

Maple Valley Christian School

Elementary String Instrument Program

Teacher: Kathy Spampinato

Dear Parents,

Welcome to another school year! Your child is starting the adventure of playing a musical instrument. It is an awesome chance to develop the gifts that God has placed in them, and to enrich their lives for many years to come. I too started playing in Elementary School, with no idea how that simple decision would change the course of my life and open doors of experience and opportunity.

Playing an instrument does take skill and dedication so here are some tips to getting a great start in Orchestra. I look forward to working with your amazing children as they discover all that they are capable of. There is a lot of information here, but it is better to have too much information than to be ill informed. Looking forward to a great year,
Mrs. Spampinato

Contact Information:

Reaching me at school is difficult as I travel to 3 different Campuses each day. The easiest way to communicate is by email. ☺ I am available after school on Mondays from 3-3:15 pm if you are picking up your child and want to have a chat. Email: kspampinato@rainiercsd.org. Home Phone: 253-946-4242.

About the Program:

- **At Maple Valley the class will meet each Monday and Wednesday afternoon for 1 hour.** Please help your child remember their instrument and supplies on these days. I will provide the technique book. This will be their main text and guide to reading music. We will use the **“Essential Elements 2000” series:** Book 1 for the Beginner Class, and Book 2 for the Advanced Class. If the child loses the book, you will have to purchase one to replace it.
- **An accompaniment CD** is included with the technique book. Please have both Beginner and Advanced students play along with the CD at home with whatever page we have played during class that week. This helps them develop a steady rhythm and lets them “match pitch” with the CD to make sure they are playing in tune. The CD will include all the music for the first half of the year skills.
- **The included DVD lesson** is for parents to view with their children. It shows the proper playing position for the left and right hands, and helps you give your child good guidance on the basics.
- Please have an instrument ready to go for the first class if possible. Beginners add bows week 3 or 4.
- The students will review skills and be introduced to new ones **each class.**
- **Regular practice** is the key to steady progress, competency and success. Your child will need to practice every week to reinforce new technique and build up their muscle tone. This is also crucial to their music reading fluency and speed. The recommended practice is 60 min. per week. They will be given a practice-recording sheet for you to sign. This will be due each Monday so I may track their progress. They can practice 2 days for 30 min, 3 days for 20 min, or 4 days for 15 min. to fit your family schedule. The Beginners will not be able to last 30 min at first though.
- You will receive a Student Progress Report from Orchestra for each grading period. This will list areas of success and challenge. It will also tell you how your student is doing on practice, and in skill tests. The Beginner Book has 12 quiz tunes, and Book 2 has 7. There will be a Certificate and Award at the end of the school year for each student who passes ALL the quiz tunes in their book. We will have a chart in class to track their progress.
- There will be **two evening Concerts during the school year:** before Christmas and the end of May.

Getting an Instrument:

- You will need to have a **violin, viola, cello, or string bass** that is matched in size to your child. String Orchestra instruments come in varying sizes from 1/8 to full-sized instruments (4/4) that the student progressively grows into until High School.
- **Renting an instrument is an easy choice** during elementary school. Part of the rental payment will count towards the eventual purchase of an instrument, with no big investment right away. Whether purchased or rented, you will be able to trade in the instrument for a bigger size every year or two until your child has reached full-size. Instrument breakage insurance is a good idea as they are fragile.
- **Please take your child with you when you go to purchase or rent an instrument.** Your local music shop will have instruments for sale and for their rental program. I highly recommend **Hammond Ashley Violins in Issaquah**. They are the local specialty shop. The instruments are very high quality and all the personnel are well trained.
- Whichever store you choose, the personnel will measure several instruments to the length of the arm to make sure you have a perfect fit. For violins and violas, the left hand fingers should be able to comfortably wrap around the end of the violin (the scroll), when the instrument is placed on the left shoulder. This ensures that they will be able to reach different notes easily. For cellos, the student's left knee should fit under the edge of the curved indentation or rib, and the bottom peg should fit behind their left ear.
- Many parents want to find a bargain on the inter-net, but this does present some problems. If you bid on a cheap instrument, you will often get one that is not set up well, and may need a new set of strings, and adjustments to the finger board, bridge, or pegs to make it function. This takes several weeks in the repair shop and up to \$150 in improvements. It often does not end up a bargain at all.
- If you want to research the web, here are the sites for two reputable string instrument companies. I recommend www.swstrings.com, and www.sharmusic.com. Both have toll free phone numbers so they can answer your questions. They also offer reductions on instruments that have previously been leased and are not brand new. You might want to get your child measured at a local shop so you'll know what size you need.

Necessary Accessories:

- **Do not leave the store without them or you will need another trip.**
- All instruments should come with a bow, rosin, cleaning rag, and case. **Violins and Violas, need a shoulder rest that fits their instrument** so it rests comfortably on the shoulder and is held in place by the chin, **not by the left hand**. The most economical and basic are the **resonans** shoulder rests. This is extra. **Cellos and String Basses need something to prevent the endpin from slipping on the floor.** This could be a rubber disk (rock stop) or a strap that attaches to the chair.
- All instruments for elementary students should come with a **fine tuner on each of the 4 strings**. This is a little screw that is turned to make small adjustments to get the string in tune. All students will learn this technique for tuning. **Do not try and help by turning the pegs on the instrument.** This is how most strings get broken. The strings are much more tricky to tune than on a guitar.
- You might want to buy a couple of **extra strings to have on hand**, saving you from an emergency trip to the music store. I will replace the strings in class whenever necessary, but you must supply the actual string. The top two strings are thinner and break more often. For violin: E and A strings. For Viola and Cello: A and D strings. Bass strings are so thick that they almost never break.
- An electronic tuner is helpful for learning to tune instruments in the advanced class.
- If you have any questions, please call or email.
- **Happy Music Making!**