

# Dream of String Orchestra Becomes a Reality

*By Lisa Adams, Music Teacher and String Orchestra Director at Berlin Intermediate School*



As the first Arts Immersion School in the Worcester County Public School System, Berlin Intermediate School continues to be in tune with an essential component to student learning: the arts. With visual arts, movement, music, and drama immersed into curriculum, Berlin Intermediate was the natural setting to add a String Orchestra Program – the first in our school system. Implemented at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year as a pilot program, the String Orchestra Program is a cherished offering at our school.

The dream of having a string orchestra began many years ago. It started as a vision and grew into an after-school course which was offered to students once a week. Today, our String Orchestra Program is offered as an elective to all fifth graders. Like other electives, String Orchestra is offered every other day during the regular school day, for the entire school year. Our goal is to expand the program to include sixth grade so that this year's fifth graders can continue in their second year of String Orchestra. Currently, 25 students are participating in the String Orchestra.

Music education is a vitally important component to every child's education. According to current research, the Music Educator's National Conference states that schools that have music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than schools without music programs. In addition, students enrolled in music performance classes score higher on the SAT than students without music participation. For example, students enrolled in music performance classes scored, on average, 57 points higher on the verbal SAT section and 41 points higher on the math, than did their counterparts.

Offering the opportunity to learn and play a string instrument benefits all children, according to research conducted by the American String Teacher's Association. Playing a string

instrument enhances creative, emotional, and social opportunities for children and teaches them to work together in a cooperative group where everyone is in the winner's circle.

In addition, string programs expand opportunities for students. As a solo artist or a member of an ensemble or orchestra, opportunities abound for string musicians.

Participating students and their parents are pleased with the addition of the String Orchestra. Fifth grade String Orchestra member Alex Lasley says that she really likes the sound produced by the violin, and she is enjoying the opportunity to learn to play this special instrument. Parents Michael and Jennifer McInerney, whose daughter Monica is playing the cello, also praise the program. According to the McInerneys, they believe that the introduction of the cello, coupled with the instruction that their daughter has received, has broadened their daughter's perspective and has allowed her to express herself in new and different ways.

Fifth grade Berlin Intermediate students interested in participating in the String Orchestra are required to have an instrument. Students must have instruments in order to practice at home. Typically, string instruments are rented to parents by local music stores who offer these rental services. Sometimes, available school-owned instruments are loaned to students. If a student cannot afford to rent an instrument and one is not available to loan, our school and community will find a way to help. We never turn any students away because they cannot afford the necessary equipment.

The new String Orchestra Program is a perfect fit in a school that is alive with the arts. This year, Berlin Intermediate School received the Creative Ticket Award given by Arts Education in Maryland Schools, a partner with the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes schools for the inclusion of the creative arts in the everyday teaching of school curriculum. The addition of our String Orchestra Program allows us to expand the opportunities that we offer our students and to provide them with the cognitive benefits that result from involvement in the arts.

If you have any questions about Berlin Intermediate's String Orchestra Program, please contact me at the school at 410-632-5320.