

Parent & Student Guide to

The HEIGHTS Music Program



A Community Treasure

*A publication of Reaching Heights in Partnership with
the Cleveland Heights - University Heights City Schools*

Music Enriches Lives

Music is a life expanding adventure. It broadens horizons and enriches lives. It's a way to explore and appreciate other cultures. This universal language is a powerful tool for self-expression, and can bring people together.

The possibilities for growth by music study are unlimited. The music program in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights schools offers students wonderful opportunities to explore music's many dimensions, to develop their skills and interests, and to discover how they want to include music in their lives. Families and students must decide which opportunities to pursue, and how deeply they will invest their time and energy.

The Heights area, home to Cain Park and close to the cultural resources of University Circle, is a natural habitat for musicians. A high level of community support has contributed to the tradition of excellence in music education associated with the Heights program.

While the Cleveland Heights-University Heights schools are well known for nurturing future musicians, every student has something to gain from studying music.



Editors Note: This guide is a publication of Reaching Heights, a citizen support organization for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights public schools. It was produced with help from music teachers, and parents whose children have thrived in this wonderful program, and printed by the Cleveland Heights-University Heights schools. We hope it provides the information and encouragement parents need to take advantage of this community treasure.

Susan C. Kaeser, Executive Director

Reaching Heights mobilizes the resources of the community to foster highly valued and successful public schools.

Studying music:

- makes you smarter. A growing body of research links music learning with brain development and academic success.
- develops self-discipline, problem solving and team work, valuable life skills and habits.
- can be a focus that makes school fun and engaging, and can lead to greater participation in all aspects of school life.
- gives students a valuable way to contribute to school and community.
- plants a seed for life long enjoyment. It often leads to fulfilling careers and avocations.

Heights Music at A Glance

Exceptional Opportunities for Every Child to Explore, Express, Enjoy and Excel

Elementary Music

All elementary school children participate in weekly music classes that focus on listening, singing, rhythm and movement. In addition to exposing students to various musical traditions, students use Orff instruments, keyboards, and dance to develop appreciation for music's structure and elements.

In third grade students learn to play the recorder. Fourth and fifth graders spend an additional half hour each week in choir practice.

Performing is a regular part of the elementary program and gives young musicians the chance to share what they've learned and to savor the pleasure of taking a well-earned bow. Because the Heights schools value inter-disciplinary study, music is often linked to other subjects.

Instrumental music begins in fourth grade. This is a good time for students who have not had prior instruction to explore an instrument and to build the foundation for future participation in an enriching aspect of school life.

Small group lessons are offered weekly within the school day. They are replaced in fifth grade with a weekly orchestra rehearsal. Younger students with previous private instruction may be placed in the experienced orchestra. Students who did not choose to take instrumental lessons in fourth grade may take beginning lessons in fifth grade or sixth grade. After this point, only students who have studied privately and play at an adequate level may join the instrumental program.



"My children were taken seriously as musicians from the very beginning. Their teachers were demanding but encouraging. This gave my children a sense of confidence. They've also felt valued as contributors - to their orchestra, their school, and their community."

Christie Borkan, parent

Middle School Music

During the intense developmental stage of early adolescence, music can provide needed focus. Working with their peers, students discover their own special strengths and the importance of collaboration.

Middle school students who want to be part of the music program must choose between vocal and instrumental music. In 6th and 7th grade instruction is offered every other day; in 8th grade music meets daily.

Vocal Music

Loving music, and being willing to give one's best, are the main requisites for the vocal music program. Students concentrate on technique and learn a wide variety of music. Performance is integral to the program and regular evening concerts at the school are rewarding for performers and the audience. Students who want to put forth extra effort can participate in "honor" groups that perform in the community.

Always emphasizing the pleasure of voice, this program makes students aware of the discipline and determination necessary to progress as a musician.

Instrumental Music

Depending on their instrument, middle school students are enrolled in band or string orchestra for group instruction. Students who have not previously taken group or private lessons are welcome in 6th grade to begin group lessons on band and orchestra instruments.

Middle school musicians work on basic techniques, fingering and reading music. They move on to advanced topics including dynamics, understanding complex rhythms, and learning how to blend as an ensemble. They are encouraged to participate in the Ohio Music Educators Solo and Ensemble Contest, which gives them the chance to prepare a piece for an outside judge to critique. Music can include extra-curricular opportunities, such as jazz band and chamber groups. If they have not already taken lessons with a private teacher, motivated students can begin private study at this time.

"The music program helped my daughters feel at home at middle school. Through it, they learned a love for music and made lasting friendships."

Laurie Garrett, parent

Music at Cleveland Heights High School

The sky is the limit.

Cleveland Heights High School is a big place. Students can find a comfortable, nurturing home, as well as motivated peers, in the instrumental and vocal music departments. More than 600 students take advantage of the opportunities to make music within the walls of Heights.

The rich and diverse offerings, and the high level skills of the students make the high school program exceptional. It offers a broad spectrum of courses and extra-curricular opportunities including: four vocal performing groups, two orchestras, three concert bands, a marching band, two jazz ensembles, and multiple chamber groups. The curriculum includes African American Music, Music Technology and Basic, Advanced or Advanced Placement Music Theory. Extra curricular offerings like Gospel Choir and musicals give students access to many musical settings, styles and traditions.

In addition to multiple concerts held during the school year, vocal and instrumental performing groups take their music on the road within the community, to state and local contests and festivals, and out of state during spring tours.

Depending on their skills and goals, students may participate in the program in different ways. Some students simply enjoy being part of their musical group while others demonstrate the highest level of musicianship through solos and participation in multiple ensembles.

Heights musicians are frequently represented in premier musical festivals, competitions and performing groups, such as the All-State Choir, All-State Band, Tri-C Jazz All-Stars, the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra or Chorus, Contemporary Youth Orchestra, Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony and Music School Settlement Orchestra.



Vocal Music



Our outstanding high school program trains students in a wide spectrum of musical styles, increases ear and rhythmic abilities, develops sight reading skills, and builds performance artistry.

Students audition for appropriate placement in Freshman Choir, Singers, Choir and Honors Ensemble. Each group elects student officers who handle many of the performance details, encouraging students to build their leadership skills.

Gospel Choir is an after school extra-curricular activity. This popular group performs its faith-based musical repertoire in school, the community and on tour.

"Music has been a mainstay of my kids' years in the Heights schools. It introduced them to wonderful peers, and gave them opportunities to travel. One of my daughters had the chance to perform a senior solo, an experience she'll always remember. I know that, whatever they wind up doing, making music will always be a source of pleasure for my kids."

Tricia Springstubb, parent

"Music is a second language in our house. We all love to sing. Meeting other students who value voice as much as she does has been a very good thing. The teachers are full of energy. The administration is very supportive of the program."

Jane Timmons Mitchell, parent

Instrumental Music

Students audition for appropriate placement in one of three concert bands, two orchestras, or two jazz ensembles. As skills develop students are placed in ensembles with more musical demands and increased responsibilities. Seniors may audition to perform a senior solo, an honor reserved for the most accomplished musicians.

All woodwind, brass and percussion musicians participate in the Tiger Marching Band, which performs during home football games, community parades, and other events. Students must be enrolled in a band or orchestra to be eligible for chamber groups, the jazz band, or marching band.



Getting Started On a Musical Instrument

Should I learn to play a musical instrument?

The elementary and middle school years give students the chance to explore their interest in an instrument while also giving them a foundation for the instrumental opportunities that lie ahead. Participation in the early years is a good way to make an informed decision about pursuing instrumental or vocal options in middle school and high school.

What Instrument should I play?

If you decide to try out a musical instrument, you have many choices. Each instrument has its unique voice. Instruments vary in how they are played, difficulty, expense, and performance opportunities. Instruments fall into four families:

Strings: violin, viola, cello and double bass

Woodwinds: flute, clarinet, bassoon, oboe and saxophone

Brass: french horn, trumpet, trombone and tuba

Percussion: drums and mallet instruments



There are many factors to take into consideration when making this choice. While it is very important to make a good choice and at least narrow your interest to a certain family, it is still possible to change later.

1. Personal taste and comfort with the instrument are crucial.

2. Because music is studied during a band or orchestra class, it is important to think of yourself as a member of one of these ensembles when you choose an instrument. A band uses only woodwind, brass and percussion instruments while an orchestra uses mostly string instrument supported by solo woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

Each ensemble sounds different and plays different styles of music. Both need a mix and balance of instruments. Your preference for band or orchestra music, and your contribution to the diversity of instruments of your music ensemble are very important to your decision.

3. You can contribute to your band or orchestra, and increase your playing options, if you are open minded and adventurous in your choice. Less common instruments lend balance and color to a group. These instruments, oboe, bassoon, french horn, tuba, bass and others, are available from the school and can open up your playing opportunities. Many students prefer to start on common instruments and switch to another less common instrument later. For example, the flute or clarinet is good preparation for the oboe or bassoon. The violin is good preparation for the viola or bass. All instruments are important.

4. Do some homework before you make a choice. Listen to recordings, attend school music performances and take advantage of amateur and professional concerts in our musical community to learn about the music and instruments you like. Don't hesitate to talk to music teachers about the options and what instruments they need.

5. Students are encouraged to study piano privately. While piano provides an excellent foundation for all music, lessons are not available through the music program.

Where do I find an instrument?

Local music stores and music schools are a good source of new or used instruments to rent with the option to buy. Your family may already have an instrument, or a neighbor may be willing to loan you one to get started. The schools have a limited number of larger and unusual instruments to loan to students. Owning an instrument becomes very practical if you decide to stay involved with music.

What about private lessons?

Private lessons are an effective way to accelerate growth on an instrument or as a vocalist. They are well worth the money if you are motivated to learn. If you are ready to commit time to consistent practice, lessons make sense. By middle school, private lessons become an important way to support progress in school. This can be an expensive undertaking, but assistance is available. Both the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Cleveland Music School Settlement offer scholarships.



The Heights area offers a treasure-trove of wonderful music teachers. Lessons are offered by independent teachers who work from their homes or through music schools and music stores. Contact these providers or talk to friends whose children are taking lessons for their recommendations.

At the beginning, music teachers stress the importance of daily practice, the basics of counting and note reading. Good teachers are responsive to their students and accommodate individual tastes in musical styles. How demanding a teacher is should also be considered. Most important - the student has to enjoy lessons. There should be a mutual respect and friendship between student and teacher.

