

## **Grade 5 Beginning Orchestral Strings at Victoria West Elementary!**

Friday, September 8, 2023

Dear Victoria West Grade 5 Families:

My name is Risa McDonell and I'm the band, strings, choir and music exploratory teacher at Rockheights Middle School. For the second year running, I will also be teaching a Beginning Orchestral Strings class for grade 5 Victoria West students. I hope that your child will be interested in learning to play a stringed instrument. Here are some things to consider:

### ***What is this class about?***

This is an **"absolute beginner" music class** where students will be learning to play orchestral string instruments. These are **violin, viola, or cello** (double bass is an orchestral stringed instrument, but it is not offered at the elementary level because they are too large. Guitar is not an orchestral stringed instrument). Students will learn to read music, and to play a variety of songs together. There will be an end-of year performance for parents.

### ***Who can take this class?***

This class is **open to any Victoria West student in grade 5**. No background in music is necessary. We would like to offer this to every student who would like to try it, but we may have to limit the students based on a first-come, first-serve basis if the students exceed the space we are using.

### ***When and where do classes take place?***

This is a pull-out enrichment class where instruction takes place during the normal school day in the music portable at Vic West. Class times are as follows.

**Wednesdays:**  
**12:35 – 1:20pm**

**Fridays:**  
**12:35 – 1:20pm**

### ***How do we choose an instrument?***

For the first two classes, I will show the students the instruments and cases, demonstrate the sound, let them hold them, and answer students' questions about them, so that they can make an informed choice about what to play. After that, they will choose **violin, viola or cello**. It's a great idea to look up some videos and recordings as well.

### ***How do we get an instrument?***

Many students, who participate in this program, **rent an instrument from Greater Victoria School District**. The Cooper Smith Music Library Collection loans the instruments to families for the school year. The CSMLC asks for a fee of **\$150 for violins and violas and \$200 for cellos** – a one-time fee for the year. However, **no student is denied the opportunity to participate because of costs**. If your family can't pay these fees, a donation of any amount is appreciated, or I can have the fees waived entirely. You just need to tell me privately (email is best), and I will be happy to do that. This information will be kept confidential. **There are forms attached, which must be signed** by a parent in order to use a school district instrument (whether the fees are paid or waived, the form needs to be signed, please). Once I have a signed form from you, I will bring the instrument to class. Your family will be responsible for it until June.

If you wish, you can rent or purchase an instrument from a music retailer. There are some advantages to this option. You will certainly get a better-quality instrument, and retailers typically charge a nominal fee for insurance, which covers any damage made by the student. Renting from a retailer costs more than \$150/year.

**Long and McQuade Musical Instruments, 756 Hillside Ave. (250) 384-3622**

**Tapestry Music, 772 Bay St. Suite No. 3 (250) 590-0752**

### ***What happens if we break the instrument, or lose it?***

If the instrument belongs to SD61, parents will be asked to pay for the cost of repairing or replacing the instrument, up to the full value of the instrument. If they cannot afford to pay these costs, a donation of any amount to help defray these costs is gratefully accepted. I can do minor repairs, like replacing broken strings or popping bridges back up for no cost, but I can't do major repairs. If something happens to the instrument, please **DO NOT** attempt to fix it on your own. Please also **DO NOT** tune the instrument without checking with me first – the procedure is different from other stringed instruments, such as guitars. Music retailers will have their own policies in the event of loss or damage – be sure to ask.

### ***Will there be concerts?***

Yes! The students will perform in concert this year for family and friends. Information about these events will be communicated later in the year. A big highlight of the year is the District 61 Strings Finale Concert in May. Last year over 800 strings students performed together!

### ***Can we try it out and quit later?***

Absolutely. Students won't know if they like it until they try it out. I encourage students to stick with it for a whole term, or until we have a live performance, because the results will not be instant. A concert gives them a clear goal to work towards and the feeling of accomplishment needed to keep going. However, students are free to leave at any time.

### ***How do we get started?***

If you know which instrument you want to try, please carefully complete and sign the forms attached to get one, then I will bring it to class. If you aren't sure which instrument you want yet, the student should please come to class anyways. Please make sure that your email address is up to date with the school district, so that I can contact you easily that way.

Please get in touch with me at [rmcdonell@sd61.bc.ca](mailto:rmcdonell@sd61.bc.ca) if you have any questions or concerns and I'll be happy to assist. There is also a page on my website at [www.rockheightsmusic.com](http://www.rockheightsmusic.com) that is devoted to grade 5 strings. I'm looking forward to building bridges between our schools and making music!

Warmly,

Risa McDonell,

Music Teacher, Rockheights Middle School

Strings Teacher, Macaulay Elementary and Victoria West Elementary