necessary to help fund the many choral activities that are generally ongoing throughout the year. We still will have a variety of expenses such as the funding of various software programs, audio technology needs, booster operating expenses, professional development for online choral music instruction, virtual sheet music licensing, and potential choral clinicians to work with our students. There will be **no annual fundraising drive** (like a product sale such as our annual Butterbraid sale). It is possible/hopeful that the second semester will feature more typical student events (only relevant to Pd. 3 and Pd. 4 students), at which time it will likely be necessary to **re-institute** at least a partial FairShare. But until then, it is our hope that families might consider making a **tax-deductible donation** to our PC Choral Boosters, a 501c3 tax-exempt organization. Such donations can be made via PayPal, accessible on our program website, www.panthercreekchorus.com.

Getting Connected:

Regular classwork and remote learning meetings will be conducted through **Google Classroom**, where students have access to a permanent link for the **Google Meet** application, the primary mode of student learning for at least the first quarter. Also, **Remind.com** is used frequently for reminders and important announcements. ALL students must enroll in this on their own; assignments will regularly be posted here. Please make a priority to enroll on the first day of school as follows:

Pd. 2 Mixed Chorus

Google Course Code: bbjkbyu

Class Link (right click and open in new tab): [Mixed Chorus Google Classroom](#)

Must also connect through Remind through <https://www.remind.com/join/mxdchr>

Pd. 3 Women's Ensemble

Google Course Code: ys84o7

Class Link (right click and open in new tab): [Women's Ensemble Google Classroom](#)

Must also connect through Remind through <https://www.remind.com/join/wmsens2021>

Pd. 4 Chamber Choir

Google Course Code: 7yeqvyt

Class Link (right click and open in new tab): [Chamber Choir Google Classroom](#)

Must also connect through Remind through <https://www.remind.com/join/pcchmbr>

All Parents should likewise connect through our **Parent Remind group**, which will likely be used no more than once a month for general reminders: <https://www.remind.com/join/chrsprnts>

Program Overview



The choral program at Panther Creek High School is aimed at producing excellence in its students through a challenging music curriculum that focuses on the development of the whole musician—as proficient performer, academic scholar, and caring citizen. Additionally, it is my opinion that every student has value, which is not dependent on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, cultural practices, religious beliefs, personal preferences, or familial values. I commit to do everything possible to treat students equitably with the expectation that all students will do their best work while enrolled in my classes—whether remote or in person.

Students in the choral program will have the opportunity to learn music and musical concepts from literature representing a diverse array of styles, historical time periods, cultures, and musical genres. **The music selected will be appropriate for its educational and musical value, rather than its popularity, entertainment value or listener appeal.** *These music courses are indeed academic classes, and students will be expected to learn, participate, and demonstrate their knowledge about such elements.*

The Performing Ensembles:

Mixed Chorus: Pd. 2 The Mixed Chorus will be comprised of a variety of students representing all four grades. This non-auditioned class focuses on basic musicianship and protocol for choral rehearsals and performances. It includes an introduction to music sight-reading and proper singing technique using choral literature for mixed voices (SAB and SATB). Music selected will range from the 16th century through current day, including a cappella music, historical literature, lighter “mainstream” arrangements as well as music from various cultures, genres and languages.

Women’s Ensemble: Pd. 3 This year-long group will include girls in grades 10-12. Ladies in this group must **already** have a fundamental understanding of sight-reading and singing techniques. Music selected is written specifically for 3-4 part female voices and will involve a wide range of styles, cultures, and languages.

Panther Creek Chamber Choir: Pd. 4 The premier community performing group at PCHS, this year-long auditioned ensemble will represent students in the upper grades at PCHS. This class will require the greatest commitment and involvement of any choral class. Students **must** be proficient sight-readers and must have a working knowledge of singing technique.

The Catatonas Our auditioned contemporary a cappella group! A non-credit extracurricular ensemble, The Catatonas are made of about 16 students who rehearse during 2 SMART lunch sessions per week. Generally, only the most capable and committed upperclassman students are considered for the group. Auditions are held in early September and will be limited to Chamber Choir students only. **Implementation during remote learning is still being determined.**

Supplies/Materials

Students may need the following materials in every class rehearsal or online Meet:

- Immediate access to online sheet music files (a best practice may be to print out copies, when available)
- Students should stay hydrated with **water only** during singing rehearsals
- Immediate access to appropriate note-taking resources
- *Students who have technology access needs should contact Mr. Bensen for distribution of WCPSS issued options*

Online Expectations and “Netiquette”

- **Actively engage in every online meet**, which students are expected to attend.
- During the meet, please keep **cameras on and mics muted** except for when prompted otherwise. Several apps exist for adding optional graphic backgrounds to Google Meets.
- The **chat function** should only be used for communication between teacher and student—not between student to student. It will be monitored and saved, as appropriate.
- Students should **dress according to the PCHS expectations**, which are aligned with the in-school policy. Pajamas and/or revealing attire isn’t appropriate.
- Find a **quiet place, free of distractions** where you can **sit or stand tall** (necessary for proper singing technique). Engaging from bed or laying down is not an effective learning option.
- **Be respectful others.** Students are to behave in a way that they cause **no disruption** to teaching or to other student’s learning while being considerate of others’ needs, and feelings. Most singing will not be done as solo singing in front of

the group, but rather as prerecorded clips to be posted for my private review. It is important that students do this with the best effort possible to receive the most effective feedback for growth.

- Login to the meet a **couple of minutes before starting**. Attendance will be taken daily and instruction will begin on time.
- Do not use **cellphones** in addition to primary learning devices during live meets. Students must remain properly engaged at all times.
- **Chewing gum** or eating food while singing is both dangerous and distracting.

Choral Class Curriculum

The curriculum taught in all choral music classes is based on the [NC Essential Standards for Music Education](#). Goals are basically as follows:

- Understanding and demonstration of singing technique and vocal pedagogy
- Basic physiological understanding of tone production and care of the voice
- Musical literacy to include sight reading, interpretation, composition and dictation
- Musical harmonic/tonal structure, including scale construction, aural identification and key signatures
- Performance preparation skills and concert etiquette
- Evaluation, reflection and critique of musical performance in both written and oral formats
- Understanding music as a product of history and world cultures

Musical Repertoire

The literature learned and performed in class will be of high educational quality and will represent a wide variety of musical samples from all over the world through a variety of historical periods and cultures. We will also learn music that the North Carolina Music Educators Association suggests through a published music list for our state. Such music is **sometimes sacred in nature**, due to its role in the historical development of classical music literature, *though religious themes will not be the focus of my teaching*. Music is used specifically for the purpose of its educational and artistic value. Here is access to the [HS state choral list collection](#). (select the voicing of the choir and “HS”). Students will be encouraged to take seriously their exposure to new forms of musical literature. ***The purpose of the class is not to entertain (or to train students to be entertainers), but rather to further the musical knowledge and performance proficiency of the students.*** Such a goal will be the driving force behind all programming and rehearsal decisions.

Grading

Starting the 2020 Fall Semester, all classes at PC will institute a simplified 2 category grading system including Major Assessments (60%) and Minor Assessments (40)%.

1. Major Assessments (60%)

Major assessments include summative knowledge indicators that demonstrate mastery of curriculum standards through the use of activities like quizzes, performances, projects, presentations, etc.

2. Minor Assessments (40%)

Minor assessments include activities-based assignments and formative indicators of progress, which may include items such as classwork, literacy checks, critiques, practice requirements, etc.

The following are PC Arts Department grading norms aligned with the school policy on assessment:

- *Any major assessment may be remediated for the purpose to grow in knowledge of content and improvement in grade. Some AP arts classes may have exceptions to this policy.*
- *Work turned in after the due date will be accepted. A late penalty of up to 10% deduction per day late will be implemented, though the lowest grade offered for late material will be 60%.*
- *Missing work will be marked with a 0% placeholder with the opportunity (expectation) for students to make up the missing assignment.*
- *Other global aspects of grading will be aligned with the schoolwide policy as published by the PC administration.*

Honors Credit

Choral students are grouped into course sections based on audition and/or their **length of experience** in the choral program: *Beginning (Vocal 1), Intermediate (Vocal 2), Proficient (Vocal 3) and Advanced (Vocal 4)*. All students who complete at least 3 semesters of choral music are **automatically placed** into Proficient and Advanced Levels, which receive Honors Credit. Students should check to make sure they are **signed up for the correct section** at the very beginning of each semester. It is the expectation that honors credit merits enrichment or expansion activities to validate the credit, as students

are mixed as both academic and honors levels into single classes. Thus, choral students at the Vocal 3 and Vocal 4 levels must complete a **Concert Evaluation Project** for EACH semester that they are enrolled in these levels. **For the 2020 Fall Semester**, students will watch recorded events presented online (or be provided a similar project in scope and rigor) and then critique the events with a report-style paper to be electronically submitted. Noncompletion of this project will lower the student's grade as much as 1 letter grade (which is similar to the difference between academic and honors GPA percentage points).

FINAL EXAMINATIONS: As per Wake County school legislation, a comprehensive semester final exam will be given comprising 20% of the student's overall grade. **Thus, the two assessment types (Major and Minor) comprise 80% of the course's final grade (40% each quarter) with the final exam weighing 20%.** Students should WISELY PLAN for these examinations THROUGHOUT the semester. Senior exemptions will follow the school's policy.

Performance Activities

Public performance is one of the most effective means of music education assessment. Because chorus is considered an **academic class**, grades are assigned for engagement in all scheduled performances. Though we are remote for the beginning of the year, we plan to have some virtual performances which students are expected to engage in. Students will be given plenty of time to prerecord their video submissions prior to a specific due date. After the due date has passed, make up of that submission will no longer be possible as videos will be sent to mastering and mixing. **These virtual concerts** will be considered a Major Assessment for the quarter. It is most likely that there will be just 1 virtual concert during the first semester. Proper performance apparel will be determined prior to the recording submission timeline, likely consisting of a specific choir t-shirt provided for the students. Because the editing process to build the virtual platform will be of considerable expense, the performance will likely be streamed through event-hosting software that will include virtual ticketing for the "admittance" to the event. Because it will be hosted on a secure site, student privacy will be respected as the product will not be posted on an open online environment. Further information about this will be published well before the date of the event is established.

Choral Booster Organization

The choral booster organization is a **501c3 incorporated group of parent volunteers**. No dues or fees are required for membership. All choral parents are welcomed to be involved with the organization. The group exists for the benefit of both choral students and the choral program itself. "Boosters" help support the program by assisting the choral director with numerous program elements, including fundraising, organizing concerts, coordinating trips, and completing numerous other tasks that are necessary for the success of the choral program. For the Fall of 2020, this group will run on a limited scale; we will not complete a typical product-sale fundraiser, organize student social events, chaperone local trips or other typical aspects of support. It IS possible that we may need some help with virtual items that are yet to be determined. The one thing we KNOW we will need is some support in the way of monetary donations. Because we have no specific fundraising income nor FairShare fees, please consider making a tax-deductible donation so we can cover the anticipated expenses. We have several thousand dollars in program needs; specifics are on the [Fall 2020 Booster Budget](#).

I look forward to investing time in the excellent students in this program, even though it be from afar. Please feel free to reach out with questions as they arise.

Many Thanks,

Brad Bensen