

May 20, 2019

Dear Parents,

Today all third grade students were introduced to the musical instruments that they will have an opportunity to play next year as fourth graders. The instruments available include violin, viola, 'cello, and bass in the orchestra; and flute, oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone, trumpet, trombone, baritone horn, French Horn and percussion in the band. This is a program that could last throughout the rest of your child's life in public school, and well beyond. Being a member of these groups teaches music skills as well as "life" skills such as responsibility, citizenship, and respect.

Who?

Any child, not only those with special talent or ability can learn to play a musical instrument. The key to success is daily practice. Students will be required to keep a record of their practice time and present it to their instructor at every lesson. Those students with a full schedule of after school activities may have a difficult time, as learning to play an instrument is a large time commitment. Students should expect to practice 20-30 minutes every day. Students who practice regularly and effectively will succeed. **Students who participate in band OR orchestra may also participate in chorus. Students may not participate in both band and orchestra due to the pull-out lesson schedule. Chorus information will be distributed by Dr. Bell in the fall.**

When?

- Small group lessons—once per week during the school day. Students will be pulled out of an academic class for 30 minutes and are responsible for making up missed class work.
- Large group rehearsals- 1-2 times per week before school (arrival time between 8:00 and 8:10 AM)—Parents are responsible for transportation to these rehearsals.
- Students must participate in BOTH the large group rehearsals and the small group lessons to participate in the instrumental music program.

Instruments?

It is the parent's responsibility to provide an instrument in good working order for their child. One way to do this without risk is through rental. For your convenience, the National Educational Music Center (NEMC) works with Village Elementary School to provide and service rental instruments. Should you wish to obtain an instrument from another source, feel free to do so. It is very important for your child to have a quality instrument so that he or she does not become frustrated. I believe that the best choice for beginners is to rent an instrument. This way you will be assured of quality without having to make a large financial commitment. Whatever means you choose to acquire an instrument, **students will need to have an instrument ready to play by September 12th.** Lessons will begin shortly thereafter. **More specific information about instrument rental or purchase will be sent home in June once we know which instrument your child has chosen to play.**

Which instrument?

The best instrument for your child is one that your child wants to play and also one that is a good "fit" for your child. **All students will have an opportunity to try some of the instruments that we offer so that we can determine which instruments fit your child the best.** I have engaged several music specialists to assist me in giving every interested third grade student an opportunity to try some instrument choices. We will be meeting with students individually to give them a tryout and assess their ability to see which instrument is a good match. This is an effort to fit the right instrument with the right student to reduce dropouts and heartaches due to a poor match. These tryout days will occur during the school day from **June 3rd-June 17th.** Groups of students will be called to the tryout rooms and will come home with a recommendation from an instructor, after which you will fill out a selection form to send to me so we can formulate lesson groups for next September. **To help you make a decision about which instruments your child might want to try, I have included information about each instrument on the back of this letter.**

Please fill in the attached registration form, detach, and have your child return it to his or her classroom teacher **NO LATER THAN Wednesday, May 29th.**

Sincerely,
Cheryl Houston, Band (chouston@mtsd.us)
Eugenia Goldman, Orchestra (egoldman@mtsd.us)

About the Instruments

No matter which instrument your child chooses, he or she will have to practice both playing skills and music reading skills daily. There aren't any "easy" instruments, however, with practice, 4th grade children are capable of learning these instruments.

Orchestra instruments:

Orchestra string instruments are violin, viola, 'cello, and bass. They all belong to the same family of instruments. To play a string instrument, a player has to make one or more strings vibrate by plucking the strings or sliding the bow across the strings. The strings stretch lengthwise along the fingerboard and are tied to the tuning keys (pegs). Loosening or tightening the strings makes them sound higher or lower. Different notes are played on string instruments by pressing the strings down in different places on the fingerboard. Although orchestra string instruments look similar to each other, they are different in size and have different ranges of sound. Small instruments use thin strings and produce high pitched sound, large instruments, like 'cello and bass, use thick strings and produce low sound.

Band Instruments:

Woodwinds: Woodwind instruments have many keys and require good finger coordination. The woodwind instruments that we offer in 4th grade are flute, clarinet, saxophone, and oboe.

Flute: Sound is produced by blowing across a hole. Students who are able to produce a sound on the try-out days have a strong chance for success at the flute.

Clarinet and Saxophone: Sound is produced by blowing through the mouthpiece and reed. The saxophone is much larger than the clarinet and is made out of brass.

Oboe: The oboe is a much more challenging woodwind instrument. To be successful, students need to be able to produce a good sound during the tryouts, be able to show quick progress with a basic note reading assessment, and be an independent learner. You should be aware that playing the oboe requires the ongoing expense of purchasing reeds. Quality oboe reeds range from \$12- \$20 per reed. Oboe students will be expected to have 2-3 working reeds at all times in order to have a backup for when the reed breaks. Because oboe is very challenging, not all students who try the oboe will be recommended to play the instrument. If oboe is not recommended in 4th grade, I encourage your child to play a different instrument. Some students are more successful at oboe after a year or two playing a different instrument. Oboe is not included on the tryout registration form, but if you are interested in having your child try the oboe, you may write it in on the form.

Brass: Brass instruments have only 3 valves (buttons) or a slide. Different sounds are produced both by changing the valves or slide positions and by changing the lips. The brass instruments that we offer in 4th grade are trumpet, trombone, baritone, and French Horn.

Trumpet: The trumpet is the highest pitched brass instrument. Lip muscle development (and therefore daily practice) is essential for producing good sounds on trumpet. Those students who are able to hit 2 or 3 notes on the try-out days have a strong chance for success at the trumpet.

Trombone: The trombone is the only instrument that uses a slide to change notes rather than valves. Because of this, good coordination and a willingness to work on developing extra strong music reading skills are necessary for success. The trombone has a larger mouthpiece than the trumpet making it easier for some children to produce a sound.

Baritone/Euphonium: The baritone (sometimes called the Euphonium), like the trombone has a large mouthpiece, but like the trumpet, has valves. The baritone is a large instrument but it is not a difficult instrument to play. Even the tiniest of students have had great success with the baritone. **VES owns several baritones so most students who play baritone will be able to rent an instrument to leave at home and will be able to play on a school owned instrument during school, eliminating the need to carry this instrument to and from school.**

French Horn: This is a more challenging instrument than any of the other brass instruments. To be successful, French Horn students need to have a strong sense of pitch and must be highly independent learners. If horn is not recommended based upon the assessment, I encourage your child to try a different instrument. Some students are more successful at horn after a year or two of experience on another instrument.

Percussion- 4th grade students will learn how to play bells (like a xylophone) and they will learn snare drum technique (played on a drum pad). Percussion students do not learn drum set in school in 4th grade. Instead they will focus on music reading and counting skills. Percussion can be quite difficult because students need to learn two instruments. Although attendance at rehearsals is important for all students, it is even more vital that percussionists have excellent attendance. Students who do well at percussion are those who have a good sense of rhythm and coordination and who are independent and highly motivated learners. Piano experience is helpful but not necessary.

Instrument Tryout Registration

PLEASE DETACH AND RETURN THIS PAGE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND NO LATER THAN May 29th.

Date: _____

Student's Name _____

Current Homeroom Teacher _____

Circle 3 instruments that you want to try:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------|--------|
| Trumpet | Flute | Violin |
| Trombone | Clarinet | Viola |
| Baritone/Euphonium | Saxophone | 'Cello |
| French Horn | Percussion | Bass |

Parent Name (please print)

Parent email (please print clearly)

Parent signature

Please note that due to time constraints, every child will not be able to try every instrument listed. If none of the 3 chosen instruments seem to be a good match, we will continue trying more instruments until we find the best match for your child.

It is not necessary to have prior musical experience to participate in the instrumental program in 4th grade!!! However, we'd like to know if your child has any instrumental experience outside of school.

Have you taken piano lessons, and if so, how many years? _____

Lessons on another instrument? Which instrument and how long? _____