

**S. P. Waltrip High School
Choir Handbook**

Dear Students and Parents/Guardians,

Welcome to the S. P. Waltrip High School Choir and Vocal Training Program! Our goal is excellence. Congratulations to you now that have you join us in our pursuit of that goal. Your full participation in this organization will enable you to become a knowledgeable singer, performer and musician for life regardless of your chosen profession. It will also help you become a more focused, responsible, disciplined, and well-rounded person. Being involved will provide you with wonderful, memorable experiences and will develop skills that will help you increase your success in all aspects of your life as a Waltrip student.

Please read this handbook and calendar carefully. Sign and return the appropriate forms located at the back of this handbook. Three grades will be assessed for the completion of the three forms. Do not hesitate to call or email me if you have questions.

We look forward to *the best year yet* in Choir!

Sincerely,

**Laurie Amsler
Director of Choirs
S. P. Waltrip High School
lamsler@houstonisd.org
713-688-1361 Ext. 385**

General Information

The Waltrip High School Choir and Vocal Training Program currently includes the following performing groups:

- **Advanced Mixed Choir, Period 1R**
- **Beginning Mixed Choir, Period 2R**
- **Women's Choir, 2G**
- **Men's Choir 3G**

Previous choir/vocal experience is helpful but not required for membership in a Waltrip High School choir. Choir is intended as a full year core enrichment class. Willing and cooperative students are welcome. Students may be dropped from choir at the request of the director. Interviews/auditions for choir placement are held in the spring for the upcoming year and before schedules are finished in the fall semester.

Although Advanced Mixed Choir is the most advanced choir with rigorous requirements and greater demands placed on students, each choir works very hard and is of equal importance to the overall success of the choir program.

In addition to the interview/audition, the following criteria are taken into consideration for placement in the appropriate choirs for the following school year:

Concert Attendance	Rehearsal Attendance	Vocal Quality
Vocal Range	Part-Singing Skill	Grades (Eligibility)
Focus in Rehearsal	Attitude	Sight-Reading Skill
Cooperativeness	Behavior	Participation in
Grade Level		Optional Activities

Students are encouraged to continue their vocal training in Choir throughout their high school careers, not only for the credit but also for the experience and joy of singing.

In order to more likely assure that students are placed in Choir for the next year, students must request Choir before schedule requests are filled out in the second semester.

It is also highly important that students take and pass all required classes in order to graduate in a timely manner and so that they can continue their training in Choir throughout high school. Your high level of involvement and participation in this can be greatly effective and mutually enjoyed and appreciated.

The choral and vocal director is Ms. Laurie Amsler, a graduate of Texas Woman's University and who holds Kodaly certification from Sam Houston State University. With 25 years experience as a vocal music educator in Texas, and six years at Waltrip, Ms. Amsler brings a lifetime love of music and singing to Houston ISD that she shares with all her students.

General Guidelines

Choir is a performance-based course with four basic evening performances, two per semester. Students are provided preparation and training to perform and will evaluate their performances. They will develop their singing voices, learn to sing in a choral ensemble, learn to read music, learn the basics of music history, genres and styles, develop self-discipline, concentration, and cooperation. A great deal of class time is spent on vocal and musical techniques as well performance standards and will be demonstrated in performances throughout the school year.

Choir students will have opportunities in individual activities such as solo and ensemble contest, district and region auditions and region honor choir as well as group performances. Group performances include seasonal/holiday concerts at school, tours, U.I.L. Concert/Sight-reading Contest competitions, and variety shows/concerts at school.

Grading Policy

Grades are based on

- ✓ participation in class,
- ✓ written and oral tests of singing and music reading skills,
- ✓ attendance and performance at required performances and practices,
- ✓ and teamwork, behavior/citizenship.

Each required performance is a major grade in the grading period in which it is performed. Performances at the end of each semester also count as 90% of the exam grade. Required performances and rehearsals are notated on the Waltrip Choir Calendar.

For committed students, advanced and beginning, some before and/or after school rehearsals are necessary in order to properly prepare each student for auditions for the (Fall)TMEA District and Region Auditions including Region Honor Choir, (Spring) UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest, and (Spring)UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Contest. These additional events will be announced in class.

Students earn grades in Choir based on the following criteria:

- Level of participation in class, rehearsals and performances
 - Posture
 - Sight-reading
 - Using Solfege Syllables and Hand Signs (Curwen Hand-Signs)
 - Correct vowel sounds
 - Written, aural and/or oral exercises and/or tests administered by the director.
 - Organization (bringing complete, solid-black, choir binder including sheet music, handouts, evaluations and sharpened pencil to their seat every day,
 - Homework (returning forms, keeping up with and filling out choir forms, etc.)
- Advanced Choir Students are expected to participate in all Choir U.I.L. preparation and events.

(Extra consideration may be given to those who participate in optional activities such as region choir, region honor choir, solo/ensemble contest, etc. Some extra work and rehearsals outside of class will be required.)

Expectations of Choir Students

The choir is an ambassador of the school it represents. Therefore, each and every choir member is expected to exemplify excellent behavior both at school and away from school, during rehearsals/class, in concerts and on trips.

During Class and All Rehearsals

Since we have a lot to accomplish, you are expected to please and please:

1. Be ready to get started and rehearse!

- A. Come to class every time and with a spirit of cooperation and respect, wanting to accomplish something more each day.
- B. Sit in your assigned places with your own choir binders and pencils within at least one minute after the tardy bell rings.
- C. Do not have any foreign objects or chew gum in your mouth at any time in Choir. Do not eat candy, or food, or drink sodas during Choir Class. Since these interfere with singing, they are not allowed. You may bring plain, clear, bottled water to drink during Choir Class.
- D. Keep your choir binder handy and organized so it's ready to show and use its contents. Turn in all paper work on time!!

- E. **Keep a sharpened pencil handy** so you can make notes in your sheet music. Mark your music with pencil!
2. **Listen to the directions and audiate the pitch the first time they are given.**
- Listen to yourself, audiate (sing it in your mind) and match each pitch correctly every time.
 - Listen to your section and blend your voice with your section.
 - Listen to how your part fits in with the other section/s while they are rehearsing their part. Silently memorize your part.
3. **Ask questions.**
- When you hear people around you struggling with a part, raise your hand and ask how the part should sound.
 - It is not necessary to point out those who are singing incorrectly.
 - Allow that person to correct him or himself.
4. **Pay close attention to the instructions** even when the director is working with another group.
- Many suggestions and corrections covered in one section will apply to everyone else.
 - Also, try to follow your part to see how it fits with other sections.
 - The choir is a team. It is not enough for you to know your part. It is the uniting of the parts that makes the song a work of art.
5. **Stay quiet and still before, during and after every song.**
- It is sometimes tempting in class to just sit and talk, or not participate while others do all the work.
 - Every voice is necessary.
 - Without every voice, the choir is not the best it can be.
 - Great choirs are great because of consistent good rehearsals.
 - There is no room for talking during rehearsals.
6. **Exercise self-control.**
- The best disciplinarian in the choir is NOT the director, but each choir member who wants the choir to be the best it can be. It is important to be supportive to everyone in the choir who is giving their best efforts.
 - Everyone will enjoy choir so much more if they can notice improvement, and move on to other material. The feeling of accomplishment is wonderful for all of us!!

Concerts: Concert Protocol and Etiquette

Every member of the choir must focus, sing, and pronounce together. Any movement, wandering gazes, giggling, laughing, elbowing those around you, looking at other choir members, or acknowledging people in the audience, takes attention away from the choral group.

- Enter the stage, looking straight ahead, arms at sides watching your step.
- Do not talk, gaze around the room, or acknowledge anyone in the audience in any way when in place,

3. Keep your hands at your sides while performing.
4. Resist the urge to adjust glasses, flip hair, scratch your nose, etc.
5. Focus on the director.
6. Do not respond to movement in the audience.
7. Do not talk or lose your focus between songs, when the audience is applauding.
8. Walk off quietly when the performance is completed.
9. The audience can still hear you, even if you are offstage.
10. Listen to others when they are performing.
11. Listen to others when they are performing.
12. Do not ridicule, discredit or criticize their performance.
13. When you distract the performance of others, you are the loser.
14. Please do not leave during a concert.
15. Encourage other performers.
16. Even if you did not like what they had to offer, find something good in what they did and praise them for it.
17. In a concert, it is not choir against choir or performer against performer. It is a number of fellow musicians striving to improve, and fulfill their potential.

Conduct for Trips

Trips are taken only following the approval of the HISD administration. All school, choir and school board policies are in effect during trips. Students who violate regulations trips will be subject to disciplinary action upon return and/or may be sent home from the trip at the parent's/guardian's expense.

On the bus:

1. Do your part to make each trip enjoyable for everyone.
2. You may only play music with headphones attached.
3. Stay seated at all times.
4. Do not yell.
5. Pick up all trash.
6. Quietly, pay attention during all announcements and roll checks.
7. Keep everything inside the bus. Nothing is to be put out of the windows.
8. Do not open the emergency door.
9. Be polite to all adults and students, including chaperones.
10. No profane language or gestures will be tolerated.
11. If a choir member does not wish to return from a trip with the choir, this will only be allowed if a letter is submitted to the choir director before departure for the trip. Students may leave only with their own parent or guardian.

Supplies, Uniforms, Fees, Fund Raisers, and Optional Expenses

Supplies

Each choir student needs the following supplies for choir class. Every choir student needs to have his/her own complete, black, choir binder with him or herself and be in his/her seat every day before the bell rings, ready to begin class.

Choir Daily Supply List 2009-2010

Black (Solid)Choir Binder:

- Hardback vinyl, 1 inch binder, with inside pockets with name inside the cover (no writing on outside of binder, please)

Filled with the following:

- Notebook paper--5-6 clean sheets of in binder at all times
- Pencils-- sharpened with erasers (mechanical pencils okay)
- Sheet music and other handouts, tests, and evaluations given out by teacher

Each choir student is responsible for all supplies and materials that are issued to them. These materials must be turned in at the end of the year and must be in good condition. This includes any signed-out original sheet music, etc.

Uniforms

For our concerts and choir pictures, we dress up. We want to look good for our audiences and each other as choir members. For these concerts, we want everything working in our favor to help us present a high-quality, musical event. In addition to learning the music in class, rehearsals, and individual practice, each choir student must prepare his/her appropriate and special clothing for being a member of the choir. For many, this means shopping for the clothes. If you already have the appropriate clothes and shoes, then you may use them provided they still fit you. Please read the information below that applies to your choir. All choir students wear black and white as is explained below.

Advanced Choir uniforms are checked out to students after the choir fee is paid. The uniforms are the property of the Waltrip High School Choral Department. It is expected that uniforms be kept in good, clean condition throughout the school year for performances. These uniforms must be turned in at the end of the year or before withdrawing and must be returned cleaned (still in the bag with the dated receipt).

Ladies:

1. Long, black, Waltrip choir dress, properly hemmed but not cut
2. Black, low-heeled, dress shoes, no flip-flops or athletic shoes
3. No flashy or extreme jewelry of any kind
4. No earrings (and only one pair) or necklaces larger than a dime

Gentlemen: Waltrip Choir Tuxedo that includes:

1. Black coat with all buttons sewn on properly.
2. Black pants hemmed properly but not cut and sitting at waist level white shirt completely tucked in
3. Cummerbund, properly adjusted to fit neatly over the waist band of the pants
4. Bow tie, properly adjusted to fit neatly, but not choking, around the shirt collar and under the front collar flaps
5. Black dress shoes (no athletic shoes or flip-flops, etc.) with black socks
6. No flashy or extreme jewelry of any kind in view

Beginning Choirs: The student and his/her family provide **Beginning Choir uniforms**. It is also expected that uniforms be kept ready and in **good, clean condition** throughout the school year for performances.

The colors are solid white and black. This uniform is as follows:

Beginning Mixed Ladies and Women:

1. Long-sleeved, plain, **solid white**, blouse
2. Long, black skirt or dress pants
3. Black, low-heeled, dress shoes, **no flip-flops**
4. No flashy or extreme jewelry of any kind
5. No earrings (and only one pair) or necklaces larger than a dime

Beginning Mixed Gentlemen and Men*:

1. Long-sleeved, tailored, plain, **solid white***, button-down collar shirt, completely tucked in (*Men - **solid black**)
2. Solid black dress pants cinched at the waist and that are NOT baggy
3. Belts and ties will be discussed and decided in class.
4. Black dress shoes with black socks
5. No flashy or extreme jewelry of any kind showing
6. No earrings (no more than one pair) or necklaces larger than a dime

Each choir member will be expected to wear the complete uniform for all concerts unless otherwise informed. **On the day/s that choir pictures are taken, all choir students will be required to bring/wear their designated choir uniform for the pictures. A grade will be given for this.**

Fund Raisers

These are necessary to fund our program. A grade will be given for **participation***. Each student is expected to participate in these activities to promote unity in Choir and so that we can pay for things we need, keep and enhance the choir program. Please check the calendar for dates on these. Participation is also appreciated! If necessary, we may do another one in the spring semester. We plan to sell chocolate.

*This year, an option to participating in the fund raisers is to make a minimal \$50 cash donation.

Fees

Choir fees and choir fund raisers help pay for **necessary choir costs** such as **music, recordings, entry fees, transportation costs, etc.** Since the **choir program does not receive a budget from the school, raising money is necessary.**

The usual choir fee per choir student is \$15. Many high schools' choir fees are substantially higher than this. But, good news!! Since economic times may be more difficult for families this year, we are lowering the fee for this year down to \$10! This is in addition to

the basic fund raiser. If this amount is a financial hardship for your family, please have your student see me privately. This needs to be taken care of as soon as possible, please.

Necessary fee for all choir students, please: \$10

Each **Advanced Choir** student will be issued a uniform after the choir fee is paid. If there is a severe financial situation concerning this fee, or any other, please contact Ms. Amsler privately as soon as possible. Thank you.

Necessary Fees(only for those participating in the events)

--District/Region audition/s \$20.

--Region Honor Choir \$20

--Other as announced for participants

Optional Expenses

- Choir T-shirt \$ 10 In stock!!
- Voices of Tomorrow CD \$ 5.
Includes Our Waltrip High (school song)
- Voice Lessons (upon availability)

Attendance Policy for Performances and Rehearsals

For the sake of excellence and the unity in the choir, each choir student is expected make **every effort to attend and participate in all our rehearsals and performances.** Choir performances showcase the school. Every student is expected to participate with enthusiasm, bringing the joy of music to all of us!

Choir performances are mandatory and count as major grades. Performances cannot be made up. Each performance is a real-time event and synchronized for all the participants. Every choir member is important and needed.

Throughout the year, each choir will present several **public performances.** Performances are listed on the choir calendar. Additional performances or changes may be added with as much advance notice as possible. Parents, guardians, and friends are encouraged to come these performances!

While only a few after-school rehearsals for all choirs are usually scheduled, it is expected that each choir student take participation in those rehearsals seriously. Before and/or after-school rehearsals are extensions of the classroom and attendance at these will be considered when calculating student grades. Monday, Tuesday or Thursday mornings, afternoons or evenings are the **usual** times for extra choir rehearsals.

While an after-school paying job may be important to a student right now, school work must first since it affects the future. Students should communicate with employers **as far in advance as possible** about rehearsals and performances so that arrangements can be made and employers are not left without the help they need. Schoolwork must come first!

So, please **notify employers of the school choir schedule** as soon as possible so that you can help them make other arrangements. If you need a verification note from me to take to your employer, please let me know at least a week in advance. I will be glad to have this available for you.

When it is necessary to have before/after school rehearsals, students will be notified about the times and dates of these rehearsals in advance. **The activity will be graded.**

Students are expected to be ready to start on time so that all the time allotted can be dedicated to full rehearsal for everyone.

Sometimes emergency events happen that cannot be avoided. In these cases, a certain amount of reason will apply provided that a written note or the absence form from home signed by the parents/guardians is brought in the next day the student comes to school. (A blank form is included with this handbook.)

Acceptable reasons for missing a performance or a rehearsal are:

1. student illness
2. family distress emergency
3. the death or serious sudden illness of an immediate family member.

Examples like *going shopping, forgetting the event, social events, or other like activities* will not be accepted as an excused absence. Advance planning and coordinating with family is necessary!

Unexcused absences will receive a low grade. If no note is submitted, then no credit is given, and the student will receive a zero for the event. Excuses from sectional rehearsals and other rehearsals should be presented in writing and signed by the parent/guardian to Ms.Amsler no less than 24 hours before, or after, the absence. (The blank Reason for Absence forms are available and should be used for this.)

In every case of absence, documentation is required. The note must be brought in no later than the next day the student comes to school. A grade will be given and depends on the reason. While a phone call is appreciated, a paper note is required. Cooperation is appreciated!

Goals for All Choir Members

Excel in All Performance Opportunities

1. Work hard each day to be prepared musically and physically.
2. Take all rehearsals and performances seriously and give 100%.
3. Arrange your transportation (ride) ahead of time!
4. Encourage parents/guardians, friends, principals and teachers to attend concerts.
Get a fan club.
5. Attend all full and sectional rehearsals.
6. Take care of your voice.

Maximize Your Talent

1. Work hard each day to improve and form good singing habits.
2. Work outside of class on the music.
3. Apply previously learned material to each rehearsal or performance.
4. Listen and use your pencil to mark your music.
5. Improve your sight-reading skills individually and as an ensemble.
6. Sing with expression and sensitivity.
7. Have a desire to be great: never be satisfied with low quality!!

8. Study with a private voice teacher.

Present a Positive Image of our choir to Community, School, and Peers

1. Be proud of our choir!
2. Share with others what we do (when we have concerts, etc.) and what we hope to accomplish. SPREAD THE GOOD WORD!
3. Be competitive but appreciate and encourage the abilities of others.
4. Be attentive while other groups and/or individuals are performing.
5. Show pride our school and all of its organizations.

Keep a Positive Attitude Throughout the Year

1. Always look ahead and see the desired goals we are working toward.
2. Don't let personalities get in the way of our unified effort. Work together to move forward and progress.
3. Encourage each other in a positive way.
4. Always give respect to each and all members of our group.

To learn something new, you have to do something different.

Private Voice Lessons

Private voice lessons definitely make a difference in the success and progress of any high school choral program. Choir students are encouraged to study privately in order to enhance their vocal development. More information concerning a private voice teacher will be made available to those students who ask about one.

It's A Great Year
for
Waltrip High School Choirs!!!