



ILLINOIS MUSIC SOCIETY

ANNUAL EXAMS

(Updated 7/16/2025)

Program

IMS Annual Exams are held every year, in late April, at NMA. Each exam consists of 4 portions: written theory, aural skills, technique, and performance. Upon successfully completing the exam, the student will receive a Certificate of Merit and a medal. Passing grade is 70%. These exams are designed to help parents and students measure the progress in music lessons and to improve their college and employment applications. We encourage students to complete the entire program by the end of their junior year in high school, so that they can include the highest-level certificate with their college applications.

Now that many universities have phased out standardized tests, and are having a holistic approach to applicants, bigger focus is placed on the students with extensive and demanding extracurricular activities, especially music. The same is true of the employers. They know that music training is demanding, time consuming and requires highly developed cognitive and analytical skills, as well as long term planning. These are valuable skills for competitive college programs and employment.

We are offering annual exams in piano, voice, guitar, and drums.

There is a minimum lesson requirement for each level:

Guitar/Drums: Levels 1-2 minimum 20-30 min lesson
Levels 3-6 minimum 30 min lesson
Levels 7-8 minimum 45 min lesson
Levels 9-10 minimum 1h lesson

Piano/Voice: Levels 1-2 minimum 20-30 min lesson
Levels 3-4 minimum 30 min lesson
Level 5 (piano only) minimum 45 min lesson

This is a program unique to NMA, and currently there are no other certification programs for guitar, drums, and young voice students in our area. This exclusive opportunity is made available to all NMA students.

Eligibility

All students currently enrolled in NMA classes for at least 2 consecutive quarters are eligible. Students taking lessons in more than one instrument with us are eligible to take exams in all instruments they are learning at NMA. Students participating in Illinois State AIM program (piano and voice) do not need to take the IMS exam. Students not enrolled at NMA are not eligible.

Exam Date

Exams will be held on Sunday, April 26, 2026. NMA cannot offer makeup exams to students who are unable to take the exam on the designated day. Fee is refunded to students who cancel participation by April 10, 2026. If a student feels that they can improve their score, they can re-take the same level test next year, or they can continue to the next level. There is no re-take of the exam in the same year.

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Exam Fee, Deadline and Levels

The fee for this exam is \$44 per instrument and is payable at registration. Fee deadline: April 10, 2026. Payment can be done in cash, check (made out to NMA), or credit card. There are no additional charges for credit card payments. The drums and guitar exams have 10 levels; piano has 5 and voice has 4 levels. The students are allowed to combine 2 levels in one year at the discretion and advice of their teacher.

Registration

Registration for this exam starts on **January 20, 2026, and closes on April 10, 2026.** Please click on the **registration link below** and fill out the registration form. The fees will be processed on April 10, 2026.

Exam Structure

Each exam consists of 4 portions: theory, aural skills, technique, and performance.

- Theory will include understanding and defining music theory terms. It also includes sight reading, i.e., analyzing and playing/singing an unfamiliar piece of music appropriate for a specific level
- Technique includes various scales and technical exercises
- Aural skills will include listening, recognition and repeating or writing down the music dictation
- Performance portion will include the performance from memory of the songs from the required repertoire list. The songs are chosen by the teacher.
- **Passing grade is 70%**

Exam Preparation

This exam can be prepared in regular lessons and does not require additional instruction outside the regular schedule.

Judging Committee

The students will be graded by judges other than their regular teachers to avoid conflict of interest. Judges will be NMA teachers and other highly regarded educators from our area. The decision of each judge is final.

Questions and Concerns

For questions or concerns please call us or send us an e-mail.

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