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# FAQs

## SEVEN LAKES HS ORCHESTRAS

January 2026



### 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 composers 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

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! In 2024, 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*

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## How Large is Our Orchestra?

Currently, the Seven Lakes Orchestras are divided into six classes during the school day. With over 250 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?

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 March for the following year. Audition information will be distributed to all interested students in January.





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## 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.



## 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 19th "Sweepstakes" trophy at the annual UIL Concert and Sight-reading Contest! In 2016 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.



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## 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 6 All-State Musicians this year! 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 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 during the school day. Seven Lakes does not provide violas or violins for school use.



## 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.

## 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.

## 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 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. In 2024, we performed at the world-famous Carnegie Hall!





## Dear Class of 2030,

Hi! We are Annie and Shailesh, the President and Vice President of the Seven Lakes Orchestras this year, and we are so excited to welcome you to the Seven Lakes Orchestra program!

Being part of this program for the past four years, we have had so many amazing experiences. From performing at Carnegie Hall to being the TMEA State Champion Honor Orchestra, every opportunity has helped us to grow as musicians.

But the Seven Lakes Orchestras isn't just about the performances and accolades. It's a community that constantly supports each other to strive for excellence, in and out of orchestra. With fun socials every six weeks, ranging from painting posters to going to Main Event, and weekly challenges with our sections called Section Showdown, there are so many moments that have allowed us to grow closer.

Some of our favorite memories have come from the program's traditions: sharing what we are thankful for and eating pie together on Pie Day, and writing kind messages to each other for "All the Good Things".

We also love giving back to the community, which we did this year by volunteering together at the Houston Food Bank and raising over \$1,700 to buy Christmas gifts for underprivileged students in Katy ISD. You're not just joining a world-class orchestra program, you're joining a family who will always stand by your side and push you to succeed in all things. We can't wait to see what you'll achieve!

Sincerely,  
Annie Zhou  
and Shailesh Satewar  
(Class of 2026)



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