

Dallastown Area School District



Elementary Strings Program Handbook for Parents

2010-2011

Introduction

Welcome to the strings program in Dallastown Area School District. For many years our orchestra program has enriched the lives of our students and brought the joy of fine music to our community. As your child enters this program, he or she will have the opportunity to become a part of a long-standing tradition of excellence in public school music. It is a challenging journey from those first beginning lessons to performing with the high school orchestra on a stage in Disney World. This handbook will guide you and your child toward achieving his or her greatest musical potential while still maintaining your sanity! It should also serve as a resource to answer many of the questions and concerns that arise during this exciting learning process. Electronic copies may be accessed on the Moodle pages for the strings instructors. Please save this document in your computer files and/or print pages as needed. All students will be required to return the completed Information sheet by September, 30, 2010.

The Basics

Lessons on violin, viola, cello and bass are provided for students in third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade on a weekly basis in each of our elementary schools, and in the intermediate school from September through about the first week of June. (Please note: **beginning instruction is not offered after the fifth grade year.** Students who wish to begin instruction in sixth grade or later would need to begin outside of school on private lessons and come into the school program when they have reached the appropriate level.) The lessons, approximately 30 minutes in length, take place during the school day. Students will miss part of an academic class to attend the lesson. Intermediate School string lessons will be on a rotating schedule on a given day of the six day cycle. Most lessons are in small groups of three to five students. At the Intermediate School, orchestra rehearsals for non- beginning fourth through sixth graders will be held once a week during the noon lunch recess. In addition to the winter holiday concert, a culminating Strings Festival involving **all** string students in grades three through twelve is scheduled for **Thursday, May 5, 2011**. The festival takes place in the middle school gym at 7:00 PM. A final rehearsal will be held during school time prior to that festival. **Students accumulating THREE UNEXCUSED absences from orchestra rehearsals prior to each concert will not be permitted to perform.**

The Instructors

Currently there are four staff members teaching strings in the elementary schools with many years of combined experience.

Mr. Diehl is the high school orchestra director and teaches cello and bass lessons for the third grades.

Mrs. Detrick is the strings instructor for the Intermediate School

Mrs. Wertz, an intermediate general music teacher, will assist with the intermediate strings.

Mrs. Moul works with the Middle School orchestra as well as with the third grade violins and violas in the elementary schools. All instructors have had specialized training in strings pedagogy. *The best way to reach instructors is through e-mail or voicemail.*

Mr. Diehl – David.Diehl@dallastown.net; ext. 3280

Mrs. Detrick – Venona.Detrick@dallastown.net; ext. 1723

Mrs. Moul – Anne.Moul@dallastown.net ; ext. 2264

Mrs. Wertz - Charissa.Wertz@dallastown.net; ext. TBA

The Instruments

The majority of our students rent instruments through Menchey Music Service. The school district deals exclusively with this company. They provide high quality student instruments at a reasonable rental cost. A Menchey representative visits weekly to take care of repairs, returns or other issues. You can visit their website (www.mencheymusic.com) for more specific information. You are not obligated to deal with this company. However, if you choose to obtain an instrument elsewhere, please be sure it is the correct size for your child (as per instructor's recommendations) and is of good quality. ***Please, please, do not go to the internet looking for bargain violins.*** WE CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH. There are lots of online sites offering poor quality instruments at very low prices, and the untrained or un-suspecting parent is not going to know they are getting cheated. Instructors will be glad to provide you with sources of instruments from other reputable companies. With string instruments, you will get what you pay for, and if you buy the cheapest thing you can find, you will be making up for it in repair costs. Your child's progress and interest will suffer with an inferior instrument.

The school district can provide school-owned string basses although they are now also available in Menchey's rent-to-own program. Basses will need to be transported to the school by the parent for the weekly lesson and/or orchestra rehearsal. Parents are responsible for repair and maintenance costs of the school basses since no rent is charged. Other school instruments may be provided if circumstances warrant (i.e., the family owns a violin that's currently too big for the child and a smaller instrument is needed for short-term use.) We have found that the success/retention rate is much higher for students who have their own instruments.

Expectations for Students

Students desiring to play a string instrument should be strong academically. ***If your child is experiencing significant classroom challenges (academic or behavioral), we do not recommend starting a string instrument!*** This is especially true for third graders for whom this is the first opportunity to play an instrument "like the big kids." Students need to be mature enough to handle watching the clock for the lesson time, taking appropriate care of the instrument and understanding that they will need to make practicing part of the daily routine. If your child is in fifth or sixth grade and considering starting an instrument, it is essential that he or she take private lessons to supplement the school instruction. Otherwise, they will be facing a difficult situation when they reach middle school and the rest of the group is two years ahead of them. The middle school does not provide beginning instruction.

Expectations for Parents/Guardians

Parents—you are the single most important factor in your child's musical success. Parents absolutely have to encourage and supervise practicing, instrument care, lesson schedules and be an integral part of this whole process. Do not expect your elementary aged child to be totally responsible for practicing. We offer the following suggestions:

- Provide a comfortable, quiet well-lit place in the home where the child can practice without interruption with a music stand and if possible, a CD player available. Please provide a music stand for the child—you can get them at yard sales!

- Provide a safe place where the instrument can be stored away from younger siblings and pets. **No one should touch the instrument who is not a string player.**
- Establish and enforce ground rules for practicing. This is easy in the beginning. Wait until January when the excitement has waned! To insure good progress, we recommend the following minimum practice times at least **FIVE** days a week: **3rd grade**-15 minutes; **4th grade**-20 minutes; **5th and 6th grade**-30 minutes Motivate your child with charts on the refrigerator, stickers, positive rewards, playing for grandparents or their favorite stuffed animal! Parents, you know best what works with your child. Establishing a regular practice schedule is a major key to success. You, the parent, are the one that's going to have to make it happen. Be excited about the simplest rendition of Mary Had a Little Lamb! The majority of the learning takes place at home.
- Help your child use the CD and DVD that come with the book—they are wonderful home teaching tools. We are continually amazed at the number of students who never take them out of the sleeve!
- If possible, come to an occasional lesson at school so you can see exactly what is being taught.
- Encourage your child to set the instrument out with the backpack the night before the lesson and make sure the book and any needed papers are with the instrument. Forgotten instruments and lessons greatly impact your child's progress.
- Mark lesson days, performances, special practices, etc. on the family calendar.
- Take your beginning student to performances at Dallastown Middle and High School to see what lies ahead for them. The York community also provides many opportunities for attending orchestra concerts.
- Keep this handbook nearby, check e-mail and/or the district website, in addition to your teacher's Moodle for additional information or last minute changes.

FAQ's

What's all this fuss about the size of the instruments? A violin is a violin, right?

String instruments come in a variety of sizes which is why we are able to offer this program to youngsters in third grade. It is essential that the child is playing on an instrument that fits comfortably. The appropriate size is determined by the instructors by actually measuring the arm length and having the student "try on" different sizes of the instrument. Menchey's and other reputable vendors offer a liberal "trade in" policy when the child is ready to move to the next size. Your rental eventually goes toward owning the full size instrument. Sizing is not a ploy designed by instrument vendors to make more money! We respectfully request that you adhere to the instructor's recommendation on size. Teachers will provide a form for students to bring home indicating the next size and how to obtain it. ***Please, please do not switch your child's instrument size without communicating with instructors or with the child's private teacher.***

I don't know anything about music. How can I help my child with practicing?

First of all, simply by supporting/encouraging/rewarding the practice structure will be a tremendous help. A lot of the information in the book is very clear and user-friendly. The CD's and DVD's that come with the book are wonderful learning aids. Let your child be the "teacher"

and show you how to do some things! Go online and Google something like “beginning violin” and there will be thousands of resources for you. Feel free to contact your child’s teacher for questions or suggestions regarding the skills being taught. If your child’s instructor uses a practice record, it is preferred that the parent completes it or assists the child with recording the time each day.

How can we keep the instrument in tune?

This is a challenging problem, especially during the winter months when there tends to be less humidity in the air. Small violins can be tricky to tune especially with the pegs at the top of the instrument. It is not like tuning a guitar, and it is very easy to break a string. If you have some musical background, instructors will be glad to show you how to tune the instrument, or at least use the “fine tuners.” Sometimes, we can locate a high school string student who lives nearby who may be able to assist with tuning during the week. If it is a truly consistent problem, it should be taken to the repair shop for adjustment. Students in the Intermediate school will begin learning tuning skills.

What if a string (or something else) breaks?

Strings break just like light bulbs burn out – it’s not a big deal. The best option is to purchase a set of strings in the appropriate size for the instrument and keep them in the child’s case. When a string breaks, the instructor will replace the string. Or, you can take the instrument to Menchey’s and have a string put on for you. Instructors carry a small supply of strings—we can replace the string at the lesson and then will send a “bill” home with the child. ***It saves instructional time if the child can bring any repair issues to the teacher before school. Please do not attempt ANY string instrument repairs yourself!*** String replacement is not covered under the maintenance/repair agreement on rentals.

How will we know how our child is doing?

Stay in close contact with instructors via e-mail. If at all possible, visit and observe the lesson at school. Teachers will get in touch if there are major concerns. If a student exhibits exceptional talent or ability, we may suggest private lessons ASAP. If there are concerns with your child’s progress or there are frequently missed lessons, teachers will also be in contact with you. Strings report cards are distributed twice a year at the end of the **second** and **fourth** marking periods.

Do we really need private lessons for our student in addition to school lessons?

Students who study privately far excel students who only participate in school lessons. It is like custom work compared to mass production. We strongly recommend private lessons for our string students, especially as they reach the middle school age. There is a private teacher list attached and we usually have some HS students available to teach younger students at a less expensive cost. You can expect to pay anywhere from \$15-30 for a private lesson depending on the instructor, length of lesson, etc.

My child now wants to quit. He says “it’s boring.” Should we let him?

Probably not! Just like in sports, students don’t realize how much hard work is involved in learning to play an instrument. There is not always instant gratification. There will be “ups and downs” plateaus, whining and probably occasional tears. This is very normal! You as the parent will have to help them through the hurdles. Remember that scientific research has shown that

studying a musical instrument reaps multiple intellectual, emotional, and physical benefits. “Boring” is often a substitute for “I don’t want to do the work,” (**Make them!**), “My friend quit so I should too” (**not a valid reason**) or “I really don’t understand something and I’m afraid to ask the teacher” so it’s easier to quit than ask for more help. (**Please ask for help!**) We really encourage students to play through the school year and participate in the district-wide strings festival. (Ask people who have been there – it’s cool!) However, if your child is experiencing major academic difficulties, is making behavior choices that interfere with the learning of others in his or her group or is truly so over-scheduled with activities that he or she cannot spend 15-30 minutes a day practicing, then it may be best to leave the program. This decision should be made in close communication with the teacher. Often students tell the teacher they’re quitting and the parents have no idea they’re doing that! Instructors will **not** allow a child to discontinue lessons unless there is a confirming note, e-mail or phone call from the parent.

Do we have to keep renting the instrument over the summer!

You should absolutely continue the rental if your child is planning to continue in the fall. If you return the instrument, you will have lost everything you invested and have to start a new rental. There are a number of opportunities for summer instruction including private teachers, high school student tutors and a summer lesson program provided by Mr. Diehl, the high school instructor. Students taking private summer lessons advance greatly, and are prepared for the challenges of the next grade level. Students not enrolled in summer lessons should be encouraged to continuing practicing and playing “for fun”.

If my child plays strings this year, can he or she switch to band next year?

Yes and no. **Yes**, in the sense that many musically talented students play both band and strings. The school program accommodates both through high school. Obviously, there are differing opportunities within each program (strings don’t march at football games but the orchestra plays at graduation!) As long as students are willing to practice both instruments and are not having academic difficulties with missing class twice in one week, “double majors” are welcome. **No**, in the sense that a child should not play a string instrument in third grade with the idea that this will be a “warm up” for drums in fourth grade. If the child truly wants to play a band instrument, please have him or her **wait** until the appropriate age for that instrument. Playing a string instrument for a year intending to switch to band the following year is a waste of time and money for everyone.

What’s different in the 2nd and 3rd year of lessons?

In the second year of lessons students will begin to focus more on orchestra music. We attempt to keep the lesson book going as much as possible but will be spending more time on orchestra music and learning to play in an ensemble. The orchestras in the Intermediate school rehearse one day a week during the lunch recess, perform for the holiday concert in that building and, in addition to the third graders, prepare music for the strings festival in May. ***Practicing should increase to at least 20-30 minutes a day at this level.*** Depending on your child’s physical growth, instructors may recommend a size switch for your child’s instrument.

2010-2011 Dates

Tuesday, September 21 -Wednesday, September 22 – Instrumental rental nights at the Intermediate School. Drop in anytime between 6:00 and 8:30. Bring your child along to be sized for string instruments. (Please note, returning students *DO NOT need to attend this meeting unless switching sizes!*)

Friday, September 24 – deadline for new student registrations; No registrations accepted after this date;

Wednesday, December 15, 2010--Holiday Strings/Band Program at the Intermediate School--Experienced students only, no beginners. Dress for this concert: dark, preferably black skirts/pants, white tops with sleeves and collars, dress shoes; *NO* jeans, t-shirts, tank tops, flip flops or casual footwear.

Mid January – String report cards will be published along with classroom report cards.

Thursday, May 5, 2011 – District-wide strings festival for all string students (grades 3-12) including beginners; 7:00 PM in the Middle School gym; Dress code is as above: dark, preferably black skirts/pants, white tops with sleeves and collars, dress shoes; *NO* jeans, t-shirts, tank tops, flip flops or casual footwear.

Friday, June 3 – tentative last day for elementary lessons (pending snow days!

Private Strings Teacher List 9/10

Violin, Viola

Jeni Herrea-443-827-5230 (teaches at York College)
Kathy Yeater – 792-3127
Colette Wichert - 235-0821
Margaret Shuey – 428-32
Dr. Priscilla Howard – 757-3787
Gloria Grahe - 843-0826
Kate Jones-578-9326
Adrienne Myers – 246-2286
Ashley Thrush – 318-5756 (will take cellos as well as vln/vla in summer only)
Emily Krape-755-1642-c; 542-5458-h
Nicolette Wagman-817-65211-c; 347-1909-h
Lessons also available at Menchey Music. Call: 755-2907

Cello

Jan Nemshick – 755-2104
Rachel Kauffman – 600-2791
David Diehl – 854-9123 (offers 6 week summer program, waiting list for year-round)
Colleen Elias- 515-6605 Richard Konkel – 848-8321
Richard Konkel – 848-8321
Michaela McDonald 741-3718

Bass

Kelly Ali – 515-5368
Regina Barrett — 944-4573 (teaches at York College)
Jacob Shuey – bass – 845-1741

High School /CollegeStudent Teachers recommended by their adult private teachers.

Jennifer Boyle- 417-2965	(viola, student of Mrs. Grahe)
Jinian Compton- 717-815-0707	(viola; PSU music ed student; summer lesson only)
Carly Henry -741-2654	(violin, student of Mrs. Detrick)
Emily Ilyes - 741-5926	(violin, student of Mrs. Detrick)
Ashley Cho –755-7325	(violin, student of Dr. Howard)
Amy Krape- 757-2842	(violin, student of Mrs. Detrick)
Daniel Blumhard - 747-9313	(cello, student of Mr. Diehl)

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL STRING INFORMATION SHEET

(Must be completed eletronically and returned to instructor by
October 4, 2010)

STUDENT NAME: _____

SCHOOL: (red, blue or yellow) _____

GRADE: _____ HOMEROOM TEACHER _____

PARENTS/GUARDIANS NAMES:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

SPECIAL NEEDS/CONCERNS-if applicable: _____

PRIVATE TEACHER-if applicable: _____

OUTSIDE SCHOOL MUSICAL ACTIVITIES-if applicable (i.e.
YJSO): _____