



## **Student and Family Handbook**

### **About El Sistema**

El Sistema is a program that fosters community building through music. The Sistema was developed about 37 years ago in Venezuela by musician/economist Jose Antonio Abreu. The intent then was to nurture children living in poverty, and to give them a sense of belonging and responsibility. The life-long social and academic skills learned through music, would allow impoverished children the opportunity to grow and live as responsible, prosperous citizens. Today, El Sistema, Venezuela serves over 400 000 children. There are over sixty El Sistema programs in the United States.

Our goal for the Greater Milwaukee El Sistema in Waukesha, is to make music education possible for all children in our community. We aspire to build positive,

responsible citizens in a loving and nurturing atmosphere. We encourage community development among the members of the orchestra and their families. Through music instruction, community building activities, responsibility to the ensemble and performance experience we will build mutual admiration for our diverse cultures. We believe that this will build an energetic, passionate, dedicated and enthusiastic community.

## **Musical Instruction**

Waukesha El Sistema is a program that begins in the second grade. Children study up to three days per week after school. They begin with musicianship and movement skills that develop their ability to move freely and expressively to music and learn the music notation system of pitch and rhythm. After several weeks they are introduced to their instruments and receive daily instruction from highly trained professionals. Most of our teachers are trained in the Suzuki strings method. Beginning with simple arrangements of real music, the children learn the melodies and harmonies of the world's finest and most beautiful Western music, not the soulless exercises that characterize so much educational music today.

The basis of all El Sistema programs lies in orchestral training in classical and folk music. This is the way that a feeling of community responsibility and pride is built. From the beginning, public performances for parents, community, and peers are a central component of the learning process, and strong feelings of accomplishment and belonging are instilled and nurtured all along the way. The Waukesha El Sistema program will change lives of our young people throughout the city and bring newfound confidence, success, and joy to untold numbers of children.

## **Student and Family Commitment**

Students will quickly learn that they are responsible to contribute their individual best to their El Sistema community. This means showing respect for the teachers, themselves and other students in the Sistema. As a member of El Sistema, it is expected that students will attend rehearsals and classes regularly, demonstrate appropriate care of their instruments, and practice daily. It is only by appropriate conduct, self-discipline, practice and respect that students will be able to fully contribute as members of the El Sistema Community.

Families are expected to provide support to their Sistema students. Allowing time for practice, expressing and interest in your student's work and musical development are essential. Having patience and giving encouragement to young beginners will ensure that students are receiving the support they need to blossom as fine musicians and members of the community.

We encourage parents and extended families to become involved in El Sistema as much as possible. Some opportunities for involvement include: Attending concerts, Encouraging performances at home, Joining the parent support group and attending rehearsals. Your involvement is key to building a positive community that will be enjoyed by all.

## **Practice**

Daily practice is required in addition to attending Sistema classes and rehearsals. Begin with small amounts of time, 10 to 15 minutes for beginners, and increase the time as your musician's experience grows. Ask your child questions about the music, perhaps have them teach you! Practice should extend the joy of being a part of El Sistema, so please be patient and encourage your students. Each small concept takes time to master and is truly a great accomplishment for your child.

Students and their parents/guardians will be expected to keep a daily practice journal with weekly reflections about the music, their class experience and home

practice habits. Students will be given the opportunity to present their journals in class and share their reflections about Sistema. Parents may also be invited to share how the Sistema has benefitted their family.

## **Student Conduct and Incentives**

We believe that attitude is everything. Positive conduct is an essential part of being a Sistema member and contributing to the orchestra. Students will love being a part of El Sistema, and will soon learn that they are a valuable part of what makes Sistema a place where learning and joy go hand in hand. We care about what is going on in our student's lives and want to help them grow.

Students will have the opportunity to earn incentives for positive behavior and musical growth through our "Sistema Stars" program. Other incentives include the opportunity to perform solos for their peers or at a concert or special Community event. We want to encourage students by showing them that their hard work and personal responsibility brings positive rewards.

## **Instrument Use and Care:**

*\*Parents must sign a rental agreement through White House of Music for use of our instruments.*

*\*Instruments will be turned-in at the end of the Spring Session for maintenance.*

*\*Students who continue in the Summer Session will keep their instruments until the end of the session and then turn them in for maintenance.*

*\*Parents will be charged rental or overdue fees for Instruments not returned at the designated return date. Instruments not returned after six weeks of notice will be collected by a representative from White House of Music.*

***Please treat these instruments with care, they belong to White House of Music.***

This instrument has been carefully constructed and completely adjusted by expert string technicians. Proper care will reward you with maximum performance.

- Release hair tension on bow after use. Hair left tight will result in over-stretching.
- Rosin dust should always be removed from the instrument and strings after use. To maintain the instrument's finish and for the removal of heavy rosin deposits, clean with a high-quality string instrument product.
- Tension pegs should only be adjusted by teacher or repairperson. Do not over-tighten. If pegs slip, have checked by repairperson.
- Have your bridge checked frequently by an orchestra teacher or qualified string repairperson for correct position and angle; incorrect angle may result in damage to instrument and shorten bridge life.
- String adjusters (fine tuners) should not be allowed to touch the top of the instrument.
- Apply rosin to your bow before use (6 to 10 strokes) or as instructed by your orchestra director.
- Do not handle bow hair.
- Never leave your instrument in a hot or cold car; an instrument left in any excessive heat or cold can become damaged.
- Keep instrument and bow in a securely closed case to avoid damage.
- Report any problems with this instrument to the White House of Music Repair Department 262-798-9700

## Contact Information:

Contact information will be collected during registration, PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY,  
Thank You!

*It is very important that we have a home phone, work phone, or cell phone number to reach you in case of student illness or emergency.*

Event Flyers, Reminders and information will be given out at the end of class during student pick-up. Please check with your student for information they bring home.

All of our communication is done via email, on our Facebook page and on our web site: [www.elsistema-milwaukee.org](http://www.elsistema-milwaukee.org)

Questions or concerns may be forwarded to Assistant Director, Sarena Lawrence email: [gmelsistema@gmail.com](mailto:gmelsistema@gmail.com) or phone: 262-271-1928.

## Rehearsal and Concert Schedule

Instruction will be held from Monday through Thursday. You will be notified of your rehearsal days and a separate calendar of events will be provided regarding concerts and community performances at the registration meeting.

## Absence Policy

For excused absences due to illness or family circumstances please call or text the Assistant Director 262-271-1928 if it is the day of rehearsal. Please provide a note to the teacher in advance of an absence when possible. ***Prolonged tardiness or absence will be dealt with on an individual basis, but may result in removal from the program.***

## **Student Pick-Up and Safety**

El Sistema observes the same student pick-up and safety procedures as Hadfield School and the Boys and Girls Club. Parents are responsible to ensure the safety of their children as they leave an after school program. Parents must meet and sign their child out at the end of rehearsal in the music room. We cannot be responsible for student's safety once they leave the building, therefore, we ask that you make every effort possible to ensure that your student/s have a safe way home. We ask that any changes in student pick-up be given to us in writing. Due to liability and student safety **PARENTS are REQUIRED to transport their students to and from any and all rehearsals and GMES events.** In case of an emergency, please notify the Assistant Director: 262-271-1928.

## **GMES Community Center Nights**

This year we are thrilled to partner with the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in downtown Waukesha who will be our community center partner. GMES community nights will be held the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month beginning in October. Community nights will begin at 6:00 P.M. with a free family-style meal (goodwill offering may be taken), organized game or movie night accompanied with scheduled 15 minute one-to-one practice sessions with community musician volunteers. Parents are encouraged to bring the family and watch practice sessions as they grow with their student in learning what it takes to play a musical instrument. All programming follows the FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy. More Information about Community Nights and how YOU can become involved will be given out at rehearsals prior to the event.

## **Questions, Comments, Concerns**

Our GMES Administrative Team makes every effort possible to deliver quality programming for our families and students. In the event that you should have a question or concern, we ask that you please share this with the Assistant Director Sarena Lawrence at: 262-271-1928 or with the Executive Director, Kelly Schmitt: 262-278-8480. Please bring

your concerns to us before sharing within the greater community as this can create harmful gossip for our students and program. We aspire to build a safe, quality and positive musical presence in our community and count on you to help us do so. In return, we promise that your concerns will remain confidential and that we will make every effort possible to meet with you and work on an acceptable resolution.