

Page 16 is to be signed by student and parent. Please return page 16 to Mr. Otto by the second week of the semester.

GCPS

Chorus

Handbook



Miss. Kristina Watkins, Director, Gloucester High School

Mrs. Karen Scalf, Director, Page Middle School

Mr. Paul Otto, Director, Peasley Middle School

Dear Students and Parents/Guardians,

I am excited to begin this school year/semester as your Chorus teacher! I'm looking forward to meeting you all and seeing each student develop and grow as a singer and member of chorus at Peasley Middle School. Gloucester County Schools demonstrates a strong support for the well-rounded education of all students including their involvement in the arts. This support provides a solid foundation for a strong and growing chorus program in the district. It is my sincere hope that your experience in Peasley Middle School Chorus will be the beginning of a life-long journey of musical learning and development that provides many positive and meaningful experiences now and in your future.

Middle School Chorus is mostly an entry-level course. Some students will join chorus with little or no prior group singing experience. Others will have had this experience and are looking forward to expanding and advancing their skills and understandings. What is important to understand is my core belief about using your voice to sing. **I believe fully that each human being is born with the ability to sing.** Singing is sometimes referred to as the highest level of speech. With this as my central approach to teaching chorus, I will commit to making the chorus classroom challenging, yet not threatening. Singing is odd in that it is a natural expression of being a human but, as it connects to and reveals emotion, it can be somewhat uncomfortable to young people who are developing emotional strength and stability through the Middle School years. I look forward to helping each student develop their singing abilities as well as a strong foundation in what we call Choral Singing.

My office is always open for questions, considerations, concerns, or just to chat! I am very transparent in my dealings with students and parents/guardians. Always feel free to talk to me or make an appointment with me if you have questions or issues. There are several modes provided for expressing any feelings or concerns. Some of these will be explained in detail later in this document. You are encouraged to use any of these modes of communication in order to avoid misunderstandings or other distractions.

Every successful music program is more than a 7-3 job. It requires outside dedication and more crucially, the support of parents/guardians. I will solicit parents and students for help, if ever you are looking for a volunteer opportunity even if I haven't asked yet; chances are I'm in the midst of something I need assistance with. Please read about the **Chorus Boosters Support Group** later in this handbook.

This combined student and parent handbook contains a detailed description of the chorus program and the policies and procedures under which it operates. Please read the handbook thoroughly so that you are familiar with its contents and retain this copy for future questions. There will also be an electronic copy available on the Chorus Web Page. Parents/Guardians and students are responsible for knowing this information.

Sincerely,

Paul Otto, Choral Director
Peasley Middle School

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I. Mission and Purpose Statement

GCPS Chorus Department Mission Statement

It is our belief that when a wide array of music accomplishments is achieved, a students' potential for living a wholesome and fulfilling life is made possible.

It is our mission to provide a means of musical expression in a creative learning environment that teaches appropriate fundamentals, provides opportunities for individuals and shared performances, and represents the school throughout the community, region, nation, and world.

Statement of Purpose

In Gloucester County Public Schools, we strongly believe that music has the ability to enrich every person's life in unique and powerful ways. Thus, our primary goal is to foster the development of a life-long relationship with music in every choral student. Whether our students go on to be music majors, doctors who sing in a community choir or church choir one night a week, or are simply educated music fans/supporters our goal is for them to have a love and appreciation of music and the music-making process.

Beyond the purely musical goals of the program, we also aim to develop students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Teamwork and cooperation are REQUIREMENTS for all choral ensemble members. There are no "second-string" players in a chorus. Instead, each individual in the ensemble plays a *vital* role in the quality of music making and the environment in which we work. Each musical experience is unique and can never be perfect. Even the best professional musicians spend their entire lives practicing towards perfection, never quite attaining it. Not to say that much is lost in this journey, but rather gained exponentially. These characteristics set apart music from other subjects and are what make it such an irreplaceable aspect of a student's education.

Given all of this, we are not in the business of producing only "conservatory vocalists" or "performance monkeys." We are – very much – in the business of developing consummate and independent musicians who will maintain life-long relationships with music. Along the way we will also be providing and encouraging positive interactions and personal growth through the medium of music. The road toward these goals can be tedious, frustrating and challenging, but also extremely rewarding. Only through positive effort on the part of all members involved in the program can true excellence be achieved.

II. What Will the Learning Process Look Like?

We recognize that music learning is experienced on a highly individual level and therefore, will be adjusted to meet the individual needs of every student. In addition to this, it is important to understand that a successful, positive chorus experience depends on the efforts of each member of the group. The dedication and effort put into each lesson, rehearsal, and performance directly affects individual learning as well as the success of the group. There cannot be one without the other.

Music is also a “skill-based” set of knowledge. There will be many absolute and concrete things that will be learned, but there will be just as much abstract and interpretive knowledge and skill sets that will be explored and mastered.

The learning environment is the first important link. A positive experience for all students will be cultivated in each class. This is a weighty task and requires COOPERATION on the part of all students, student leaders, families, and staff. The voice is the most personal of instruments as it is part of one’s own body. And the lyrics we sing will be seated at the heart of our emotions. Thus, a supportive learning environment will provide a level of comfort where students should feel free to explore difficult skills and make mistakes. Individual ability and comprehension levels will vary greatly from student to student. Consequently, students are required to maintain a positive and helpful decorum as we work toward both individual skill enhancement and comprehension, and group progress and performance readiness.

Our second link is efficient rehearsal use. Students should use class time to their best possible advantage. They should focus, study music when waiting for rehearsal to progress, and make a positive contribution at all times. Individual learning styles will vary. Respect for all styles, patience and the ability to understand the “process” and be compliant with it will be expected of all singers at all times.

Next in our chain is individual responsibility. Students will be responsible for completing all assignments, learning music, and acquiring new skills within the appropriate time allotted. It is the students’ responsibility to communicate with the teacher if additional support or instruction is needed.

To all chorus students:

Patience, patience, patience...in spectacular ensembles there is no amount of patience that can be deemed “enough.” The director will keep us moving ahead as best and appropriately as he/she can. However, there will be rehearsals which are more tedious than others, there will sometimes seem like there are more failures than successes in a rehearsal, sometimes you may feel like you are the only one NOT “getting it.” This is a normal part of any skill-based learning process. The key is to have “THE 2-P’s” patience and perseverance. It is often amongst the greatest struggle that our success is just over the horizon. Never give up on yourself or your teammates!

There are numerous activities and opportunities as students’ progress through the middle and high school programs. Please refer to section **VI** of the handbook.

III. Goals

1. Students will continually improve their individual singing ability and musical literacy by participating in full ensemble, small groups and individual assessments, and auditions.
2. Students will increase their musical skills and literacy levels by understanding and working towards mastery of various musical concepts, including, but not limited to: posture, breath control, tone production, diction, and technical facility (including scales, warm-ups, rhythmic accuracy, sight-singing, terminology, interpretations, form, style, etc.). These improvements will be monitored in class and through outside practice.
3. Students will be evaluated through various methods, including singing quizzes, formal testing, observation and public performances, written work and teacher feedback/coaching in class.

IV. Rehearsal/Performance Attendance Policy

Performing in a group is a very rewarding experience. Every chorus student benefits from the participation and efforts of each other member. In chorus, the greatest expression of learning is experienced in our concerts. During our concerts, students will be expected to stay for the entire program. Each school designates attendance expectations for rehearsals and concerts. Please review these policies carefully as they directly affect the overall chorus grade. (See section V.)

V. Behavior Expectations and Consequences

A. Classroom Expectations: (beyond the Student Code of Conduct)

- 1. Follow Directions**
- 2. Be on time for each rehearsal/lesson**
- 3. Be respectful (friendly) to each person in the room**
- 4. Keep hand and feet to yourself**
- 5. No hats, gum, food or drinks (except water)**
- 6. No personal electronic devices used during class**

B. Consequences:

1. Teacher/Student conference
2. Time in "FOCUS" with parent phone call
3. Conference with Parent, Student and Teacher to devise a corrective action plan
4. Office Referral with parent phone call

C. Absences and Tardies:

1. Excused Absences

Excused class absences will only be granted when appropriate notes are submitted to the attendance office. An excused absence has neither a positive nor a negative effect on the classroom participation grade. (Keep in mind that we use class time to prepare for our concerts.)

2. Unexcused Absences

Unexcused class absences will be given a classroom participation grade of 0. Please be aware of current District Policy regarding attendance. (For more information concerning absences, refer to the Code of Student Conduct).

3. Tardies

The only tardy considered excused is a tardy with a pass. You will not be permitted to go back to a previous instructor or administrator to obtain a pass. In essence, a tardy pass will be your admittance ticket to class. If you arrive late (excused or unexcused) please be respectful of the learning environment and don't be any more disruptive than your tardy already is. (For more information concerning tardiness, refer to the Code of Student Conduct).

D. Choir Trips (school)

Students not displaying consistent academic progress and expected etiquette will be prohibited from participating in additional trips (Special events, Festivals, etc.).

VI. Program Offerings at Peasley Middle School

Sixth Grade Chorus

Sixth Grade Chorus is a semester long class. Students enrolled in Chorus 6 will learn the fundamentals of singing. Students will explore and develop skills that will promote confidence in singing alone and with others. Students will also learn how the singing voice develops throughout their secondary school years. Songs and activities will involve unison, two-part, and some three-part singing. Singing exercises will help improve music reading ability and listening skills necessary for group singing. This will include Sol-Feg singing and Curwen hand signs for singing the scale (DO RE ME FA SO LA TI DO). **Students in this class are expected to participate in public performances and/or performance exams each quarter.**

Seventh Grade Chorus

Students will continue to improve skills that are important for group and individual singing. All aspects of choral singing will be explored. Songs and activities will include music written in unison, two parts, and three parts. Lessons will focus on developing independent singing and music reading skills. This will include Sol-Feg singing and Curwen hand signs for singing the scale (DO RE ME FA SO LA TI DO). Students in this class (1st or 2nd semester qualify to audition for District Chorus in October.)

Individual singing assessments will be held each quarter. Each student will be required to sing for the director for a grade to demonstrate level of skill as well as understanding of assigned music.

Students in this class are expected to participate in public performances and/or performance exams each quarter.

Eighth Grade Chorus

Eighth Grade Chorus is a yearlong class. Students wishing to be in Eighth Grade Chorus must have prior experience in chorus. Those students who transfer in from another school district will be required to have a vocal assessment to determine appropriate voice placement in the group.

Students in this class will continue to develop their musicianship as a singer and member of chorus. These lifelong skills and understandings will help the student to be prepared for further vocal experiences in High School and beyond. There will be challenging individual and group activities that will enhance musical growth. This will include individual assessment in areas of vocal development and sight singing. In addition, students will embark on a study of music theory. These lessons will be initiated in class via web-based learning. Individual progress will be tracked throughout the year. **All Chorus students are expected to perform in our concerts.**

VII. Other opportunities for chorus students

Area Chorus: Chorus students who desire a large group experience are encouraged to try out for *Middle Peninsula Northern Neck Area Chorus*. This is a two-day event offered in the spring. (First Semester students do qualify to try-out.) Members of Area Chorus will learn five or six selections and then, during the event, will rehearse with as many as 100 other middle school chorus students in the Area. The event culminates with a public performance at the end of the second day. (Available to students enrolled in 6th, 7th or 8th grade chorus classes only.)

District Chorus: This two day large group experience is a wonderful opportunity for chorus students to experience a high level of choral growth and experience. To qualify, students will be coached to participate in an audition that happens on the first Saturday in November. Students with high scores are then placed into District Chorus that is scheduled for the second Friday and Saturday in February. Because this is a challenging experience, students will be required to attend coaching/rehearsal after school sessions. (Available to only students enrolled in 7th or 8th Grade chorus classes.)

District Chorus Assessment: During this event, the chorus will perform two songs that will be assessed by judges. In addition, the chorus will be judged on its ability to sight read a short musical pattern. Students enrolled in 8th grade Chorus will be registered for this event that is scheduled in March.

Kings Dominion Choral Festival: The 8th grade chorus will perform two selections on stage during this event. Three judges will listen to the songs while following the sheet music. As they listen, they will fill out judging forms. The scores from these forms will be tabulated and the following ratings will be awarded based on various aspects of the performance. After the performance, we stay at the park...ride the rides, see the attractions and have fun! This trip will be scheduled near the end of the school year.

VCU Vocal Arts Project: The Vocal Arts Project is a summer music camp designed for singers entering grades 6-12 in Fall 2017. This weeklong camp provides singers with a comprehensive choral experience. Singers will be placed in choirs according to voicing and ability level. Throughout the week, students will take classes in theory & sight singing, drama, vocal technique, and world drumming.

Further information and the application form can be found online at

<http://arts.vcu.edu/music/areas-of-study/voice/special-programs/vocal-arts-project>

VII. Assessment

Perhaps the most obvious question you may have is how you will be assessed during your time in the choral program. Students in all chorus classes will be graded according to the following plan:

Grading Symbol in Grade Book	Assessment Type	Percentage
CP	Classroom Participation	40%
ConTst	Concert Performance/Tests	30%
CwQz	Classwork/Quizzes	25%
Project	Personal Reflection Project	5%

A. Classroom Participation (40%):

This is the largest component of your grade because your success as well as the ensembles success is DIRECTLY DEPENDENT on your ACTIVE participation and involvement in rehearsals and classroom instruction. It is absolutely crucial that you participate to the best of your ability in EVERY class and rehearsal. This is not limited to singing ability, but also answering questions, being prompt to class, having all materials, etc. Each individual student will be given an opportunity to earn 5 points per class period (25 points per 5 class periods) represented by the breakdown below:

Five Levels of Participation for Chorus Students

1. **Arrival:** On time, belongings away, no gum/food/drink (except water), in assigned seat, immediately involved in focus activities such as Vocal Warm-ups and Exercises.
2. **Materials:** Have your music folder and pencil, and any other assigned classroom materials.
3. **Attentive:** Be focused and involved during all tasks such as singing, listening, studying, reading, discussing, composing, evaluating, etc. Also be mindful of your surroundings, classroom procedures, and your fellow classmates.
4. **Responsive:** Be aware of, and ready to follow conductor's verbal and non-verbal instruction, gestures and leadership.
5. **Collaborative:** Be RESPECTFUL of the music learning process, your environment, peers, guests, and property

Classroom Participation grading method...

Success in all 5 levels = 5 points

Success in 4 levels = 4 points

Success in 3 levels = 3 points

Success in 2 levels = 2 points

Success in 1 level = 1 point

Unexcused Absence = 0

Excused Absence = X (Student must make up all work missed)

Your classroom participation grade will be reported at the end of each week. If you have had success in all levels throughout five class periods, you should have 25 points in this category.

Continual bad habits or major infractions will be handled according to the discipline procedures of the GHS Student Code of Conduct. **Disrespectful behavior will automatically result in a participation grade of 0 (zero).**

B. Concert Performances/Tests (30%)

Concerts are an essential part of being in a performance-based ensemble. Your team relies on you to be at each concert to make the performance work. Each concert will count for a test grade and is REQUIRED. You are provided with all major concert dates as of the release of this document, so work conflicts and family vacations are not considered excused absences. **FAMILY AND MEDICAL EMERGENCIES are the only events that constitute and excused absence from a concert.** Emergency, as defined as an unforeseen event occurring out of your control. A parent/guardian will need to provide a note no more than 48 hours after the performance. ONLY after the excuse note is received will the student be given an alternate concert assignment.

Not only will you be required to be at every concert, but be an active and appropriate participant. This includes wearing proper attire, preparedness, being punctual, engaged in the music-making process, etc. The following are consequences that could be enforced either prior to the concert or during the concert, at the discretion of the director.

Consequences

You may be dismissed from performing the concert and given an alternate assignment if...

1. You have had too many absences to have adequately prepared for the concert.
2. You received a safety disciplinary action that prohibits your participation in the concert
3. You miss the dress rehearsal
4. You miss the concert warm-up
5. You are not showing the proper respect of your classmates, room monitor, guest musicians, performance venue or property, etc.
6. You are not wearing the appropriate concert attire

- 1 letter grade will be deducted for every 5 minutes you are late to the concert call-time.

PERFORMANCE TEST: If there are no public performances scheduled during a marking period, there will be a "virtual concert" during the school day that will count for this performance grade

C. Class work and Quizzes (25%)

Students will be expected to complete various types of class work. All class work should be maintained in the student's folder for review or reference at a future date. We will perform daily written warm-ups (Do-Nows) in addition to our music literacy work.

Students will be assessed through various means. Quizzes may be written, sung (solo or small group) or present themselves in the realm of score checks. A score check is when the director looks through the

student's scores for particular markings. These will be a pass/fail grade; either you marked the score when asked or you didn't. Any extra rehearsals we have will also constitute a quiz grade. You should be recognized for any and all work you put into the ensemble, even if it is outside of classroom hours.

D. Personal Reflection Project (5%)

Each student in chorus will be expected to complete a project at the end of each semester which would be a review of what was learned and experienced as a result of being in chorus.

E. Extra Credit

Chorus students at Peasley are encouraged to seek out opportunities for musical self-growth. This credit can be things like...

- VOICE LESSONS
- OTHER CHOIR - Participation in a choir outside of school.
- CONCERT ATTENDED (symphony, musical, etc.)
- SOLOS/OR SMALL GROUP PERFORMANCE
- CONCERT SETUP – Help Mr. Otto (after school)
- AFTER SCHOOL TRAINING – Attend special preparations for auditions, etc. (after school)
- AUDITIONS – Try-outs for District Chorus, a special ensemble, a musical, or solo.
- FESTIVAL OR WORKSHOP – Participate in an approved choral festival or workshop.

VIII. Financial Information

Chorus Uniform Fee: \$20.00

Part of performing on stage has to do with the overall image of our group. During all chorus performances, students are required to wear the official chorus uniform. No hats, scarves, or large jewelry should be worn. (See Mr. Otto if there is a cultural exemption to this rule).

Chorus Uniform fee is \$20.00 (Payable to Peasley Middle School). Cases of financial hardship should be brought to the attention of the director immediately.

XI. Chorus Uniforms

Girls: Peasley provides beautiful black full length gowns that will be worn at our performances. The girls in chorus are to provide black dress shoes.

Boys: Peasley provides white tux style shirts, vests and bow ties. The boys in chorus are to provide their own black dress slacks, black shoes, and black socks.

Sixth and Seventh Grade Chorus

Peasley will provide vests for each member of sixth and seventh grade chorus.

Students are to provide a white button down shirt, black dress pants, black shoes and black socks.

Optional Chorus Fees

Most auditions, festivals and extra chorus opportunities require additional fees. These fees and due dates will be posted as events are scheduled. Again, cases of hardship should not keep a student from participating in an audition or event, but the director must be made aware of the situation in order to request funds from the choral booster organization.

Chorus Fund-Raisers

There will be one major fund-raiser during each semester. Each chorus student is encouraged to participate in these events. The funds raised meet many Chorus needs that would otherwise not be available for our program. The first priority of any funds raised is to offset the cost of special activities and opportunities for chorus students such as registration and transportation costs for District Assessment, District Chorus, Area Chorus, and Kings Dominion Choral Festival. In addition, these funds help provide partial scholarships for Individual Music Enhancement opportunities such as VCU Vocal Arts Camp.

X. Important Dates and Events

Date	Performance/Event	Time
Sept. 3rd	First Day of School- Receive All Class Materials	during class
Sept. 20 th	All Class Materials/Fees Should Be Returned to Mr. Otto	during class
Tuesday, Oct 3rd	Chorus Spirit Night at Chick-Fil-A	5-8pm
Friday, Oct 4	Fall Chorus Fund-Raiser begins	
Friday, Oct 18	Chorus Group Picture Day	during class
Saturday, Oct 26	District Chorus Auditions (7th and 8th grade chorus students)	TBD
Wednesday, Dec 11	Chorus "Pizahearsal" after school.	2:50-4:30pm
<u>All 6th, 7th and 8th grade first semester chorus students.</u>		
Thursday, Dec 12	CHORUS/GUITAR WINTER CONCERT	7:00pm
Tuesday, Dec 17	8th Grade Chorus Trip to the Elementary Schools	TBD
Fri/Sat, Feb 7-8	District Chorus	
Thursday, March 5	District Chorus "Mock Assessment" at Peasley	9:00 11:30
Friday, March 6	Spring Chorus Fund-Raiser begins	
Thur/Fri, Mch 12 <u>or</u> 13	District Assessment (8th Grade Chorus)	TBD
Thursday, March 19	All County Chorus Concert at GHS	6:30pm
Thursday, March 26	Chorus Spirit Night at Chick-Fil-A	5-8pm
Thursday, April 2	Peasley Talent Show	7:00pm
Fri/Sat, April 17-18	Area Chorus – Selected Chorus students	
Wednesday, May 13	Chorus "Pizahearsal" after school.	2:50-4:30pm
<u>All 6th, 7th and 8th grade secons semster chorus students.</u>		
Thursday, May 14	CHORUS/GUITAR SPRING CONCERT	7:00pm
Friday, May 22	Chorus Festival at Kings Dominion (8th Grade Chorus/Guitar Ensemble)	

Information listed above will be updated on our website regularly

** ALL Dates are subject to change and additional opportunities will be added which will also be required. You will have PLENTY of notice in order to get these concert dates and times available in your schedule.**

***It is YOUR responsibility to notify your family about rehearsal and performance dates. You should submit a copy of the performance schedule along with rehearsal dates to your coaches or other important people in your life at the beginning of the school year. Most coaches are happy to work around your schedule if they know well in advance. They are usually less willing to work around your schedule when they find out the day before. Practice/Games are not an excused absence under any circumstance. ***

XI. Chorus Boosters' Organization

Running a successful chorus program involves lots of responsibilities that go way beyond the scope of an average classroom experience. This is true for the students, their families, and their director! There are various tasks and events that depend on individuals that are willing to donate their time to help with these activities. It is simply not possible to organize these great opportunities for our students without the help of members of the Chorus Boosters' Organization.

The good news is that we can organize everything without a formal meeting! To get involved, please visit the chorus web page to see what task or activity you are willing to help with.

You can sign up to volunteer during Open House or you may contact me at

Potto@gc.k12.va.us.

REMIND CLASS CODES FOR TEXT ALERTS (Chorus Classes Only)

To improve communication among students, parents, and myself, everyone can now enjoy texting via Remind. Remind is a free, safe, easy-to-use communication tool that helps teachers connect instantly with students and parents. Any student and parent can start using Remind today, for FREE, on any device. No commitments or fees required.

You can sign up for Remind in seconds. If you are worried about your personal information, be assured that your phone number or other contact info will not be shared or made available anywhere.

Phone numbers are always kept private so information is safe and secure. Teachers, students, and parents have easy access to their message history, and can also use our reporting tools to flag conversations.

Teachers never see students' phone numbers. Students never see theirs.

Class Codes for receiving important text reminders and updates...

Text the correct class code to 81010 or (804) 269-8890.

<u>First Semester</u>		<u>Second Semester</u>	
Chorus 6	@chorus6s1	Chorus 6	@ch6s2
Chorus 7	@chorus7s1	Chorus 7	@ch7s2
Chorus 8 (all year)	@chorus8ay	Chorus 8 (all year)	@chorus8ay

Peasley Middle School Chorus

School Year 2019-2020

Please review this handbook at home and have your parent/guardian complete and sign this form.
Return this form no later than **September 20th (first semester) or February 14th (second semester)**.

Please include \$20 Chorus fee with this form (unless already paid). Make checks payable to Peasley Middle School.

STUDENT SECTION:

I have received and reviewed the Chorus Handbook. I agree to work hard to achieve my personal best and to follow the guidelines outlined in the handbook.

Student Name: (print) _____

Student signature: _____

PARENT SECTION:

- ☐ I have read received and reviewed the Chorus Handbook
- ☐ I have signed up for the REMIND Text System (see page 15)
- ☐ I have completed the Chorus Volunteer Questionnaire (see page 17)

Please provide some basic information. This is requested in order to improve communication efforts.

Parent/Guardian Name: (print) _____

Parent Signature _____

Phone(s) _____

E-mail _____

(main home e-mail)

Mr. Otto's Contact Info:

Email: potto@gc.k12.va.us

School office: 804-693-1499

Text: Text your child's **class code** to **81010** to receive important messages and updates. (See previous page for the **class codes**)

Web Page: <http://www.guitarpotto.com/peasleychorus> .