

Dear parents and supporters of the Oak Ridge String Orchestra Program,

Once again the question of cutting the 4<sup>th</sup> grade string program in Oak Ridge has arisen, this time not for budgetary reasons, but in order to give more time to 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to teach core subject material.

Oak Ridge has long been known for its excellence in education, and part of the education process is educating the whole child, and exposing them to experiences at school that they would not necessarily get at home. Over the past 20 years, the string orchestra program has grown from having a total of 16 High School students in grades 10 – 12, and a total of 25 students in grades 7 – 9 at the Junior High School level in 1988, to a total enrollment of 165 string students at ORHS, 101 in grades 7 and 8 at the Middle schools, and 215 in the 4<sup>th</sup> grades at the 4 elementary schools, along with 81 in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 77 in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, for a total of 615 students in Oak Ridge taking advantage of the orchestra program. We are one of the largest and best High School Orchestras in the country, and for anyone attending the concert last Tuesday evening, it is evident that the quality of the program has not lessened with the quantity.

A leading factor in the excellence of our program is that students start playing in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. A string instrument needs to be started at a young age, in order for the finger agility and coordination required to master the instrument can develop to its full potential. Starting a string instrument in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade will limit the level of development that students can reach. Added to that is the fact that learning to play an instrument is a way of significantly enhancing brain development. Numerous studies prove that this enhancement takes place mostly before the age of 10. Students also learn to focus and concentrate when playing a string instrument. By having this program in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we are helping students get ready for the higher level of demands made on them in the middle school years.

The string orchestra program in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade calls for 90 minutes a week of string instruction. When students reach the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the Middle School, they are scheduled for 225 minutes a week of orchestra instruction, which they choose as an elective. The middle schools still manage to find enough time in the day to adequately teach the core subjects.

On Monday, March 23, the board of education will meet and Dr. Bailey, superintendent of Oak Ridge Schools, will make a recommendation about the future of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade strings program in Oak Ridge. I am asking for people who feel that strings in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade should continue in our schools to let board members, elementary principals and the superintendent know your feelings. The contact information for these people can be found on the Oak Ridge Schools website.

Thank you, Jenifer van Tol  
Director, Oak Ridge High School Orchestra