



NLSA Powerful Practices



“We can mention only one point (which experience confirms), namely, that next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. No greater commendation than this can be found – at least not by us. After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music.”

–Martin Luther (from Luther’s preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae iucundae*, 1538)

“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation!
Let all who hear
Now to His temple draw near,
Joining in glad adoration!” (LSB 790)

“Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
Till all the world adore His sacred name.” (LSB 837)

Sioux Falls Lutheran School, Sioux Falls, S.D. ‘Praise God with both word and music’

These lyrics and the tunes that accompany them are familiar to us as Lutherans. For some, they may be so well known that your brain subconsciously adds the sound of an organ in the background as you read the words on the page.

However, from time to time at Sioux Falls Lutheran School (SFLS), these songs may sound a little different. Instead of typical keyboard accompaniment, you’ll often hear the tunes sung to the beat of a peppy guitar ensemble, combined in a choir tune with a Swahili hymn, beautifully drawn from the strings of a violin or echoing serenely through the hall from a set of tone chimes.

Twenty years ago, Martin Luther’s cue, together with modern brain research, served as the catalyst for a major focus on and subsequent overhaul of our music programs. The result is an expansive music program that not only allows our students to proclaim “[the Word of



Under the direction of Karen Dooley, the SFLS advanced band plays for a special Reformation chapel service in October 2017.

God] through music,” but also has a profoundly positive impact on our students’ brain development, academic achievement, self-confidence and self-discipline.

Beginning in kindergarten, our students participate in a Suzuki-based violin program. Also known as the “Mother-Tongue Method,” the Suzuki Method of music instruction stems from the idea that all children have the ability to develop and enhance skills that are taught in a nurturing environment. Much like learning language comes naturally to children as they hear it spoken, learning to make music can be a natural process when similar teaching methods are applied.



Left: The SFLS guitar ensemble performs at the annual Christmas concert in December 2017. Right: The Marching Eagles of Sioux Falls, a group which consists of students from SFLS and Lutheran High School of Sioux Falls, made their debut during the summer of 2017. They took first place and received awards for best drum major, best drumline and best color guard at their first-ever marching competition that fall.

SFLS students in grades K – 3 participate in two small-group violin lessons per week. The lessons draw from the Suzuki Method by starting instruction at a young age, teaching children to play music before they learn to read it and placing special focus on producing good sound.

In kindergarten, students spend their first several lessons learning how to hold the violin and bow and making foot charts to help them master proper posture. When they begin making music, students learn by listening and replicating the sounds and movements of their instructor. Through the process, our young musicians build fine motor skills, learn how to listen, strengthen brain synapses and practice self-control.

Once violin students reach third grade, they begin learning to read sheet music. By fourth grade, they can choose to continue with private violin lessons and join our orchestra.

Since its implementation in 2011, the Suzuki-based violin program has received high praise from parents like Jen Sohre, who has children in third and fifth grade.

“I know many parents cringe at the sound of a beginner playing the violin ... the squeaks and squawks of the bow ... but not me,” she said. “I enjoy every single minute of it and am overcome with how wonderful the Suzuki-based program is.”

While our violin program is robust, it’s certainly not the only way students learn to make and appreciate music at SFLS. From kindergarten through eighth grade, students

participate in weekly general music classes where they explore everything from playing the recorder to music history. As our students progress through elementary and middle school, they can expand their musical horizons by joining choir, orchestra, band, guitar ensemble or tone chime ensembles. They can also take private voice, instrumental or piano lessons during the school day. Offering private lessons during the school day not only improves musical skills and enhances brain development, but also allows our families to enjoy uninterrupted family time at home during the evening hours.



Kristi Prouty leads music and movement time at Kid’s Day Out, the 2-year-old preschool program at SFLS.

Music also has a prominent presence in our preschool. Classroom teachers incorporate music into their daily schedules, and twice each month a member of our music team leads music and movement classes in preschool.

As a former Kindermusik® teacher, Kristi Prouty works with children as young as 2 to develop foundational music skills, such as rhythm and counting, by building on the children’s natural love of music. During music and movement time, our preschoolers learn how to keep time with their bodies by clapping hands, tapping feet and counting out loud. They also experiment with a variety of hand-held instruments, such as wood blocks, drums, tambourines and bells. Our preschoolers have an opportunity to showcase the things they learn throughout the year at our annual Christmas programs and preschool graduation ceremonies.

In addition to Christmas and spring concerts, our K – 8 music students participate in winter and spring recitals,



where they have the chance to share their musical gifts with peers, parents and other friends and family. Several students also participate in local honor choirs, all-state band and all-state orchestra on an annual basis.

During the summer of 2017, our music department teamed up with the Lutheran High School of Sioux Falls to form a marching band program. That fall, the Marching Eagles of Sioux Falls took first place and received awards for best drum major, best drumline and best color guard during their debut performance at the Missouri Valley Marching Festival in Platte, S.D.

Finally, as a school that is owned and operated by five local LCMS churches, we take a choir or small music ensemble to our local congregations each academic year for Sioux Falls Lutheran School Sundays. The special worship services provide us with opportunities to join our supporting congregations in worship, to share and showcase what our students are learning and to thank church members for their investment in Lutheran education.

At the conclusion of their SFLS careers, many students carry their musical skills forward into high school, college and the real world. Countless alumni expand their musical horizons in high school by joining new groups like jazz band or show choir. A smaller, but still numerous, group continues to grow as musicians at the collegiate level by participating in ensembles like choir, orchestra and concert, jazz or pep band. Finally, some



choose to take their talents into the church and serve as members of worship bands at churches near and far.

All in all, the comprehensive music programs at SFLS provide us with an uncommon and impactful way of achieving our mission to develop capable, Christian servant-leaders in a complex world who are “World Ready, Faith Secure.”

Clockwise, from top left: Under the direction of Karen Dooley, the SFLS orchestra performs at the annual Christmas concert in December 2017. The Shepherds Chorale performs excerpts from Handel's *Messiah* at the annual Christmas concert in December 2017. First-grade students at SFLS showcase the skills they've learned in the Suzuki-based violin program during a spring concert. Kindergarten students rehearse during small group lessons twice each week as part of the Suzuki-based violin program at SFLS.

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