

August 23, 2024



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[www.JenisonOrchestras.org](http://www.JenisonOrchestras.org)

Dear Fifth Grade Parent:

You may remember that at the end of last school year your child had the chance to try out a string instrument. This letter is to inform you that the Jenison Public Schools Music Department is currently organizing its Beginning Orchestra for this school year. The string instruments (violin, viola, and cello) are taught three times each week; twice before school from 8:00-8:45am at the Junior High (with busing provided back to the elementaries after class), and once during school at each elementary building. Students can be dropped off at the front of the Junior High between 7:45 and 8:00am for the morning classes by a parent, or can ride their neighborhood Junior High bus (after contacting the Transportation Office to reserve a spot - the link is on our website).

The decision of which instrument to study is an important one and will require careful consideration, particularly in light of the fact that beginning band does not begin until 6th Grade. If your child is only interested in a band instrument, please wait to begin instrumental music until 6th Grade. However, if your child is interested in playing the violin, viola, cello, (or eventually bass!), please join us at one of our **Orchestra Open Houses** in the Jenison Center for the Arts Main Lobby (JCA):

**Tuesday, Aug. 27 from 4-7 pm      OR**  
**Wednesday, Aug 28 from 4-7 pm.**

To sign up for orchestra, both parent and student should "drop-in" at anytime during either of our Open Houses. Here you will sign-up for orchestra, try out instruments, get sized, get all information needed, and rent an instrument (which includes a free book, portable music stand, and instrument accessories!) It is preferable to rent (not buy) student-sized string instruments, and a few reputable instrument companies will be on hand to rent instruments to Jenison students at the JCA.

If you are interested in more details about Jenison's Fifth Grade Orchestra, please visit our website at **[www.JenisonOrchestras.org](http://www.JenisonOrchestras.org)** for lots of additional information about all of the orchestras. By clicking on "Classes" and "Fifth Grade" you can find detailed class schedules, concert dates, sign-up information, and even a few brief videos about the Jenison Orchestras.

The Jenison Orchestras Program has a long-standing tradition of excellence. Should you and your child decide that you would like to be a part of that tradition, we look forward to meeting you at one of the Open Houses. If you should have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or email using the contact information on the left of this page.

Sincerely,

Carol Johnson  
5th Grade Orchestra Director

# What do we do about getting an instrument for orchestra?

The first step for any student in an instrumental music program is to acquire an instrument. We are fortunate to live in an area with a lot of music store competition, making the acquisition of an instrument easy and affordable.

The Jenison Orchestra Directors absolutely recommend renting an instrument for your student, as opposed to buying one. As a fifth grader, your student is likely to need a small instrument to start their studies. As they grow, they will need to advance to larger instruments. If you purchase an instrument now, you will most likely need to purchase one or more larger instruments in the near future. When you *rent* an instrument, the “size-ups” are free, in addition to all repairs and maintenance. There are many instruments for sale (especially on the internet) that seem like good deals, but are actually very bad deals. (See attached “V.S.O.” article.) As a general rule, you get what you pay for. If an instrument seems considerably cheaper than what the music stores are charging, it probably resembles a toy more than an instrument. (When in doubt, PLEASE ask us!!!)

The Jenison Orchestra Program maintains a working relationship with a few reputable music stores, who will be present at our Open Houses to rent instruments to Jenison families. Representatives from the Baroque Violin Shop and Guarneri House (formerly known as Aaron’s Instruments) visit Jenison periodically to deliver materials, pick up instruments for repairs, and deliver orders. This means that if a student’s instrument is in need of repair, the student can leave the instrument with the directors, instead of having to personally take the instrument to a store. Generally, a loaner instrument can even be supplied, so as not to interrupt the student’s learning or practice.

At our Open Houses, the rental companies offer very reasonable rental programs for their instruments, so that parents do not have to purchase instruments at full price. Monthly payments are applied to the purchase of the final instrument and cover all repairs throughout the rental program. Monthly rental price ranges are as follows:

**Violins: \$16-\$17    Violas: \$16-\$17    Cellos: \$29-\$35**

More information will be available about each of the companies and their rental programs at both Open Houses. **Huge discounts** are also available if you rent the whole year upfront.

If you already have an instrument that you would like to use, please bring it to the Open House with you. While you sign up for the orchestra program, we will check out the instrument, evaluate its condition, and make sure that it is the right size for your student.

If you have any questions about instruments or any aspect of the Orchestra program please feel free to contact Mrs. Johnson at [cjohnson@jpsonline.org](mailto:cjohnson@jpsonline.org)



**On behalf of Teachers, Violin Shops, and Beginning Players across the country, we encourage parents to avoid the temptation to buy a cheap internet-auction violin outfit, commonly known as a V.S.O. – Violin Shaped Object.** V.S.O.'s look like violins, but a very high percentage are virtually unplayable due to innumerable structural and set-up problems. Many well-meaning parents bring in their V.S.O.'s to violin shops around the country and are disappointed to find out that the repairs needed to make their instrument playable far exceed both the price they paid for the instrument and the price of a properly made and set up instrument without any of the problems of a V.S.O.

"I have many families who believe that returning to their home country, China, they can easily purchase violins and bows at lower prices. When they return, they often find that the instrument doesn't work properly. The pegs don't fit, or the bridge, nut, and/or fingerboard are a problem and/or the neck is crooked. When you buy an instrument from a dealer you are also buying their loyalty, service, and integrity to stand behind their merchandise."  
Sunny Cirlin, Private Teacher

"A frustrated customer came in with an internet-auction V.S.O. violin and when I tried to help them tune it one of the pegs literally broke off in my hands. Looking at the peg more closely it looked like some kind of composite material or very soft wood. After that they gladly bought a Hoffmann Amadeus [a music store brand]."  
Amanda, SHAR Retail Store

## Common V.S.O. Problems

### VSO Tuning Problems

Frustrating pegs that are very hard to turn making tuning difficult even for an experienced player or they "slip" causing frustration when instrument constantly goes out of tune. Caused by improper peg installation and/or low quality pegs made of wood that is too soft or green (not dried properly). Cost to install new pegs: \$50 to \$100

### VSO Sound Problems

Awful sounding strings that have a shrill sound or just one or two bad ones that give an uneven and unpleasant sound from one string to the next. Caused by low quality strings and/or improper set-up causing string damage. Cost for new set of strings: \$10 to \$30

Annoying & frustrating string buzzing sound when played. Caused by string being too close to fingerboard due to improper set-up and/or low quality wood parts (fingerboard, nut, bridge, neck) that are too soft or too green (not dried properly). Cost for a new nut \$30 to \$50, plane the fingerboard \$30 to \$50, new bridge \$30 to \$75, correct neck projection \$200+.

### VSO Discomfort/Pain Problems

Painful/uncomfortable fingers (especially younger players) during and/or after playing because string height is too high requiring too much pressure to push them down to the fingerboard. Caused by nut being too high, and/or fingerboard not having proper "scoop", and/or bridge being too high, and/or neck projection being too low. See "string buzzing" for cost.

### VSO Playability Problems

Frustration with bow hitting two strings when trying to just play one string. Caused by improper set-up where bridge curvature is too flat so difficult to have bow touch just 1 string at a time. Cost for new fitted bridge: \$30-\$75

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We asked current Jenison Junior High Orchestra students:  
**Why is it “worth it” to be in orchestra?**

You make friends  
 It's a different way of expressing yourself  
 To enjoy music  
 It's cool to be able to play an instrument!  
 Breaking barriers  
 To work as a team  
 It's fun!  
 Builds trust  
 Memories  
 Support and involvement from parents  
 To experience a part of yourself in a different way  
 Nice change of pace during school day  
 Makes me a better person  
 Play fun music!  
 CHALLENGE MYSELF  
 Expand your passion for music  
 Makes you smarter  
 It's a way to express how you feel  
 Teaches perseverance  
 Meet new people  
 Learn new things  
 Different way of learning  
 Opens career choices  
 FUN FOCUS!  
 Seeing music in a different way  
 To be part of a bigger “family”

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## 5th Grade Orchestra - Weekly Class Schedule

Each 5th Grade Orchestra student has three 45-minute classes per week. Classes start on **Wed Sep 4**. Bus transportation is provided back to elementary buildings after morning classes.

<b>BAUERWOOD 5th Graders:</b>	Tue 1:00pm @ BW,	Wed 8:00am @ JH,	Fri 8:00am @ JH
<b>BURSLEY 5th Graders:</b>	Mon 8:00am @ JH,	Wed 1:00pm @ BU,	Fri 8:00am @ JH
<b>EL PUENTE 5th Graders:</b>	Mon 8:00am @ JH,	Wed 11:25am @ EP,	Fri 8:00am @ JH
<b>PINEWOOD 5th Graders:</b>	Mon 8:00am @ JH,	Wed 8:00am @ JH,	Thur 1:00pm @ PW
<b>SANDY HILL 5th Graders:</b>	Mon 12:40pm @ SH,	Wed 8:00am @ JH,	Fri 8:00am @ JH
<b>ROSEWOOD 5th Graders:</b>	Mon 8:00am @ JH,	Wed 8:00am @ JH,	Fri 1:00pm @ RW

## 5th Grade Orchestra Concerts

The Fifth Grade Orchestra participates in two concerts, both in the JCA:  
**Mon, Dec 2, 2024, 7:00 pm** and **Wed, Apr 30, 2025, 7:00 pm**