

FAQs

SEVEN LAKES HS ORCHESTRAS

January 2025



Dear Future Seven Lakes Orchestra Member,

It seems that this year has flown by very quickly, and it's hard to believe that you're about to embark upon your high school career! This packet from the Seven Lakes Orchestras has been provided to help you and your parents take an in-depth look at what the orchestra program at Seven Lakes is all about.

We have been very blessed at Seven Lakes High School. In our 20th year of existence, the orchestras have earned many accolades and have presented many outstanding performances. Our ensembles have won numerous "Sweepstakes" trophies at various UIL and festival contests. Our orchestras consistently rank in the top 10 orchestras among all high school orchestra programs in Texas. In 2016 and 2020, the Symphony Orchestra was crowned State Champions; our Symphony Strings were also State Champions in 2024! The Symphony Orchestra has won several national awards

including the American Prize in Music and the Mark of Excellence Award from the Foundation for Music Education.

Each year, we bring in guest clinicians from all over the United States, and our clinicians rave about our ensembles. Our students have received masterclasses from world-class musicians from the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Houston Symphony, and from many colleges and universities all over the United States. Our students have had the opportunity to perform and work with living composer works by Lowell Liebermann, Kinley Lange, Todd Frazier, Michael Markowski, and John Mackey. One of our biggest concerts was when we performed with European pop superstar, Alexander Rybak.

Our talent has proven itself with dozens of Region Orchestra members, Area Orchestra Members, and

several All-State Orchestra members over the years. Hundreds of medals are earned at our UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest. We've earned so many consecutive "Sweepstakes" trophies at both Full Orchestra and String Orchestra UILs! In addition to the field trips to world-renowned artists like the Tokyo String Quartet, the Eroica Trio, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, 2Cellos, and the Houston Symphony! Students enjoy social events like Posters and Premieres, the O-Mazing Race, and Main Event! Our spring trips have brought us to San Antonio, Bandera, Dallas, Chicago, New Orleans, and Orlando! Last year, our students performed at the world-famous Carnegie Hall in New York City!

Our compassion has come through with flying colors by volunteering throughout the year at the Houston Food Bank.

Students have also contributed to "Toys for Tots" and Katy ISD's Santa Cops Program. Outside of music, our students have worked hard toward being the best students at Seven Lakes with far-ranging achievements in academia and sports. Nevertheless, students still enjoy performing great repertoire, making new friends, and being part of a hard-working, fun-loving, and musical family! Please check out the following pages of Frequently Asked Questions. We invite you to be a member of one of the most exciting groups at Seven Lakes. As a flagship of Katy ISD, Texas, and in the nation, we want YOU to be a part of making musical history!

Desiree Overree, Director of Orchestras
Sean Carlton, Associate Director of Orchestras
Sean Kime, Assistant Director of Orchestras

How Large is Our Orchestra?

Currently, the Seven Lakes Orchestras are divided into seven classes during the school day. With over 260 students enrolled, we are proud of all of our performing groups! Next year, we will again have seven string orchestras and one full orchestra: Camerata, Philharmonia, Arietta, Serenata, Lyrica, Cambiata, Sinfonia and of course, the Symphony. Almost all of our groups compete at UIL Contests and are engaged with numerous concerts and performances. With seven periods of orchestra to accommodate your schedule, there is a home for every player in the Seven Lakes Orchestras!



What can I expect as a member of the HS orchestra program?

What can I expect as a member of the high school orchestra program? You have come from an outstanding middle school orchestra program with terrific directors and an outstanding musical background. Just expect much of the same commitment to excellence and pursuit of knowledge!

At the high school level, there is a strong emphasis on performance, with units over string orchestra literature, full orchestra literature, and chamber music. Refinement of rudimentary skills is stressed. Additionally, all students study music theory (the math behind the music) in depth and listen to learn about the ways music works (music appreciation). This balance between performance and the more academic curriculum of music makes each student a well-rounded musician.



Do students have to audition to be a part of the Seven Lakes Orchestras?

Students are assigned to orchestras according to ability, attitude, instrumentation, and directors' recommendation. To be placed correctly in orchestra, an audition is necessary to ascertain the appropriate-level ensemble. Auditions each year consist of a performance of an etude or solo and scales. This audition takes place in April-May for the following year. Audition information will be distributed to all interested students in January.



I'm worried about high school credit and my GPA! Tell me more about how Orchestra helps me!

Following your freshman year, students enrolled in subsequent years may elect to take orchestra for GPA exempt status. That means that if you are making an 80 or above for orchestra, that grade will not impact your GPA. You must have completed one full year of orchestra at a KISD HS campus to qualify for this status.

Can a student participate in Athletics and Orchestra?

ABSOLUTELY! It is a misconception that students who are enrolled in Fine Arts must choose between Athletics and Music. The Athletics and Fine Arts Departments allow our students to participate and compete for both departments. Conflicts sometimes happen, but we work them out. Good communication between students, parents, coaches, and teachers is important in fostering a positive balance between your passions.



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What is Full Orchestra?

Our Full Orchestra (called the Symphony Orchestra) is a tradition that was established in the very first year of our existence. The top band and string players combine to perform symphonic literature in each semester. We have already had several performances this school year and were blessed to win our 18th "Sweepstakes" trophy at the annual UIL Concert and Sight-reading Contest! In 2019 and 2020, the Symphony ranked #1 in the state! There is no additional class to register for because this orchestra meets weekly on Monday nights from 5 to 7p.



What contests and competitions are available to me?

All students are encouraged to audition for a membership in the Region 23 Orchestras in the Fall term. Additionally, students may choose to keep working toward the highest level of orchestra: TMEA's All-State. Seven Lakes has 8 Orchestra All-Staters this year, and at one point in time, as many as 15! The Spring semester is highlighted by the annual UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest. At the highest level, students may compete at Katy ISD's KYAC in May. Concerto competitions sponsored by local civic organizations and youth orchestras are highly encouraged. Most of our ensembles also have a state assessment, called UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Assessment.

Do I have to buy a tuxedo or formal gown for the concerts?

No. Katy ISD issues a formal uniform to every enrolled student; however, there is a Maintenance/Dry Cleaning Fee that must be paid. Also, be aware that we have different uniforms according to the different performances that we have. Although most of our performances require the formal uniform, periodically, we will wear our informal uniform (purchased orchestra shirts and jeans) at informal settings.

Do I bring my cello or bass back and forth to school?

Like your junior high program, students may use a Katy ISD cello or bass for a fee per year. This fee is paid at the beginning of the school year. Violinists and violists will transport their instruments back and forth, but have orchestra lockers to store these in. Seven Lakes does not provide violas or violins for school use.



Does the No Pass/No Play rule affect my participation in orchestra?

Orchestra students must pass ALL classes in order to participate in extra-curricular activities of the orchestra: contests, paid performances, and auditions for Region, Area, and State. Class time instruction and all after-school rehearsals and sectionals are considered "curricular," and students participate in these regardless of academic eligibility. UIL rules have changed since 2021, and all students may participate in UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluation.

What expenses are incurred with membership in the Orchestras?

Students, at the beginning of the year, pay an Activity Fee, a Uniform Maintenance Fee, and purchase a garment bag. As part of the performance uniforms, students provide their own tuxedo shirt, black socks and black dress shoes (boys); and black hosiery and black dress shoes (girls). Additionally, students purchase the informal concert uniform, which consists of the orchestra t-shirt. Students choosing to participate in our social events pay for their admission and food costs. The spring trip at the end of the year is also an additional expense, but is optional.

What about social events? Do you have them?

Our Student Officers select, plan, and coordinate all social aspects of the orchestra. This year, they planned "Posters and Premieres," at-school socials, an outing at Main Event, and our Informal and Formal Banquets, and more! Our biggest social event is our Spring trip, which combines the fun of a mini vacation with a performance at an out-of-town major venue. Our ensembles have performed at the Meyerson Symphony Center and Majestic Theater in Dallas, Chicago's Symphony Hall, Judson Performing Arts Center, and Tulane University. This year, we will be performing at the world-famous Carnegie Hall!



Dear Class of 2029,

Hello! We're Jenna and David, the President and Vice President this year, and we're thrilled to welcome you to the Seven Lakes Orchestras (or as we like to call it, SLORK)!

Our program provides a world-class musical education that truly sets us apart. Our Symphony Strings are the 2024 State Champions and American Prize winners in both 2023 and 2024. However, you don't have to be in the top group to embark on this excellence: all our orchestras were chosen to perform at Carnegie Hall last year for our spring trip to NYC!

But SLORK is more than just making music – we're a family. You'll create unforgettable memories, from Olympic-themed races to Main Event socials. We also have weekly challenges between sections called Section Showdown. Whether it's doing funny trends like speed drawing your instrument or opera singing with

your section, these challenges truly show the vibrant community spirit. (Violas reigned supreme last year – who's next?) We love giving back too! We regularly volunteer at the Houston Food Bank and recently raised nearly \$2,000 for Katy ISD's Santa Cops Program to provide Christmas gifts for 15 children in our community.

So, take it from us when we say you're not just joining orchestra – you're becoming part of a community that will stand by you through both challenges and triumphs. Make music, embrace our traditions, and help write the next chapter in the legacy of SLORK. We can't wait to see what you'll achieve!

Sincerely,
Jenna Lee and David Wang
(Class of 2025)



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