NJSYO PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK
2025-2026 SEASON

"Building a Musical Future for New Jersey"

OVERVIEW

Since its founding as an independent nonprofit organization in 1977, the New Jersey State Youth Orchestra (NJSYO) has grown to include three orchestras. Close supervision of the orchestras and ensembles by the Conductors, Section Coaches, the Board of Trustees, and parents and guardians is required for the NJSYO to run smoothly. The goal of the NJSYO is to provide an extraordinary musical training and performance experience for all of our student musicians. This Handbook provides guidelines to help facilitate this goal. **All NJSYO families, members, and employees are required to adhere to these guidelines.**

If unexpected changes are needed during the season, these changes will be communicated to all members via email by a member of the Executive Board. Members are requested to receive unexpected changes with flexibility and patience as we bring the NJSYO forward into a new season during unprecedented times.

Please read the contents of this Handbook carefully and review its contents with your student. There is an Acknowledgment and Agreement registration checkoff that must be completed during registration.

GENERAL INFORMATION

All NJSYO program participants must register online before the beginning of each season (e.g. September). Please see the official website (www.njsyo.org) for details. Also, note that the NJSYO does not issue refunds for canceled registrations, a policy required by our fiscal and contractual obligations to our Conductors and Coaches. Students may not attend orchestra or ensemble rehearsals unless they are registered. Unregistered students may be required to be picked up by a parent and leave the rehearsal.

All families are required to watch their email and carefully read all communications. Email is the primary means by which we can reach our members in a timely manner with important information. Google Classroom may also be utilized by our conductors to communicate weekly information.

All new members must register and complete an audition. Current participants who wish to change positions within an orchestra; to change to a different orchestra; or to join an ensemble must also audition.

As described below, there are minimum age requirements for all of the orchestras.

PSO members must be in at least 2nd grade. Please note: PSO students who are below the 5th grade must be picked up in their classrooms following rehearsal. Parents MUST enter the building and students are not permitted to walk to their transportation alone.

ISO members: must be in at least 5th grade.

SYO members: must be in at least 9th grade.

Chamber Ensemble musicians: must be at least 13 years old, or be at least in the 8th grade.

Orchestral and ensemble placement is based on a student's audition and grade level, and is at the discretion of the Conductors but must adhere to the restrictions described above.

Please see the requirements as listed on our website under ***Member Information.***

Our Conductors are professional musicians and accredited music educators whose expertise should be fully relied on when it comes to appropriate placement of musicians within an orchestra or ensemble. The NJSYO Trustees request that you respect their professional assessments and recommendations.

The Conductors and Coaches are responsible for discipline in their orchestras, with assistance from the Trustees and approved parent / guardian volunteers.

All members shall respect the privilege rendered to them by the host rehearsal or performance venue and shall not cause any disturbance in or of the facility. Students shall leave rehearsal and performance venues as soon as possible following the end of the rehearsal or performance. Parents / guardians shall be responsible for students' conduct at all times and must assume full responsibility for any facility damage.

Each member who is issued a folder, sheet music or musical instrument is responsible for maintaining it in a concert-ready condition at all times. Charges may be assessed for replacement of damaged or lost materials or equipment.

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS & PRIVATE INSTRUCTION

Parents should arrange for students to take private lessons in their orchestral instrument in addition to their participation in the NJSYO. If this is not possible, in-school instruction may be substituted for this requirement. (PSO only) Private lessons are a requirement for all students in the ISO, Chamber and SYO groups. Verification of private lessons will occur periodically.

Musicians are expected to practice in advance of rehearsal. Students who are not performing to the conductor expectation will receive notice, with correspondence to guardians. If the performance level does not improve, a re audition will be required and continuation in the orchestra will be contingent upon the audition. The Board reserves the right to release any musician that is not able to perform the repertoire according to conductor expectations. The requirement for re audition can occur at any time during the season.

Please see the requirements for the Concerto Competition that will take place annually under ***Member Information.***

CONCERT PROGRAMS AND SPONSORSHIP PARTICIPATION

The NJSYO produces a special program each year for its Winter and Spring Concerts. One of our most important fundraising activities is to solicit program ads and season sponsorships. Your tuition includes one ¼ page program ad. There is an option to upgrade at an additional cost. Ads are one of our primary fundraisers and we strongly encourage all families to secure additional ads from local businesses or from Family and Friends.

The ad/sponsorship forms are available on the website (www.njsyo.org). Please return the completed forms with any artwork (business cards, photos, etc.) and the appropriate payment as directed via email. The annual deadline for program submission will be in December of each year. Sponsorships or donations may be submitted throughout the season.

VOLUNTEERS AND COMMITTEES

The NJSYO is managed by a volunteer Board of Trustees and is operated by parents, guardians, and approved community volunteers. The work that is needed to run the organization is done by volunteers.

The NJSYO has several key committees of volunteers who provide essential service to the NJSYO. Each family is expected to help with the vital projects which keep the organization running in order for programs to be offered. There are many volunteer opportunities at all levels of commitment, which include serving on, or assisting, the following committees.

Many of these involve highly flexible hours and can fit into any busy schedule.

These committees and the Board are extremely important to the life of the NJSYO. They ensure that our students get the best possible training in the best possible environment, and that the NJSYO continues to prosper. **Please don't wait to be asked to volunteer! To volunteer, or to ask questions about NJSYO operations, speak to any Board member or email njsyo@njsyo.org. A list of all board members may be found on our website.**

Committees

Public Relations and Advertising Committee: Assist with event flyers, press releases, advertising in print and online; work with Social Media committee.

Concert Committee: Assist with concert planning; volunteer to help with tasks day of concert (including welcome table, ticket sales, merchandise table, usher, clean up)

Program Committee: Solicit ads, design concert programs, arrange printing, help assemble and distribute programs at events.

Membership Committee: Organize and run auditions, help with online registration system, communicate results of auditions.

Sponsorship Committee: Solicit businesses and organizations to underwrite our programs and concert season; assist Board with grant applications.

Merchandise Committee: Keep and maintain inventory, supervise online and event sales.

Chaperone: Volunteer to chaperone at rehearsals; events; concerts

Assistance Committee (board only): Maintain application for financial assistance program; coordinate with Treasurer to make recommendations to Board based on available resources; review attendance of members receiving assistance; investigate and lead efforts for non-financial assistance for members as needed; help solicit external support.

The Board of Trustees may eliminate or create committees if needed.

COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS

The NJSYO can certify community service work for students if a school permits time spent on NJSYO rehearsals, performances and/or other activities to be counted as such.

If you need certification, you must plan ahead. You must allow **a minimum of two weeks** for the form to be signed and returned so that it can be checked against attendance records. No exceptions will be made. In the past, parents and students have requested that forms be signed immediately upon presentation to board members. This is not permitted.

You must completely fill out and present the appropriate form(s) for your school district to the Conductor for signing, including the number of hours you are claiming. You are responsible for filling out the form in a manner which follows your school district's rules. Generally your form will be signed by your Conductor. Your form may only be signed by an NJSYO Executive Board member if they are able to first confirm your attendance and participation with the Conductor. Please ask your Conductor or the NJSYO President for help if you have questions.

CONCERT ATTIRE

In general, concert attire is formal and conservative. Formal concert attire is meant to enhance the ability of the musician to perform well and show off the group as a whole in a positive manner. Detailed requirements are given below. The following descriptions should be interpreted through the lens of each person's own gender identification and in no way is meant to impose binary choices on the children.

Failure to abide by the dress code requirements may result in not being allowed on stage for the performance, at the discretion of the Conductor or a member of the Executive Board.

ALL MEMBERS:

- NO sneakers, sandals, flip flops or Doc Martens
- NO jeans or sweatpants
- NO leggings or yoga pants
- NO t-shirts
- NO athletic wear of ANY kind
- NO strapless tops and no strapless dresses.

- *Skirts and dresses must be knee-length or longer; Dress shirts must be tucked in.*

Symphonic Youth Orchestra Attire:
Girls: Black blouse and black skirt (knee-length or longer) or black dress pants, or long black dress. Black dress shoes and black socks / stockings.
Boys: Black tuxedo with bow tie, white dress shirt or tuxedo shirt. Black dress shoes and black socks.

Chamber Ensemble Attire:
Girls: Black blouse and black skirt (knee-length or longer) or black dress pants, or long black dress. Black dress shoes and black socks / stockings.
Boys: Black dress pants, black dress shirt (no tie). Black dress shoes and black socks.

Intermediate String Orchestra Attire:
Girls: Long black skirt (knee-length or longer) or black dress pants, white blouse/shirt, black dress shoes and black stockings/socks.
Boys: Black dress pants, white dress shirt, long black tie (no bow ties), Black dress shoes and black socks.

Preparatory String Orchestra Attire:

Girls: Long black skirt (knee-length or longer) or black dress pants, white blouse/shirt, black dress shoes and black stockings/socks.
Boys: Black dress pants, white shirt (no tie). Black dress shoes and black socks.

ATTENDANCE AND CONDUCT POLICY

The NJSYO is committed to providing a superior music education and performance experience to all NJSYO students. Absence, lateness, disruptive behavior, or early departure from rehearsal disrupts the learning environment and detracts from the performance level of the entire orchestra.

Perfect attendance and perfect comportment of all musicians is our goal. Each musician is required to attend all rehearsals and all scheduled performances as a condition of membership. Members are expected to arrive promptly, to behave professionally, to remain throughout the rehearsal or performance unless special permission is given, and to leave promptly afterwards.

All musicians must treat each other with respect and kindness. Harassment and bullying are serious violations of the conduct policy. Behavioral instructions from all NJSYO employees and Trustees must be followed.

In the event of serious or continuing misconduct, or inappropriate or disruptive behavior, the Conductor, in consultation with the Board, is empowered to exercise appropriate disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from a rehearsal and / or the NJSYO. Please note that in the case of expulsion or other disciplinary action, no refund will be given.

The NJSYO maintains various social media accounts, and uses Zoom for certain online activities. All musicians and their families are responsible for strictly refraining from online harassment or "cyberbullying," particularly of other NJSYO members and/or in any connection with the NJSYO social media accounts. Zoom links to rehearsals may not be shared with anyone who is not an NJSYO member. Violation of these requirements will result in serious consequences up to and including expulsion from the NJSYO, at the discretion of the Board.

ATTENDANCE POLICY
The NJSYO recognizes that occasional absences may be necessary due to unforeseen situations. Therefore, the NJSYO has adopted the following Attendance Policy.

Attendance and Conduct at Rehearsals
Attendance at rehearsals is required and only a limited number of absences are permitted (see Violations). These are to be used only for unavoidable situations, such as religious obligations, serious illness, injury, or other emergencies. The Conductor is responsible for taking attendance, with assistance as needed from a designated parent / guardian volunteer and/or Section Coaches.

If a student must miss a rehearsal, the Conductor must be notified in <u>advance</u> of the rehearsal if that is possible, or afterwards as soon as it is practical to do so. Each Conductor will inform students as to how they should be notified.

More than two absences from rehearsal for a particular concert is a violation of the Attendance Policy, whether or not advance notification is given (see Violations below). Parents/guardians and students (SYO only) should use njsyo email and Google Classroom as a form of communication.
Absences without prior notification are more serious violations than otherwise would be the case. Once a student misses a third rehearsal, the Board is notified and the musician's case will be reviewed by the Executive Board. Parents will be contacted directly by the Board with a plan of action.

Musicians are expected to arrive for rehearsals 15 minutes before the scheduled start time of their first activity. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of rehearsals. Musicians must be in their seats, ready to play their instruments, 5 minutes before the rehearsal begins. Prompt return from rehearsal breaks is also required. Late arrivals or early departures of 15 minutes or more will be recorded as absences. Parents are welcome to wait outside the rehearsal room but are not allowed to remain in the rehearsal room without permission from the Trustees.

Musicians must be picked up promptly at the end of rehearsal and are not permitted to wait outside the venue until picked up. All students in 4th grade or below must be picked up by a parent or guardian in the rehearsal room. All other musicians must wait in the lobby for pickup.

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In the event of an unscheduled rehearsal cancellation due to weather or other emergencies, the NJSYO will make every effort to notify students with a notice on the website, email and social media. The Middletown Arts Center can also be reached at (732) 706 - 4100.

Attendance and Conduct at Performances
Students must be present at all scheduled concert and ensemble performances of their groups. Absence from, or late arrival for, a scheduled performance which is due solely to a scheduling conflict is a serious violation of the Attendance Policy (see "Violations" below). Absences for other reasons will be considered on a case by case basis but generally only emergencies or conflicts due to religious observance are considered to be acceptable reasons for missing a performance.

*A missed concert appearance will be subject to review by the Board and may lead to a suspension for the following season. A student who is applying for the Concerto Competition may not miss a concert to be eligible.

Excellent conduct is expected at all concerts, including conduct backstage and in waiting rooms. The Conductors, Coaches, and Board members, in consultation with members of the Executive Board, are empowered to exercise appropriate disciplinary action for disruptive conduct at performance venues including summary expulsion from the concert. Disruptive conduct, littering, or property theft or venue damage may result in suspension and/or expulsion from the NJSYO at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

Violations
Violations of the Attendance and Conduct Policy as outlined above may result in a seating or section demotion for the rest of the season; not being allowed to perform in subsequent concert(s) and rehearsals; not being allowed to progress to advanced seats, groups,

sections or programs; expulsion from the organization for the remainder of the season; or other actions at the joint discretion of the Conductor and the Executive Board, based on the number of violations and their severity.

The 2025-26 policy requires a re-audition once a **third absence** is reached. A "readiness" audition will be required for students who miss more than 2 rehearsals. The audition will be scheduled based upon the conductor's availability and up to the discretion of conductor and with the approval of the Music Director.
Musicians are asked to provide a program, an email or signed note for any music/arts related absence.
Illness related absences should be followed by a doctor's note.