



High School Handbook 2026-2027

Hello Parents and Students!

Thank you for choosing to join Cactus Instrumental Arts. I am extremely excited to take the program in a new direction this year that focuses on strong real world music fundamentals that will provide students with unique opportunities and skills compared to other programs in Arizona. While much is changing, we continue with our mission of building *better people* through building *better musicians* and my focus remains on equipping our members with the skills necessary to succeed in life beyond high school, both musically and otherwise.

The purpose of this handbook is to communicate the policies and procedures that will help ensure a positive experience for all students and families. ALL students and parents should read this handbook to be up to date on all of this year's policies. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Email is the best and quickest way to reach me. I very much look forward to working with all of you and making this year even better than last!

Sincerely,
Mr. Simmons
jsimmons@pusd11.net
623-412-5000 ext. 838

(The policies in this handbook will be agreed to on Parent/StudentSquare, no need to print or sign anything)



The Cactus Instrumental Arts Mission

To prepare our members for lifelong success when they depart our program by helping them to become [*better musicians*](#), and through that growth, [*better people*](#).

Our Principles

RESPECT

We place value in those around us, the places we travel, and the equipment we use. We are courteous to everyone and everything we interact with.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Each of us is responsible for the success of the whole. We are proactive in our preparation and make every effort to meet the needs of the group through practice, attendance, and performance.

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

We measure our worth by our growth as people and musicians, not our current standing at any place or time. We strive to make today's best tomorrow's worst.

CACTUS TRADITION

We inherit the Cactus tradition. We uplift and engage our community at all levels and we represent that community in everything we do.

Expectations of CIA Members

- CIA Members are kind, courteous, and respectful to all people.
- CIA Members exceed expectations in preparation.
- CIA Members work to improve their skills as musicians.
- CIA Members communicate effectively with peers and staff.
- CIA Members keep trying their best.
- CIA Members stay positive.

General Expectations

As a participant of Cactus Instrumental Arts (CIA), each student is expected to work together to help create and uphold a Positive, Challenging, Constructive, and Inclusive learning environment. In order to ensure that this takes place students will:

- Respect All – Respect all participants of the CHS Instrumental Music Program and CHS, the materials in the classroom, all instruments, etc.
- Try His or Her Best – Go above and beyond what is asked of you – work to surpass one's own potential
- Be on Time – Remember “To be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late, and to be late is unacceptable.” Call times are when the downbeat of rehearsal begins, not arrival time.
- Communicate – Whether there are successes to share, concerns to address, or conflicts that arise, communicate with Mr. Simmons and your peers to ensure you are being supported in all that you do.

Within these guidelines, all students are expected to be prepared for all classes, rehearsals, and events by:

- Having all necessary materials (working instrument, music, pencil, etc.)
- Following all directions given by leaders of the group
- Following all rules and policies set by the CIA, Cactus High School, the CHS Student Handbook, CHS Administration, PUSD, and the performance and travel venues.
- Setting positive examples for all members of the group, and those observing the group, as to represent CHS and PUSD extremely well
- Supporting the individuals and groups that you interact with on a daily basis

The overall atmosphere within the music rehearsal room is always expected to be positive. Bullying, name-calling, derogatory terms, horsing around, trashing the room, and other behaviors that take away from a positive atmosphere WILL NOT be tolerated. Any student or students partaking in these behaviors will be asked to leave immediately and face possible disciplinary action.

Students not adhering to the policies described in this handbook will face the following consequences:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| • Warning | • Office Referral |
| • Detention | • Suspension from performance(s) or group |
| • Phone Call Home | |

Any additional inappropriate behaviors or extreme inappropriate behaviors and actions will result in possible off-campus suspension or other disciplinary actions.

By adhering to all of the policies in this handbook and at CHS, students can ensure a positive environment for all to learn, resulting in a better experience and stronger outcome (performance, testing results, etc.). Students seen going above and beyond all requirements will be acknowledged through phone calls home, recognitions, awards, and other acknowledgements throughout the year.

Instruments and Supplies

Each student is required to provide their own instrument. In some cases, a school instrument may be available to rent for \$50 a semester. However, students are asked to exhaust all avenues to rent third party before renting from Cactus. Students will have a much better experience with a nicer instrument and it eases the burden on our program. Students are also responsible for ensuring their instrument is in performance condition with all necessary accessories. If you are looking to rent an instrument or purchase supplies, these are the most common stores in the valley:

- [Sweetwater.com](https://www.sweetwater.com)
- [Music and Arts](#) | 5350 W Bell Rd Suite 132 Glendale, AZ 85308 | (602) 504-0205
- [Allegro Music](#) | 3510 E Bell Rd #23, Phoenix, AZ 85032 | (602) 795-4516
- [Milano Music Center](#) | 38 W Main St, Mesa, AZ 85201 | (480) 827-1111

Supplies Needed

- Reed instruments must have at least 3 PERFORMANCE quality reeds.
- Brass instruments must have their own valve oil.
 - Trombones need slide cream/oil
- Proper cleaning supplies for instrument
- Marching band members should [visit our website](#) to see materials needed for that ensemble
- Percussionists need the [items from this list](#)

All students also need at all times

- **BLACK 1" 3 Ring Binder** for their music and assignments
 - With sheet protectors for performing outside
- Pencil
- Cell phone/device with UDB and metronome/tuner
 - It's recommended students get the \$7 metronome/tuner app called Tonal Energy on their phone, however there are free options with the most common one being Soundcorset
- ***NEW THIS YEAR*** Wired Headphones/Earbuds
 - Students will have assignments that require them to use headphones. Bluetooth headphones will not work as there is a delay that will cause students to fail these assignments. These do not need to be fancy, just usable.
- Private Lesson Books (Provided by us)
- School Laptop
- Blank sheet music (Provided by us)
- Any warmups, assignments, music that were provided in class

Upgrades

If you find you or your child is committed to music, you may want to look for an upgrade for their instrument. Students can experience a massive improvement in just improving their mouthpiece alone. If you are looking to make an upgrade to a part or instrument overall, please reach out before

doing so. There are many bad deals online with subpar products in the music world and I want to be sure you are purchasing a quality product before investing a large amount of money.

Communication

Our primary method of communication is ParentSquare/Student Square. Parent/StudentSquare is mandatory for students to be successful in the class. ParentSquare is used for direct communication including calendars, announcements, reminders, and itineraries. All communications are saved in district databases and pullable through public records requests at any time.

Students will need to download StudentSquare and login through their PUSD Microsoft account. Parents will need to download ParentSquare and register through the email or phone number they have on file with the school. If you attempt to register and Cactus HS does not automatically populate, the school has different information on file and you will need to update that. I cannot provide ParentSquare account support so if you have difficulties with your account and registration, you must go to the front office.

Parents can create their account here: <https://www.parentsquare.com/signin>

Calendar of Events

There are many events involved in the CIA that students are expected to attend. All events for the semester can be found on the CIA calendar. This is our official calendar that all students and families should consistently check and be familiar with at all times. You can access it on our ParentSquare group or through this link: <https://tinyurl.com/CHSCIACalendar>

If you use Google Calendar, you can add it to your own through that link. If you use another electronic calendar, you can add it using the ICS url or calendar ID depending on what your digital calendar asks for:

ICS

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/ical/n6hhlb85vsjtn1t804sanielc%40group.calendar.google.com/public/basic.ics>

ID

n6hhlb85vsjtn1t804sanielc@group.calendar.google.com

Class Schedule & Ensembles

1st Semester Classes

- Winds - 1st Period, 7:20am-8:50am
- Percussion/Guard - 2nd Period, 9:00am-10:35am

2nd Semester Classes

- Winds - 1st Period, 7:20am-8:50am
- Percussion - 3rd Period, 10:40am-12:10pm

Ensembles

Cactus Instrumental Arts comprises multiple musical ensembles across the program that don't always align with the class schedule. Students should be enrolled in their correct class based on what instrument they play, but their responsibilities to ensembles will differ depending on their individual responsibilities. The calendar will generally indicate which group the event applies to, but concert and recital nights will apply to all students in the program. The different ensembles are as follows:

Marching Band/Pep Band

The marching band (also known as the Cobra Regiment) is our full program ensemble that performs primarily at football games that learns pop music and performs at halftime. They are also called upon to perform at various events throughout the community. It may be referred to as pep band outside of football situations.

Concert Band

The concert band is our main large ensemble that performs in a concert setting. All wind players are in concert band, but not all percussionists will be called to perform in every concert band performance.

Percussion Ensemble

Percussion ensemble is a percussion specific ensemble that performs in an indoor concert setting. All percussionists are involved in percussion ensemble. (Unless the percussionist is in the winds class for class conflict reasons)

Drumline

Drumline is a small percussion group that is decided by audition during the previous school year. They often get called upon to perform at community events on their own. Some non-drumline percussionists may be asked by staff to perform with them on crash cymbals.

Solos & Small Ensembles

All students will be involved in either a solo or small group ensemble each semester. They will perform at each semester's recital night. These assignments will be determined by CIA staff based on skill, instrument, and student aspiration.

Junior High Band

The junior high band program largely exists on its own, but some HS students may be called upon to assist them with their music or in class. The JH band will perform at some of the HS concerts.

Co-Curricular Policies

All CIA classes and ensembles are co-curricular at Peoria Unified. This means that a student's final grade consists of both in class assignments as well as out of class events, assignments, and performances. It is not possible for a student to pass a CIA class without diligently attending and participating in all after school events. You can find policies about attendance and makeup further below.

Rehearsals

All CIA students have additional rehearsals outside of class. These are generally on Monday evenings from 6-9pm. Students must be on time, have all necessary materials (working instrument, music, pencil, etc.), and be actively working towards our rehearsal objectives to receive full points for these rehearsals. **If you will miss a rehearsal for any reason, you must inform me ahead of time via email or StudentSquare.** You will find the attendance and makeup policy further below.

Please note that rehearsals will begin exactly at the indicated time and end at the indicated time. This means students should come to rehearsal and other events at least 15 minutes early to be prepared to start rehearsal at the start time. This also means that students will leave rehearsal a few minutes after the end time as they have to pack up their belongings and move equipment back to their proper places.

Dress Rehearsals

Dress rehearsals are the rehearsal before a performance. A student who misses the dress rehearsal of a performance may be unable to perform in the following performance. There are many moving parts for performances including setlists, drill, jobs, stage managing, etc. and for the safety of all performers, it is imperative all performers are at dress rehearsals.

Lessons ***NEW AND IMPORTANT FOR 2026-2027***

All CIA students will receive weekly private lessons from a staff member throughout both semesters on Thursday evenings. These are a mandatory part of the program and contribute to their overall grade. The curriculum in their lessons will line up with assignments and expectations in the class proper.

The lesson schedule will be posted before the first Thursday that indicates each student's 30 minute time slot and instructor. These time slots will fall between 3pm-9pm depending on the staff member's availability. The student is expected to arrive 15-30 minutes prior to their lesson to get warmed up so that they are ready to begin right on their lesson time. Once they are finished with their lesson, they should pack up and are free to leave. Students should not congregate in the hallway during lesson days unless they are awaiting the start of their lesson.

During the lesson, students will work through their lesson books, scales, audition etudes, and sight reading. Students will also be given an expectation for what to musically prepare and practice for the next lesson.

The full grade for the lesson is comprised of two equal parts:

- 50% - Arriving on time and actively working in the lesson
- 50% - Having the previous week's expectations prepared for the current lesson

Students will have some time in class during each week to prepare for their lessons, but they should also expect to take their instrument home occasionally throughout the week to work towards these expectations as well as class assignments.

Performances

All CIA ensembles have concerts and performances as part of the entire musical process. Performances are worth a large portion of each student's grade. To receive full points for a performance, students must arrive on time with all necessary materials, proper dress code, and actively perform in the entirety of the concert. Students should be on their best behavior for performances. If a student is not part of all performing ensembles in a concert, they are required to stay for the entire performance. Supporting one's peers and listening to music is an important aspect of every student's music education. After the performance, all students are expected to stay to help tear down and pack up before dismissing.

Performance grades include, but are not limited to, concerts, football games, and recital nights.

Absences

Students are expected to communicate any absences to me via StudentSquare or email ahead of time. Upon successful communication, the reason will be subject to the excusal policy.

If CHS would excuse the absence during the school day, then it will be considered excused for after school CIA events. As per the Peoria Unified handbook, these circumstances are considered excused:

1. Death in the family
2. Chronic illness
3. Surgery
4. Mental or Behavioral Health
5. Contagious illness
6. Car accident

The only exceptions that will be made are conflicts/pre-planned events that are communicated by the second Friday of the semester via email. Any uncommunicated or unexcused absence that falls out of these guidelines will result in being unexcused for the event.

In the event of an emergency or extenuating circumstance, students should do their best to communicate with me as soon as possible. **Please do not utilize another student to communicate your absence with me.**

Excusal does not grant the points for the event to the student. Students are still expected to complete the necessary makeup work (found below) to receive points for the event. Students that have an unexcused absence are only eligible to make up half of the points for the event.

For students participating in CHS athletics, students should provide their schedule to me within the first week of the respective season. I will review the schedule with them to determine any potential conflicts. Any conflicts that occur will be subject to the following conflict tier solution*:

CIA	Athletics	Solution
Practice	Practice	Practice is split 50/50
Practice	Game	Game over Practice
Dress Rehearsal	Practice	Dress Rehearsal over Practice
Dress Rehearsal	Game	Dress Rehearsal over Game
Performance	Practice	Performance over Practice
Performance	Game	Performance over Game
Dress Rehearsal	Playoff Game	Game over Dress Rehearsal
Performance	Playoff Game	Case by case discussion with student and coaches

*Student leadership and drumline members are expected to prioritize CIA events/rehearsals over any other and are not subject to this policy.

Travel Policies

We are required to travel to many different events throughout the year. Students are expected to follow all behavioral expectations listed in this handbook, the CHS handbook, and PUSD handbook to the highest level when we visit other venues. We leave places cleaner than we found them. In the event a student is not following the aforementioned policies and expectations, they will be sent home immediately at the cost of their parent/guardian and face further disciplinary actions.

Students are expected to travel with the group to and from all events that utilize full group travel and are not permitted to drive with or leave with family or friends to and from the venues we travel to.

Performance Attire

Concert Attire

All students must wear professional all-black attire. Failure to meet these standards will result in loss of performance points and potential exclusion from the concert. This attire is used for all non-marching band/pep band performances.

- **Tops:** Black dress shirt, floor-length black dress, or blouse (minimum elbow-length sleeves). Optional: black suit jacket, blazer, or cardigan.
- **Bottoms:** Black dress pants or floor-length black dress.
- **Accessories:** Black dress socks or tights, black closed-toe dress shoes. Optional: black tie.
- **Prohibited Items:** Black jeans, polo shirts, t-shirts, leggings, sneakers, and bow ties.
- **Compliance:** All attire must adhere to the CHS Dress Code policy.
- **Assistance:** CHS does not provide uniforms. Students unable to acquire the required items must contact me by the second Friday of the semester.

Marching Band/Pep Band Attire

All students must wear the indicated attire to create a uniform, professional look. Failure to meet these standards will result in loss of performance points and potential exclusion from the performance.

- **Tops:** Provided CIA Band Shirt
- **Bottoms:**
 - Marching Band - basketball shorts, spandex, or other light athletic bottoms to be worn under bibbers
 - Pep Band - Black, Grey, or Blue jeans or jeans shorts
- **Feet:**
 - Marching Band - knee-high black socks and marching shoes
 - Pep Band - neutral colored socks and neutral colored sneakers
 - Neutral Colors = black, white, grey OR CHS colors (columbia blue/light blue/silver, NOT royal blue or a similar blue)
 - Alternatively, students can wear marching shoes
- **Optional:** CHS themed makeup/facepaint/body paint for games
- **Prohibited Items:** Cargo shorts/pants, leggings, pajama pants, ANY clothing with logos or graphics
- **Compliance:** All attire must adhere to the CHS Dress Code policy.

Facilities

Band Room

The use of the band facilities before, after, and during school is a privilege. Students who abuse the facility will be disciplined accordingly. Any abuse or damage will be considered vandalism. No non-performing arts students are permitted in the band room, except for business with Mr. Simmons. There will be no horseplay in or around the band room. All percussion and guard equipment is off limits to anyone not specifically designated to use them.

Practice Rooms

Practice rooms are to be used for practice or private instruction only. Rooms must be kept neat and rules posted on practice room windows must be followed at all times.

Locker Room

Students will be assigned lockers based on the size of their instrument. The locker room is specifically meant for instruments and CIA class supplies only. Students are expected to grab what they need for rehearsal and leave the room immediately for a quick and safe flow through the space. No food or drink may be stored in the locker room at any time.

Percussion Room

Only percussion students may freely enter the percussion room. Other students may ask Mr. Simmons to use the room as an ensemble rehearsal or practice space.

Drumline/Color Guard Storage Rooms

Only drumline and color guard members may utilize their respective storage rooms. These rooms are for storage of school equipment only and are not to be used for personal items or belongings.

Food/Drink

Food and drink (other than water) is not permitted in the band room, storage rooms, locker rooms, or practice rooms at any time. Students are permitted to eat necessary meals or snacks before school or before events in the band room hallway. They must clean up and throw away their trash or they may lose the privilege of eating in the building.

Gradebook Breakdown

Grading Scale:

- A - 90-100%
- B - 80-90%
- C - 70-80%
- D - 60-70%
- F - 59% and below

Each semester final grade is made up of three parts:

- 50% - Major Projects and Assessments
- 30% - Aligned Checks
- 20% - Final Exam

Assignment Types in Each Category

Major Projects and Assessments Assignment Types

- Scale Tests
- Theory Projects
- Show and Tell Fridays
- Etude/Scale Mid-Term
- Performances

Aligned Checks Assignments Types

- Daily Music Theory Assignments
- Sight Reading Factory Practice Logs
- Evening Rehearsals
- Lessons

Final Exam

Consists of two equal parts with a scale final and an etude final.

Syllabus

All classes will receive a separate syllabus on Canvas during the first week of school that will detail the specifics on assignments, point breakdowns, classroom procedures, and general curricular course related topics for that specific class (e.g. winds, percussion, or jazz). This handbook is for overall program policies.

Online Assignments

Throughout the year, students will complete online assignments using the following free websites and apps:

- Canvas
- Sight Reading Factory
- OneDrive
- NoteFlight

- MusicFirst
- MusicTheory.net
- ToneSavvy

For students to participate fully, they should have access to a computer and a video recording device (provided by district). I control the students' accounts for non-district sites and they do not require or read any student information.

Makeup Work

In the event a student has an absence for a class, rehearsal, and/or performance, they should complete the appropriate makeup work assignment. Excused absences are eligible for full points while unexcused absences are eligible for half credit. Below is a summary of makeup assignments. The class syllabus will have full details.

- Rehearsal Makeup - Send an email to me about what was missed and how student will catch up
- Lesson Makeup - Eligible to make up half the points by having the previous lesson's requirements prepared
- Performance Makeup - Video recording in one take of the student performing all repertoire from performance with audio recordings

Late Work & In-Class Absences

If a student has an excused absence from class (as marked by CHS), they are eligible to make up full points for that day. If they are unexcused, they are only eligible to make up half points that day. This policy extends to assignment due dates. If excused, a student has the same # of days that they missed extra to turn in the assignment for full credit. If unexcused, a student will be subject to the original deadline and district late work policy. Students are expected to turn in late work on time through their own volition and should not expect reminders from the teacher.

For all assignments, students are expected to meet the set deadlines. Late assignments will be accepted for full credit only in the event of an excused absence. All other late work will be eligible for half credit. Per district policy - late work may be accepted until the last day of the assignment's grading period for half credit. Each grading period is ~4 ½ weeks and their dates will be found on the syllabus for each semester.

Performance Eligibility Contract

(This contract will be signed on Parent/Student Square.)

Academic Eligibility

In order to perform, all students must maintain academic eligibility. In order to maintain eligibility, each student must not have a grade below a "D" (60%). Grades will be checked every Thursday morning. The first week a student receives a grade below a "D" (60%) they will receive a warning ("yellow card"), and will have one week to bring the grade up to at least a 60%. The second week a student receives a grade below a "D" (60%), they will be ineligible to perform in marching/pep band events or traveling during school hours until the grade is brought to or above a 60% ("red card").

Absences

Students are expected to be at all rehearsals and ready to begin practice on time. If a student has an unexcused absence from a rehearsal the week of a performance (concert, football game, competition, parade, etc.) they may be ineligible to perform. Please refer to "Absences" for definitions of excused and unexcused absences.

Preparation

Students must be prepared to perform all repertoire through practice, rehearsal participation, and playing tests/assignments. Students who are not adequately prepared and show little to no effort in improving will be ineligible to perform. A contract will be formed between the student and Mr. Simmons on next steps and expectations to regain performance eligibility.

If a student is ineligible to perform for any reason, they are still expected to attend all rehearsals, events, and performances (unless it occurs during regular school hours) to maintain good standing in the program and receive full credit for the event.

Student Contract

(This contract will be signed on Parent/Student Square.)

As a Cactus musician who is participating in the Cactus Instrumental Arts program, I understand that my participating in the program as an elective is a privilege and is dependent on my acceptance of and adherence to the following rules and expectations:

- I will not use or be in possession of alcohol, tobacco, or any other illegal substances, including but not limited to improper use of prescription or over the counter drugs on or off campus.
- I will maintain satisfactory academic eligibility as defined in the performance eligibility contract. I understand that failure to meet these requirements will exclude me from performances, trips, and other activities.
- I will attend all of my classes and be on time every day. I will not have any unexcused absences from classes or rehearsals.
- I will be a good citizen and conduct myself in an exemplary manner as to not bring discredit or embarrassment to the CIA, Cactus High School, the Peoria Unified School District, my community, or myself.
- I will be responsible for all of the music and materials needed to succeed in classes, rehearsal, and performances. I understand that I am responsible for the replacement cost of anything that is lost or damaged.
- I will continually check all forms of communication made available to me to ensure I know about all rehearsals, requirements, events, and performances. These resources include, but are not limited to, the CIA's StudentSquare, the CIA Calendar, the in-classroom calendar, handouts, and posters.
- I will maintain a positive attitude at all times through all rehearsals, classes, performances, and other events to ensure that my actions do not distract or deter from the surrounding environment. I will come to rehearsals prepared to the best of my ability. I will ask questions when I do not know what is going on, how to practice something, or need help to become a better person or musician.
- I understand that failure to meet the above items, those mentioned in the CIA Handbook, and those discussed in class, may jeopardize my participation in any part of the Cactus Instrumental Arts program.