

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This week your child will be meeting with me to discuss the Strings program available to District 61 students. This program is offered district-wide, and all Grade 5 students are invited to participate. No previous instrumental music instruction is necessary.

When does instruction take place?

Group instruction will be offered two times per week on string orchestra instruments. Classes meet on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, during school hours.

How do we get the necessary equipment?

Parents are expected to supply the instrument, method book and accessories. Instruments can be obtained through various music stores in the Greater Victoria area and these music stores have excellent rental programs. A notice will be sent home concerning the necessary equipment and supplies after the first class meeting.

*****Please wait until you receive a second notice before renting or purchasing anything.***

What about costs?

If financing something like this is an issue, please make sure you have checked the appropriate place on the attached enrollment form. We will be able to assist you in getting the necessary equipment and supplies.

No child will be denied access to this program due to financial difficulties.

How long does this program last?

To ensure continuity of instruction, and to accommodate various learning speeds, students enrolling in the program will be expected to participate for the **entire year**. We know you will provide the continuing encouragement that is so necessary to the study of any musical instrument.

How do we sign up?

If you wish to have your child participate in the District 61 Strings program, please fill in the attached form, and return it to your child's classroom teacher by Monday, September 21st. If you do not wish to have your child participate, simply fill in the top of the form, check the appropriate place, and return to your child's teacher by Monday, September 21st.

****It is essential for the school's records to have all of the forms (both yes and no) returned.***

Thank you for supporting our strings program. I am looking forward to working with your child during this coming year. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by e-mail at ejohn@sd61.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

Elin John
Oaklands Strings Teacher

INSTRUMENT INFORMATION

To assist your choices, I have included information about strings in general. I have also listed each instrument with its advantages and disadvantages and have included YouTube links. You can find more audio/video clips by typing the instruments name and “YouTube” into a search engine. I suggest that you and your child watch and listen to these links together. This may help with your child’s choice of instrument.

The following is the ideal instrumentation for an orchestra of 24-32 students. For larger or smaller classes, the numbers will be increased or decreased proportionately.

16 Violins

8 Violas

8 Cellos (Violoncellos)

*String bass will not be offered at the elementary level. Students interested in String Bass should choose to play cello this year and switch when they get to middle school.

STRING ORCHESTRA INSTRUMENTS

Instruments in the string orchestra are played by drawing a bow (a long stick with horsehair on it) across the strings on the instrument. Fingers are placed on the fingerboard to change the pitches. The following instruments are offered in the Grade 5 Strings program.

Instrument	Advantages	Disadvantages
Violin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTevj_oBrqo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzP_kIXsuvA	Light weight, small. Pleasant sound. Good choice for students living in apartments. Students read same notes as piano right hand.	Very popular. Enrollment may be limited due to numbers. High notes can irritate some students’ ears.
Viola https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcLPLJ2k5fo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvT6PujKMgM	Not a commonly chosen instrument, so is always in demand. Played exactly like the violin, but has a slightly lower sound. Good choice for students living in apartments.	Students read alto clef (different from piano). This may be confusing for some students, although for most it is not an issue.
Cello https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qrKjywj07Q https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcsrcHYc4jA	Not a commonly chosen instrument, so is always in demand. Makes a beautiful low sound. Students read the same notes as piano left hand. Good for students with more sensitive ears.	Larger in size than violin and viola. More expensive to rent. Comes in a soft carrying case instead of a hard shell case, so car transportation is recommended to avoid damage to the instrument.
String Bass	Students wishing to play this instrument should begin on the cello and switch when they get to middle school.	
Ukulele, Guitar, Electric Bass	Not offered, as these instruments are not members of the string orchestra.	

INSTRUMENT SOURCES

Instruments for the strings program come from various sources. Some of you may have an instrument at home, or some of you may wish to rent one from one of the local music stores.

Family owned instruments:

If there is an instrument already in the family, it may be possible for your child to use it. However, since children are smaller than adults, using Grandma's full sized violin may not be feasible for your child. Stringed instruments are like shoes. You need to have one that fits, and most children use a $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ sized instrument until high school. If you have an instrument at home and wish to use it, please check with me by writing a short description of the instrument (including the size) on the registration form that you will be returning to me. The size of the instrument is usually printed on the paper label found inside the instrument. Look through the curved slots (called F holes) on the front of the instrument for this information. Sizes are expressed in fractions. $\frac{4}{4}$ =full size, $\frac{3}{4}$ =three quarter size, $\frac{1}{2}$ =half size, etc.

Store Rentals:

There are some advantages to store rentals:

- 1) Most music stores have rent to own plans of some sort. This means you can apply a part or all of the rental money towards the purchase price of the instrument later on should you eventually choose to buy it.
- 2) The store will take responsibility for repairs.

Financial Assistance

If there is a need for financial assistance, please place a checkmark next to the "request for financial assistance" line on the attached registration form. We will be able to help you get an instrument for your son or daughter if financial assistance is needed.

No child will be denied access to the program due to financial difficulties.

Purchasing Instruments:

Please DO NOT purchase an instrument at this time. Your child will grow out of it and they can be difficult to re-sell. The music store rental programs allow for this and you can get more information from them when you go in to pick of the rental.

Every year some parents ask about purchasing instruments online or from discount or big box stores. This can often be false economy because many times these instruments are of poor quality and need to have extra work done on them by a qualified strings technician (luthier) to make them playable. The cost of this extra work may exceed the original purchase price of the instrument, and in some cases, it can't be done because the quality of the original workmanship on the instrument is low.

Violas:

Please do not rent a full-sized viola at this time. They are expensive to rent, and too big and heavy for a child to use. Since the viola is a larger version of the violin with different strings, children starting viola do not use a full-sized viola, but either a child sized viola OR a violin of the appropriate size with viola strings on it. Most viola students get their first full-sized viola in about Grade 10 or 11.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does my child need to be able to play before they join strings?

No. All instruction is provided in class. Most students in the strings program are playing for the first time.

Why do I need to fill in the form if my son or daughter will not be participating?

A decision to participate in a program of this kind should be a family one. By having all of the forms returned, we are assured that all parents have been made aware of this opportunity.

Does my child need to be able to read music to join strings?

No. We will cover note reading in class.

How much practicing is involved?

Students need to practice **daily** in addition to the strings class for about 15 minutes per day. They should review the material covered during strings class. A good rule is to repeat each exercise or piece 5 times each day, 5 days per week. Learning an instrument is a physical skill (much like a sport), so short practice sessions daily are more productive than one or two long sessions the night before class.

How many concerts are given each year?

In a typical year, there are 2 district-wide events for beginning strings, one in November, and the second in the late spring (usually May). I will be in touch when we have a sense of the specific timing of concerts or other opportunities for the students to share what they are learning.

What if my child already studies a string instrument outside of school?

Students involved in private study are welcome in the strings program, as they can act as role models and demonstrate new concepts. However, some advanced players may find it boring to play the beginning music. For those students, perhaps it would be possible to learn a different instrument in the school program, while continuing the original instrument outside of school. Feel free to contact me if you have questions about this.

Can my child try strings for a month or so to see if they like it?

We ask that students enroll in the program for the entire school year. Learning an instrument is an ongoing process, and it takes several months to be able to play songs. There will be an opportunity to change instruments in middle school.

More information on reverse side

What if my son or daughter insists on quitting mid-year?

Students usually ask to quit because they are feeling frustrated. This may be expressed in the form of complaints (“my friends aren’t in it”, “I just don’t like music”, etc.) If this begins to happen, please contact me immediately, as it usually means that the student has misunderstood or missed a concept and is falling behind. If this is caught early, I can usually straighten things out with a quick individual lesson after class.

Do you recommend private lessons?

Private lessons can be a great help for beginners, but are not required. If you would like more information on this, please feel free to contact me.

My child wants to play band in middle school. Why not wait until Grade 6 to sign up for instrumental music?

Strings can provide a good foundation in note reading, rhythm, and other aspects of music.

Aren’t music lessons for “talented” kids?

All children possess musical ability. All children learn to speak their native language by listening to those around them. It is this listening ability that also enables them to learn music. It is a rare child who cannot learn to play an instrument at a beginning level.

My child struggles academically. Wouldn’t it be better to focus on academics first?

Research has shown that studying a musical instrument can actually help with academic subjects. Students learn organizational skills, teamwork, perseverance, responsibility and many other non-musical skills by participating in a subject like strings. Plus, strings is fun!

We can’t afford to rent an instrument, so how can my child participate?

The district is able to assist students with financial need. Please contact me, your child’s teacher, or the school principal **as soon as possible** about how to get assistance with this. There is a place on the attached registration form to indicate a need for financial assistance.

No child will be denied access to this program due to financial difficulties.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to email me. I will try to answer your questions as quickly as possible and to the best of my ability.

R e b e c c a W i l d
Strings Teacher

Please fill in, sign, and return this sheet (both sides) to the classroom teacher
or Mrs. Wild by Friday, October 7

I wish to enroll my student in the District 61 Strings program for the 2020/21 school year.
(Please check one)

Yes: _____ No: _____ We will need financial assistance: _____

NOTE: All registration forms must be returned to the classroom teacher. If you have checked yes, please fill in both sides of the form. If your child is **not** going to participate, please fill in their first and last name and check no, then sign and return the form.

**DISTRICT 61
STRINGS ENROLMENT FORM**

STUDENT'S NAME: _____
(first and last)

PHONE: _____

PARENT'S NAME: _____
(first and last)

SCHOOL: _____ GRADE: _____ DIV: _____

INSTRUMENT CHOICE:

Please indicate which instrument your child would like to play. To assist you with your decision, please see the attached sheet with pros and cons of each instrument. Because some instruments are more popular than others, it would be helpful if everyone could rank their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice. To maintain a balanced orchestra, it is necessary to have some students playing each instrument. Therefore, some students may have to play their 2nd or 3rd choice instrument.

_____ Violin

_____ Viola

_____ Cello

(Signed Parent or Guardian)

It is essential for the school's records to have all forms (both yes and no) returned

(If you are enrolling in strings, please complete reverse side as well)

