



**Brownell Middle School**  
**Ascencion Solorsano Middle School**  
**South Valley Middle School**

**2022-2023**

**Student/Parent Handbook**

**Aaron Shemas**

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**David Stankiewicz**

Head Director of Bands, Christopher High School  
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[www.christopherbands.com](http://www.christopherbands.com)

# Welcome to Middle School Band!

We believe:

- Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in music.
- Music is an integral part of a student's development, emotionally and intellectually.
- Band and Instrumental Music develop self-discipline, positive work habits, and group skills necessary for success in life.
- By achieving high quality standards in Band and Instrumental Music, these will transfer into all other areas of the students' lives.
- Band and Instrumental Music offer creative and aesthetic opportunities that provide for emotional development.
- Students' social skills, self-esteem, and positive attitudes are developed through Band and Instrumental Music.
- Music classes afford an emotional and expressive release during the school day.
- Band and Instrumental Music classes teach students to strive for excellence – a major goal of education.
- In order to achieve greatness, you have to **WANT** it.

**Remember:**

Everything you do in band is  
important,  
which makes YOU important!

Excellence is attained through this  
attitude, and it is this attitude that is  
the basis of the GUSD middle school  
bands!





Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to the Gilroy USD Middle School Band Programs! My name is Aaron Shemas, and I am the band director for Brownell and Ascencion Solorsano Middle Schools. This will be my eleventh year teaching middle school band. I am excited to get to know you, and I look forward to a fun and exciting school year!

This handbook is designed to give you a reference for the band program's policies and operations. Please read through it carefully, as a family, and keep it in your binder for reference throughout the year. **After you read the Handbook, you will need to sign the Handbook Agreement Form located in this packet – this will need to be returned to me by Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.**

As a member of the band at our middle schools, you will have the opportunity to learn how to play an instrument at a high level and will develop important life skills along the way. It is not our goal as teachers to make professional musicians, but to instill in our students a love of music that lasts a lifetime. Recent studies also show that students who participate in music programs such as band become the strongest academically in school and have higher acceptance rates into colleges and universities. The skills learned in our band program – perseverance, responsibility, integrity, dedication, effort, and self-discipline – will be reflected throughout their time in the program and in their future as adults. Students will also learn how to work as a team and make a positive contribution to the entire band. Learning an instrument is a rewarding experience, and we are honored to have your child as a part of the band this year!

If you have any questions about the program, please reach out to me ([aaron.shemas@gilroyunified.org](mailto:aaron.shemas@gilroyunified.org)) via email, and I will be happy to help you!

Thank you,

Aaron Shemas, M.M.

Director of Bands

Brownell Middle School, Ascencion Solorsano Middle School

[www.christopherbands.com](http://www.christopherbands.com)

### About the Directors

#### **Aaron Shemas, M.M. – Director of Bands, Brownell Middle School, Ascencion Solorsano Middle School**

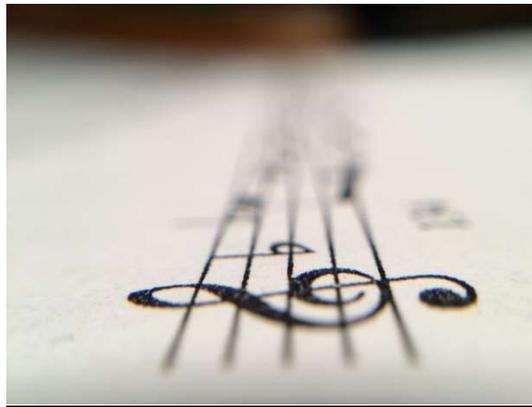
Aaron Shemas is an Ohio native and graduated from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music with his Bachelor of Music degrees in Music Education and Clarinet Performance, and Master of Music degree in Clarinet Performance. After college, Mr. Shemas was a director of bands in Santa Fe, NM, where he rebuilt two band programs from eight to more than eighty students in three years. He then moved to Texas and taught band in College Station ISD and Tomball ISD for five years. All of Mr. Shemas' Texas bands have earned Sweepstakes ratings in the UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Contest. This is his third year as Director of Bands at Brownell and Ascencion Solorsano Middle Schools, and as an Associate Director of Bands at Christopher High School. Mr. Shemas holds membership with the California Music Educators Association, the Texas Music Educators Association, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

#### **Trena Vanderhoeven, B.M. – Director of Bands, South Valley Middle School**

Trena Vanderhoeven joined the GUSD Band Team in the fall of 2019, as Director of Bands at South Valley Middle School and an Associate Director of Bands at Christopher High School. Mrs. Vanderhoeven is a native of Louisiana (Graduate of Bossier High School, Bossier, LA) and a graduate of Northwestern State University (B.M.). As a trumpet player and bassist her performance expertise is broad, including extensive experience in both classical and jazz, as well as numerous other genres. Prior to working coming to GUSD, Mrs. Vanderhoeven help positions with the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra, Band House, and worked with schools across Louisiana. In addition to her work with Christopher Bands, Mrs. Vanderhoeven serves as Director of Bands at South Valley Middle School. Mrs. Vanderhoeven holds membership in the National Association for Music Education, the California Music Educators Association, the Texas Music Educators Association, Sigma Alpha Iota Women's Music Fraternity.

#### **David Stankiewicz, B.A. – Director of Bands, Christopher High School, Solorsano Beginning Band**

David Stankiewicz joined the GUSD Band Team in the summer of 2021 as Director of Bands at Christopher High School and Beginning Band Director at Ascencion Solorsano Middle School. Mr. Stankiewicz is a native son of California, but grew up in Southeast Michigan, just outside of Detroit. After graduation Mr. Stankiewicz has taught in high schools and middle schools in Arkansas, Michigan, and California. As a performer he has performed with a variety of ensembles from the Stardust Big Band of Hot Springs, Arkansas, Arkansas Jazz Orchestra, Bakersfield Winds, Bakersfield Saxophone Quartet, and has enjoyed playing in pit orchestras in the greater Detroit area. Mr. Stankiewicz holds membership in the National Association for Music Education, California Music Educators Association, and the California Alliance for Jazz. Mr. Stankiewicz holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in instrumental Music Education with a minor in Jazz Studies from Wayne State University.





### General Overview

This handbook addresses the procedures, policies, and expectations for students in our grade level bands – **Symphonic Band (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade)** and **Beginning Band (6<sup>th</sup> Grade and any beginning 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders)**. Please read through this entire handbook and take note of the policies which affect each level, as there are differences between the levels.

Music is a performing art. Performance and the preparation for performance are essential to the art. Membership in a performing organization is a privilege. Each member of a performing organization has a responsibility to attend ALL rehearsals and ALL performances of the group. All students are vital to the success of the whole ensemble, and their presence is necessary to prepare for and execute a performance. Multiple unexcused absences from rehearsals and/or performances demonstrate a lack of dependability in accepting the responsibility of group membership.

The director will communicate with students and parents in a variety of ways. It will often be email and verbal, but the director will also send announcements to you in writing as far in advance of any obligation as possible. We have carefully constructed the calendar so that major band events, such as concerts, do not fall on school-sponsored athletic events (game days), district events, or major community events. Symphonic Band will develop a schedule for weekly section rehearsals that will minimize or eliminate conflicts with before and after-school practices, choir rehearsals, game days, and other school activities. The band directors and the school staff will work closely together to ensure that students may fully participate in school activities that they want to be a part. When conflicts arise, please understand the necessity of informing us of them as soon as possible so that we have the time to resolve or work around them in a timely manner.

What follows is a list of our expectations in terms of classroom interactions and performances.



## Attendance Expectations

- Students are expected to attend ALL rehearsals and ALL performances of the group in which they are a member. Failure to attend required rehearsals and/or performances is **not** acceptable unless it is an extreme emergency.
- Unlike assignments for core classes such as English and Math, it is not possible to make up a rehearsal or performance. This is because each individual's musical contribution is crucial to the success of the group. The band directors must approve all absences **in advance** if they are to be considered excused. In order for an absence to be considered for excuse, notice must be given according to the following timeline:
  - **Sectional rehearsal** – one school day prior
  - **Outside of school full rehearsal or concert** – two weeks prior to event
  - **Contest performance/participation** – two months prior to event
- An **excused absence** is one that the director has prior knowledge of and/or is based upon an acceptable reason (ex. illness, unforeseen family emergency). An **unexcused absence** is one that the director has no prior knowledge of and/or is based upon a reason that is unacceptable to the director.
- In the case of **ANY** absence (excused or unexcused), the student will be allowed to complete an alternate assignment that will be given by the director. For an excused absence, the student will have to complete an assignment roughly three pages in length. For an unexcused absence, the student will have to complete an assignment no less than seven pages in length.
- If a student has an unexcused absence from a band event (rehearsal, concert or contest) and does not complete their alternate assignment, it will result in a grade of zero for that event.
- If a student has two unexcused absences from performances, they will be removed from band. There will not be an opportunity to make up concert grades in this instance.
- Illness that results in the student missing the school day is always excused. We do ask that you still communicate with us in a timely manner, especially if the illness will affect the student's ability to participate in a concert or contest.
- We do understand that very occasional instances can come up that could prevent your attendance at a band event. In such a case, be sure to communicate with the band directors in as timely a manner as you can, and when possible, we will always work with you!

## **Behavior and Classroom Expectations/Procedures**

To provide and protect an enjoyable and productive learning environment for all students, the following expectations must be adhered to, by all students, always:

1. **Enter the room quietly, and get ready for class as quickly as possible.**
2. **There is no talking, without permission, while the teachers are working.**
  - If you ever have a question – raise your hand silently and wait to be called upon.
3. **Be seated, with all needed materials by the tardy bell.**
4. **All musical sounds stop when the conductor or teacher stops.**
  - Any sound, musical or non-musical, which disrupts learning for others in the classroom will not be tolerated.
5. **Respect all people and property.**
  - Any form of disrespect towards staff or fellow peers will be dealt with quickly and without prejudice.
  - Your instrument belongs to you and no one else – do not let others handle your instrument. Percussionists are only allowed to handle percussion equipment.
6. **No food, drink, or gum allowed in the band room.**
  - These can not only damage band instruments, but also pose a choking hazard.
  - Water in a closed container is permitted

Consequences for expectations and general policies not followed during class will be:

1. Teacher Warning
2. Time out, parent phone call
3. Teacher/student conference, parent phone call
4. Detention, parent/student/teacher conference
5. Class suspension with office referral

Any student specific, alternative, or intermediate corrective action needed will be discussed with parents, students and/or campus administration.

Cell phones are not permitted unless expressed otherwise by the band director.



## Grading Procedures and Rubric

Students in BMS and ASMS bands will be graded accordingly:

- **Participation (40%):** Includes bringing necessary materials to class daily
- **Homework Grades (10%):** Includes practice records
- **Performance Grades (50%):** Includes concerts and playing tests

Students should expect to turn in a Practice Record every Friday and have at least one major performance grade every two weeks. The grading procedures for our Practice Records will be listed on the page itself.

Playing tests and chair tests will also occur for all band students. If a chair test is missed for an unexcused absence, the opportunity for chair placement will be lost. Below is a brief rubric of how points are determined in playing and chair tests:

Music Performance Grades	
Tone Quality	40
Articulation	15
Technique	15
Rhythm & Pulse	15
Musicianship	15

Students are welcome to re-attempt an assignment once to earn a higher grade.

## School-Owned Instruments and Equipment

While we **STRONGLY** encourage students to purchase or rent their own band instruments, and provide resources to assist with this, there are an extremely limited number of school instruments available to students on a first-come, first-serve basis. Our primary concern is that every student has the opportunity to experience band and we will do whatever it takes to ensure that this happens.

If using a school instrument, it is the responsibility of the student (and the financial responsibility of the parent) to return the instrument in the same condition that it was issued. **All families borrowing a school owned instrument must fill out the GUSD School District-Owned Musical Instrument Agreement for the instrument to be taken home.** Report any damage or necessary repair immediately to the band directors regardless of the cause; failure to properly care for school instruments will void the privilege of using them. All equipment issued to your child is the property of Gilroy Unified School District and must be maintained in good operating condition. Damages caused by neglect will be the responsibility of the student and their parents. Fees assessed will be the actual replacement cost or costs of repair of the damaged equipment or instrument.

### **Materials Needed for Class**

All students in the BMS and ASMS Band Programs will need to be prepared for class every day. This is done in several ways. First and foremost, come to class having practiced your part or assignment adequately so that you will make a positive contribution to the ensemble and make individual improvement. Staying on top of your own assignments in band will help you improve on your instrument and will help the ensemble be successful!

In addition to the above, here are materials that you will need every day:

1. A positive, "I want to learn" attitude
2. Pencil with an eraser
3. A 1 1/2" white band binder with pockets (this, along with sheet music will be provided)
4. Instrument in good playing condition and any needed accessories (valve oil, slide grease, slide spray bottle, reeds, etc.)
5. Percussionists will always have (and use) their own assigned sticks/mallets that they will keep in their personal stick bag (have a name tag on your stick bag and your name on all your sticks/mallets)

### **Donations and Fundraising**

Band is expensive, and having a basic budget allows us to repair equipment, purchase new equipment, buy music, bring in professional clinicians to work with our bands, and provide fun experiences for the students. We ask that each band student make a "Fair-Share" donation of \$100 for their student's participation in band. Checks should be made payable to "Brownell Middle School Band" or "Ascencion Solorsano Middle School Band." These donations will be the student's "fair share" of what is needed to support and improve the entire band program and all students involved. While we hope that every family will contribute a donation, we understand that not all are able to do so. All students are treated equally, and students will NEVER be denied participation in band due to lack of a contribution.

Band fundraisers will be held periodically. This is another way in which special band activities are paid for. Encouraging your child to participate is appreciated by all band members. We will have sales of certain items (ex. butter braids, poinsettias) to help with the costs of the band program.

### **Performance Attire**

For all formal public performances, **Symphonic and Beginning Band** students of the BMS and ASMS bands will need to wear solid black dress pants (NO jeans) and a solid black button up dress shirt, along with long black socks with black dress shoes or close-toed dress shoes with dresses. Students should let the directors know immediately if they need assistance acquiring these items. ***Students in inappropriate attire will not be allowed to perform with the band and will receive a grade of zero for that performance.***

### **Medical and Dental Appointments**

Please schedule dentist, doctor, and orthodontist visits for times other than band class, sectional rehearsal, or a performance. Because of the group dynamic involved with band membership, all students need to attend all rehearsals and performances. When someone is missing, the group is incomplete, and they miss out in contributing their own part. We do recognize, however, that there are situations where this is impossible or unavoidable, such as an emergency.

**Regarding braces and orthodontia** – Woodwind and brass players, if there are plans (even if only a consideration) for braces, please be mindful of the timing involved in getting them. Braces are a fact of life for many students, and should you get braces, you will continue to be successful after the first week or so of getting them. It takes time to get used to them. For this reason, we ask that you kindly consider not getting them put on or removed close to performances (particularly spring contests and festivals). Please inform us of your early intention to get braces (or remove them) so that you have adequate time to adjust to your “new” mouth. There is never a perfect time to get braces put on or taken off, but some times are worse than others.

### **In-Person Learning Safety Protocols**

We are committed to providing your child a safe and healthy learning environment as we progress through the pandemic. Band students will follow safety protocols set by Gilroy Unified School District and the California Department of Public Health. We ask that all students and families respect individual decisions made regarding mask wearing.

Thank you for reading through the BMS and ASMS Band Handbook. If you have any questions about this document, please do not hesitate to reach out to the directors. To find a list of the band performances this year, please visit [www.christopherbands.com](http://www.christopherbands.com).

**\*\*\*Please remember to fill out the Handbook Acknowledgement Form, which is located on the next page. Students and parents will need to sign and turn in the form to their director, which is due on Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

