

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Avon-by-the-Sea](#)

School set to begin offering music lessons during the day

Students invited to pick from six instruments

By *Brianna Townsend*

AVON-BY-THE-SEA – Avon Elementary School will be launching music lessons during school hours for the first time next month, with the start of the new school year.

Previously, music lessons were offered after school only, and at a cost to parents for instruction time.

Now, parents will continue to pay for instrument rentals and for a practice book of music for their child, but will no longer have to pay for lesson time, according to Michele Gioia, Avon Education Foundation president.

The lessons will be taught by music teacher Catherine Kusters, and third- through eighth-grade students will have the choice of six instruments to learn: clarinet, alto saxophone, flute, trumpet, glockenspiel [commonly called “the bells”] or snare drum.

“We will launch in September and see what the enrollment interest is,” Superintendent Christopher Albrizio said.



He added, “We are excited to be able to offer lessons to families who may not have had access last year when it was a pay-to-play program. All research suggests when you play a musical instrument, you activate cognitive abilities.”

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Instrumental music lessons at Avon Elementary School have taken time to develop.

Two school years ago, the Avon Education Foundation [AEF] started the instrumental band program at Avon Elementary School.

“The way we approached it was to test if there was an interest in learning to play concert band instruments,” Mrs. Gioia explained. “The state required that students learn how to play the recorder, but beyond that we didn’t have any instruments.”

So, the AEF covered Mrs. Kusters’ expenses for teaching an after school program. Those materials included music stands, sheet music and the concert band instruments Mrs. Kusters used as teaching instruments.

In the first year, there were six students, most of whom were between grades three and six.

Last year, that number doubled to 12 students who completed the three sessions.

“Most showed up with their instrument in a box and had no idea what to do with it. Then, by the end, they could perform ‘Star Wars’ for their parents. It was amazing,” Mrs. Gioia stated.

“I think the administration recognized there was significant interest. Twelve students participating is very significant when you have 65 students in the whole school,” she said.

The pilot after school programming let the administration say, “OK, we feel there is enough of an interest level to bring it inside during the school day,” according to Mrs. Gioia. “The beauty of that is it opens it up to more students.”

Mrs. Gioia said she was confident the program would involve 12 students and more this year.

“Hopefully it will continue to grow into a meaningful ongoing, lasting program. I am very happy with the response from the school in looking past state requirements and trying to foster positive, creative things for the students,” she said.

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