



MEMBER AND PARENT HANDBOOK

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<https://gctyo.org>

Welcome to GCTYO!

Young people achieve amazing things at GCTYO. They develop their talents beyond what they thought possible and feel pride and joy in their accomplishments. Greater Connecticut Youth Orchestras' holistic approach to music education means we inspire and challenge students at every stage of their music development. The study and performance of great music in an ensemble setting can be a transformative experience for young musicians, and the skills they learn as part of a GCTYO ensemble—teamwork, perseverance and responsibility—carry over into all areas of their lives.

Our Mission

Greater Connecticut Youth Orchestras (GCTYO) brings young musicians together to achieve the highest standard of music performance in a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment. Our holistic approach to education fosters growth, learning, confidence, and both social and emotional awareness, which prepares students for a full and balanced life.

Our Core Values

- Belonging | Providing an inclusive place where everyone feels accepted
- Community | Building partnerships within the GCTYO family and beyond
- Dedication | Encouraging commitment to each other as we work to achieve a common goal
- Equity | Ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement
- Integrity | Making ethical, transparent, and well-intentioned decisions

GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

PERSONAL BEHAVIOR & BULLYING

At GCTYO, we hold our members to high standards of character and conduct, reflecting positively on themselves, their families, schools, and communities. We expect every student to contribute to the wholesome atmosphere of community with others, dedicated work, and serious performance that sets GCTYO apart.

Any behavior that brings discredit to the organization can result in disciplinary action. As part of their membership, all GCTYO students must adhere to our Anti-Bullying Contract - see below. This commitment ensures a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

Let's work together to maintain the respectful and encouraging spirit of GCTYO, making it a place where everyone can thrive and make beautiful music!

Anti-Bullying Contract Student and Parent/Guardian Agreement

Everyone has the right to feel physically and emotionally safe at Greater Connecticut Youth Orchestras (GCTYO). Bullying is defined as intentionally aggressive behavior that can take many forms (verbal, physical, social, emotional, or cyber - or any combination of these); it involves an imbalance of power and is often repeated over time. The bullying can consist of one child bullying another or a group of children bullying another child or group of children.

Every member of GCTYO should enjoy it equally, and feel safe, secure, and accepted regardless of color, race, gender, popularity, musical ability, intelligence, religion, or nationality. Bullying can be pushing, shoving, hitting, and spitting, as well as name calling, picking on, making fun of, laughing at, or excluding someone. Bullying causes pain and stress to victims and is never justified or excusable as 'kids being kids,' 'just teasing,' or any other rationalization. The victim is never responsible for being a target of bullying.

Student's responsibility: As a member of the GCTYO community, I will do everything I can personally to create and preserve a physically and emotionally safe environment. I will strive to treat everyone with respect regardless of any differences. I commit that I will not bully my peers. If I witness bullying, I will report it to the Conductor of my ensemble or to the Music Director of GCTYO.

Parent/Guardian's responsibility: I commit to encouraging my child to always respect others. I will also respect all other adults (parents and staff) at GCTYO. I have instructed my child not to bully. I have advised my child to report any bullying to the Conductor of my child's ensemble or to the Music Director of GCTYO.

I understand that bullying may result in immediate expulsion from GCTYO.

RESTROOM POLICY

At GCTYO, we believe that everyone should be able to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity. Nobody should feel anxious or unsafe using a restroom, and nobody should have to go way out of their way to find one. Our restroom policy is gender-inclusive: Everyone is welcome to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity. There is also a single person restroom in the 2nd floor auditorium lobby at RLMS.

We are committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all our members. Let's ensure everyone feels comfortable and respected while participating in GCTYO activities.

ATTENDANCE

At GCTYO, we believe that every rehearsal and performance is a step towards excellence. That's why we expect our members to attend all events listed on the GCTYO calendar. If you need to miss a rehearsal, please notify your ensemble conductor in advance—not the executive director. You'll find their contact information in weekly emails and on our website on the Contact page.

Regular attendance is crucial. Excessive absences could result in exclusion from concert performances. Attendance at dress rehearsals is mandatory; missing a dress rehearsal may mean you won't be able to perform in the concert.

Every player is vital to the orchestra's harmony. There are only a few acceptable reasons for missing a performance, and unexcused absences may lead to being dropped from the orchestra or moved back in your section. The consequences of excessive absences or missed dress rehearsals and concerts are at the discretion of your conductor in consultation with the Music Director.

We take great care to avoid scheduling conflicts with school vacations, religious holidays, CMEA auditions, and music festivals. We ask our members to review the GCTYO calendar carefully and do their best to avoid conflicts on their end. Try not to schedule vacations on 2 weekends of a long break so that your musician doesn't miss 2 rehearsals in a row. Together, let's make beautiful music with commitment and dedication!

DON'T BE LATE!

Punctuality is key to a smooth and productive rehearsal. GCTYO members are expected to be in their assigned seats, instruments tuned, and ready to play at the scheduled start time. If rehearsal starts at 9:00 am and you arrive at 9:00 am, you are considered late!

Three late arrivals will count as one absence. Conductors have the discretion to adjust seating or dismiss members who are consistently late. Let's respect each other's time and make the most of our rehearsals by being punctual and prepared.

CELL PHONES

At GCTYO, we want our rehearsals to be focused and engaging. Cell phones detract from the social experience of meeting new people, making new friends, and playing music together. Cell phones should be put away as soon as you enter the building for a rehearsal or concert. When you get to your sectional or full rehearsal space, say Hi

to the people already in the room and try starting a conversation. Welcome musicians as they come in. Break the cell phone silence with conversation! You will be happily surprised at how much better this feels than just staring at your phone.

We understand that families want to stay in touch, and may have important reasons for doing so, such as medical issues, family emergencies, carpooling, or schedule changes. It's OK to check your cell phone periodically during the morning. A good time to do this is at the beginning of snack break and again at dismissal. During rehearsal is not a good time to do it. The other musicians around you are counting on your musicianship and dedication to the group.

Snack time is way more fun if you are off your phone and talking to other students or playing games with them. If you think no one wants to talk to you, it might be because your head is down and you are looking at your phone instead of the people in the room. Try joining a group of students, or introduce yourself to someone else standing alone. You will be glad you did!

We guarantee that GCTYO will be way more fun if you put your phone away and focus on meeting people and making new friends!

If you need your phone to monitor a medical condition, let your conductors know. Of course you will be allowed to use your phone for that purpose.

If there's an emergency and parents need to reach a musician immediately, you should call or text the Executive Director at 203-209-4255. We will relay your message promptly and have your musician contact you. Let's stay connected while making the most of our rehearsal time.

Conductors may confiscate a cell phone if a musician uses it during rehearsals.

PROPERTY

At GCTYO, we are committed to operating safely and responsibly, particularly when using rented facilities. We ask all members, families, employees, and volunteers to observe safety rules and show respect for the building, its occupants, and its equipment. Since our rehearsals take place in public schools, it's important to remember that we are guests of the school and the school district.

Students should respect their surroundings and refrain from touching or moving any school property unless instructed by a staff member or adult volunteer. Wandering around the building before, during, or after rehearsal is not permitted. Students should go directly to their practice rooms, the restrooms, or the snack area. At Tomlinson MS, elevators are reserved for cello, bass, and baritone sax players or for those who have difficulty walking or using stairs.

By respecting these guidelines, we ensure a positive experience for everyone and maintain our good relationship with the schools. Let's work together to be responsible guests and keep our rehearsal environment safe and respectful!

RULES OF CONDUCT IN THE REHEARSAL SPACE

Parents, please ensure your children have read and understood these rules, and remind them to act respectfully throughout their time at GCTYO.

- **No Wandering:** Wandering around the building is strictly forbidden. Students should take the shortest route possible to their rehearsal and break spaces and should not go anywhere else.
- **Respect Property:** Do not touch any property in the building that is not needed for rehearsals (such as chairs and music stands). This includes whiteboards, bulletin boards, trash and recycling cans, items on desks, and any items in rooms or spaces that do not belong to GCTYO.
- **Food & Drinks:** *Food and drinks (snacks or lunch; water is an exception) may not be consumed anywhere in the building except the cafeteria.* This includes hallways and the lobby. Musicians in afternoon ensembles who need to eat before rehearsal must do so outside or in the cafeteria.
- **Breaks:** All students must go to the cafeteria with their group for breaks, even if they do not want a snack. No students may remain in classrooms or hallways without adult supervision.
- **Pickup:** If a student is not picked up immediately after their rehearsal ends, they are to remain in the lobby or cafeteria until a parent or guardian arrives. Please be aware of your child's end time and arrive promptly to pick them up. If an adult is running late or off their regular schedule, they should text the Executive Director.
- **Obey Signs:** Obey all posted signs in the cafeteria, lobby, and hallways.

By following these guidelines, we can maintain a respectful and organized rehearsal environment. Thank you for your cooperation!

GOOD STANDING

At GCTYO, we value the synergy between our organization and school music programs. We expect our members to remain in good standing within their respective school music programs, where they exist. What does "good standing" mean? It's determined by your school's guidelines and expectations.

If you ever find yourself facing a conflict between school music activities and GCTYO commitments, please inform your GCTYO conductor as soon as possible. School music activities will take precedence, and we'll work with you and your school music director to ensure a harmonious balance. Your growth as a musician is our top priority!

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

Ensembles meet at different times. Be sure to drop your musician off at least 15 minutes prior to the start of rehearsal.

Families are expected to pick up their children at the designated dismissal time from rehearsals, retreats and concerts. If a student cannot be picked up exactly at dismissal time, the Executive Director and conductor should be notified. The student should wait in the lobby area until a driver arrives. Please note that GCTYO is not a babysitting service. Children who are not members of GCTYO should never be left at rehearsal unattended and student musicians should not be picked up more than 15 minutes after a rehearsal, concert or social activity ends. Under no circumstances should students wander around the building or the neighborhood after a GCTYO activity! Parents who repeatedly pick up their students late will be asked to change their schedule. Students who are unattended and not where they are supposed to be will be given a warning. If the behavior is repeated, the student will be asked to leave the program. Let's ensure the safety and well-being of all our members by following these guidelines for dismissal.

REHEARSAL CHANGES/CANCELLATIONS

GCTYO strives to maintain the schedule and calendar distributed at the beginning of the season. However, unforeseen events can cause disruptions. In the event of weather complications, please know that we value members' safety above all else. If you think that rehearsal may be canceled due to weather, check your email, the GCTYO website (<https://gctyo.org>), or the GCTYO Facebook or Instagram page after 7:00 am. Decisions regarding cancellations/delays are generally made by that hour. You will be emailed regarding any change, provided GCTYO has your correct email address. Because GCTYO draws from a wide geographic area, the weather may not be the same throughout. If rehearsal is still on, but you think that the weather in your area compromises your safety, please let your conductor know that you are not coming. Rehearsal changes that can be anticipated will be announced as early as possible. Changes will be posted on the website, Facebook, and Instagram, and members will be emailed. Let's stay informed and safe!

RETREATS

GCTYO provides each ensemble with an annual retreat or social activity early in the season. Just as with regular rehearsals, attendance is mandatory. The purpose of the retreats is two-fold: A period of intense rehearsals, coupled with recreational activities, immensely improves the quality of the musical performances during the season. The social activities and rest periods give students the opportunity to get to know each

other and bond into a cohesive group with common interests and goals. Retreats are held off-site so that they feel special.

MUSIC

All music and folders are the property of GCTYO and are maintained in a library for ongoing use. At the first rehearsal, each orchestra member is issued a folder containing music. The number on each piece of music should match the folder number. GCTYO music should remain in the GCTYO folder at all times, and it should not be folded or wrinkled. Any marks on the music must be made in pencil. It is the orchestra member's responsibility to maintain the music in good condition. Students who do not return the folder or music at the end of the year will be charged up to \$50 for replacement. Let's take care of our music so that it can be enjoyed by many more musicians in the future!

CONCERT ATTIRE

For all members (except Steel Pan- see below), concert attire is **ALL BLACK** and should be "business casual." Here's what is acceptable:

- Long-sleeved black dress shirt (crew neck or collared, with or without buttons)
- Black dress pants or ankle-length black skirt or long-sleeved black dress
- Black socks or stockings
- Black dress shoes
- If pants have belt loops, a black dress belt should be worn
- Suit jackets and ties are not required, but are acceptable if black

Absolutely NO t-shirts, jeans, leggings, leotards, or sneakers! Concert dress should look professional. Arms, legs, and ankles must be fully covered. Shirts should not be low-cut. Shoes must also be black.

Steel Pan Only: Black long pants & short-sleeved polo shirt, preferably in a shade of purple, light blue, or pink. White or navy blue is also okay.

Let's all look sharp and professional on stage!

COMMUNICATION

Most communication from GCTYO to families is by email. Be sure you provide up-to-date, accurate email addresses. If you are not receiving at least one email per week from GCTYO, then you may not be on the list or there may be an error with your email address. If that's the case, contact the Executive Director at gctyo@gctyo.org or call (203) 293-8447.

The website, www.gctyo.org, is the other most important form of communication. Before asking questions of staff or conductors, please check the website, as your

question may easily be answered from the extensive information available there. The website contains information such as the calendar, concert schedule, important forms, policies, trips and more. Other communication occurs at the three parent meetings per season and at concerts.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

At GCTYO, we understand that every family's financial situation is unique, and we strive to make participation accessible to all students. Our membership fees vary depending on the ensemble, and additional fees include retreat and snack fees. Payment, either in full or partially, is due at the first rehearsal. Good news for families with multiple children: each sibling after the first gets a \$100 discount on their fee!

We believe that no qualified student should be turned away due to financial constraints. If you need financial assistance, you can find the necessary forms on our website. To apply, submit the completed form, your most recent tax return, and a \$25 application fee by the first rehearsal. Our financial aid awards are based on the National School Lunch Program income levels and cover snack and retreat fees. Scholarships are also available; check out the details on our website.

For those who prefer spreading out the cost, we offer a convenient installment plan with three payments. We send reminders about the 2nd and 3rd payments. To get your music and be seated in your orchestra, the first payment must be made at the first rehearsal. The second payment is due in October, and the final payment is due in November.

Members who withdraw before October 1 of any season will have their ensemble fee, minus a \$25 handling fee, refunded upon request. Members who withdraw or become ineligible to participate in GCTYO on or after October 1 will not receive a refund.

We aim to make the GCTYO experience inclusive and worry-free, so our musicians and their families can enjoy GCTYO completely!

HOW CAN I HELP GCTYO?

GCTYO relies heavily on the support of volunteers, and there are many ways you can get involved to support our organization. Here are some opportunities:

1. **Volunteer for Concerts:** Help ensure smooth operations on concert days by volunteering with the Concert Committee. This includes recruiting and training volunteers, helping patrons with tickets, and selling flowers and apparel. Students are welcome as concert volunteers and can get credit for their service.
2. **Contribute & Advertise:** Consider purchasing an ad or "shout-out" in our concert program booklets. Personal donations are also welcome and acknowledged in the program booklets. GCTYO is a 501(c)(3) organization, so

donations are tax-deductible. Check with your employer about matching contributions. GCTYO also participates in Giving Day each year in November.

3. **Fundraising Activities:** GCTYO undertakes one to two major fundraising activities each season, such as a parent social event and Bingo night for families. Volunteers are always needed for these events.
4. **Social Activities:** Volunteers are always needed to run social events a few times per year after rehearsals. These activities might include a first day event such as Field Day and a holiday party in December. New ideas and new volunteers are always welcome!
5. **Grants & Sponsorships:** GCTYO actively seeks corporate grants and sponsorships. If you know of companies or foundations that might grant funds to GCTYO, please contact the Executive Director.
6. **Open Rehearsals:** Help out at our Open Rehearsals, held twice a year, to give interested students, parents, and teachers the opportunity to observe our ensembles in rehearsal.
7. **Rehearsal Refreshments:** Volunteers are needed each rehearsal week to serve snacks. It's a great way to get to know GCTYO and other families.
8. **Rehearsal Hall Volunteers:** Volunteers are also needed each rehearsal week to monitor the school hallways. It's a great way to get to know GCTYO and other families and to hear lots of music!
9. **Stage Crew:** Student and parent stage crew volunteers are needed every season. Stage crew sets up and breaks down all the rehearsal spaces every week, arriving early and sometimes staying after rehearsals. Stage crew students form a special bond and contribute immensely to the organization.
10. **Board of Directors:** A Board of Directors oversees the entire organization. The Board provides valuable leadership in fundraising, hospitality, community-building, and policy-setting. To get involved, talk to any Board member or email the Executive Director at executivedirector@gctyo.org. Your support is essential to the success of GCTYO!

CALENDAR

The full calendar is available on the GCTYO website at <https://gctyo.org/events/> and can easily be added to personal cell phones. Additionally, the calendar is available in a downloadable PDF format. Please add all the dates to your personal calendars. If a change is made to the schedule, it will be announced by email and posted under the Calendar tab on the website, and a new calendar will be posted. We make every effort to avoid changes, but sometimes they are unavoidable. Stay updated and organized by syncing the GCTYO calendar with your personal calendar!