

This guide was prepared to provide a brief overview and answer the questions asked most often about the Suzuki program at NIU. If you have further questions, call the NIU Community School of the Arts office and the office staff will help you or put you in touch with one of the teachers.

You are always welcome to observe lessons and attend recitals. Check the website for updated schedule information. (815) 753-1450  
www.suzuki.niu.edu.

**Q. What is the Suzuki approach?**

A. More than fifty years ago, Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki realized the implications behind a simple fact. All children are able to learn to speak their native language with ease, just by listening to people speak. He began to apply the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music. The ideas of parent responsibility, loving encouragement, and constant repetition are some of the special features of the Suzuki approach. Parents are very involved in the process, just as they have been in their child's acquisition of language. They attend lessons with the child and serve as "home teachers" during the week. One parent often takes a few lessons on the instrument before or at the same time as the child, so that s/he understands what the child is expected to do. Parents work with the teacher to create an enjoyable and successful learning environment at lessons and at home.

**Q. Do the teachers receive special training?**

A. In addition to years of teaching experience, all the Suzuki teachers at NIU have attained a high level of specialized training in the Suzuki approach. A current list of the teachers and their biographies can be found on the website.

**Q. What is the best age to begin Suzuki lessons?**

A. Listening to music should begin at birth, as important connections are made in babies' brains from the very beginning. Suzuki lessons may

begin at age four. If your child is younger than four, you can enroll your child in one of the community school's group classes for young children, generally taught on Saturday mornings during the year. These classes teach basic rhythm and melodic concepts and are ideal preparation for future musical instruction. It is never too late to begin Suzuki lessons. However, if your child is older than ten and already reading music, you may want to consider a traditional (non-Suzuki) teacher. Call the office to discuss your options.

**Q. Are there special sessions just for parents?**

A. Two orientation sessions for parents whose child is starting with the Suzuki program are scheduled at the beginning of the fall semester each year. Conducted by Suzuki violin director Ann Montzka-Smelser, these sessions provide parents with an introduction to the Suzuki philosophy and explain how a parent should work with his or her child at home. These sessions are for parents whose child started lessons the previous spring and summer or who are new to the program in fall. Dates and times are posted online and in the current flyer.

**Q. What are the parents' other responsibilities?**

A. Creating an interest in music and a good ear are the main jobs for the Suzuki parents. It is up to the parents to see that the child listens to music recommended by the teacher every day. Before a child is asked to play a piece, he should have it thoroughly ingrained in his mind. It is much easier for him to play after he has already memorized it. Later, his ear and his intuition will be so well-trained that he may be able to play a piece even before it is presented to him. Your teacher will recommend various concerts and workshops that you and your child might enjoy. There are many concerts and recitals available for free in the NIU Music Building throughout the school year.

**Q. What about practice?**

A. Daily practice, even for a short time, is essential. As the child's attention span and music repertoire grow, so does the amount of practice time. This is ideally a time of learning together, when the parent is creative and nurturing, as parent and child work together on the practice assignments from the lesson. The goal is for the child to eventually practice on her own, as independence and ownership are encouraged from the beginning.

**Q. What about the instrument?**

A. A piano - not a keyboard - is required for those enrolled in piano lessons. For violin, cello, and guitar lessons, your teacher can help you find an appropriate instrument to rent or purchase. Please wait and discuss the instrument type, size, and vendor with your teacher.

**Q. What is the schedule for lessons?**

A. Once a teacher has been assigned to the student, a schedule of weekly private lessons is arranged on a day and time agreed upon by the parents and teacher. Lessons are taught in the NIU Music Building or in the teacher's home studio. In fall and spring, there are 14 private lessons and in summer, there are six. In addition to private lessons, group lessons are essential to the curriculum. Violin, guitar, and cello students attend seven group lessons each semester on Thursdays; piano students attend four group lessons on Mondays. The dates are posted on the website and in the current flyer; specific times for each child will be shared at private lessons. A parent is expected to attend all lessons, both private and group.

**Q. What can we expect from the lessons?**

A. The Suzuki method provides a step-by-step methodical approach with an emphasis on posture, ear training, and basic musical technique. Teachers place great importance on building enthusiasm for learning through games and other motivational techniques. Depending on their

progress, many children begin to learn to read notes and to work in the printed repertoire within the first year of lessons. Dr. Suzuki said that his first concern is creating ability, not adding pieces to the repertoire. For this reason, the process of lessons and the learning of music may seem slow, especially at first. When a child can play a piece, she does not drop it in order to go on to a second piece. Rather, she continues to play it, using her older pieces to develop additional skills. For this reason, any Suzuki-trained child is expected to be able to perform at any time any piece that she has ever studied. Once learned, the music becomes a part of her. This level of training is not easily reached. It takes constant listening and repetition.

**Q. When do the children perform?**

A. Recitals are integral to the NIU Suzuki program. At the end of each semester, all Suzuki students participate in at least one recital, which is held in the Recital Hall or Concert Hall of the NIU Music Building. Occasionally, the students also perform for residents of senior citizens' homes, schools, and community events. A schedule of recitals is printed in the program's flyer and is available on the website.

**Q. What is the cost of the program?**

A. Up-to-date registration fees are printed in the program flyer, available online and from the office. There are also some expenses in addition to the cost of your lessons:

- Purchase or rental of an instrument that is the correct size for your child.
- Printed music of the Suzuki repertoire. Children begin playing by ear, but the parent will use the reference copy in the beginning.
- Books: You will be asked to read *Nurtured by Love* by Shinichi Suzuki, which is essential for your understanding the Suzuki philosophy. There are many other books that may be purchased or borrowed for even more insight into this method.
- A video recorder. Children like to replay their lessons, practice sessions, favorite pieces, and concerts they have enjoyed.

- A recording of the Suzuki repertoire your child is studying and an easy means of listening to it. This can include a copy on CD as well as a portable listening device loaded with the recordings.

**Q. I would like to observe a lesson to see if this program is right for my child. How do I go about arranging this?**

A. Observation of Suzuki lessons in progress is highly recommended before registering your child for the NIU Community School of the Arts Suzuki Program. We would be happy to help arrange this. Call the office at (815) 753-1450.

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*"Where love is deep, much can be accomplished" - Shinichi Suzuki*



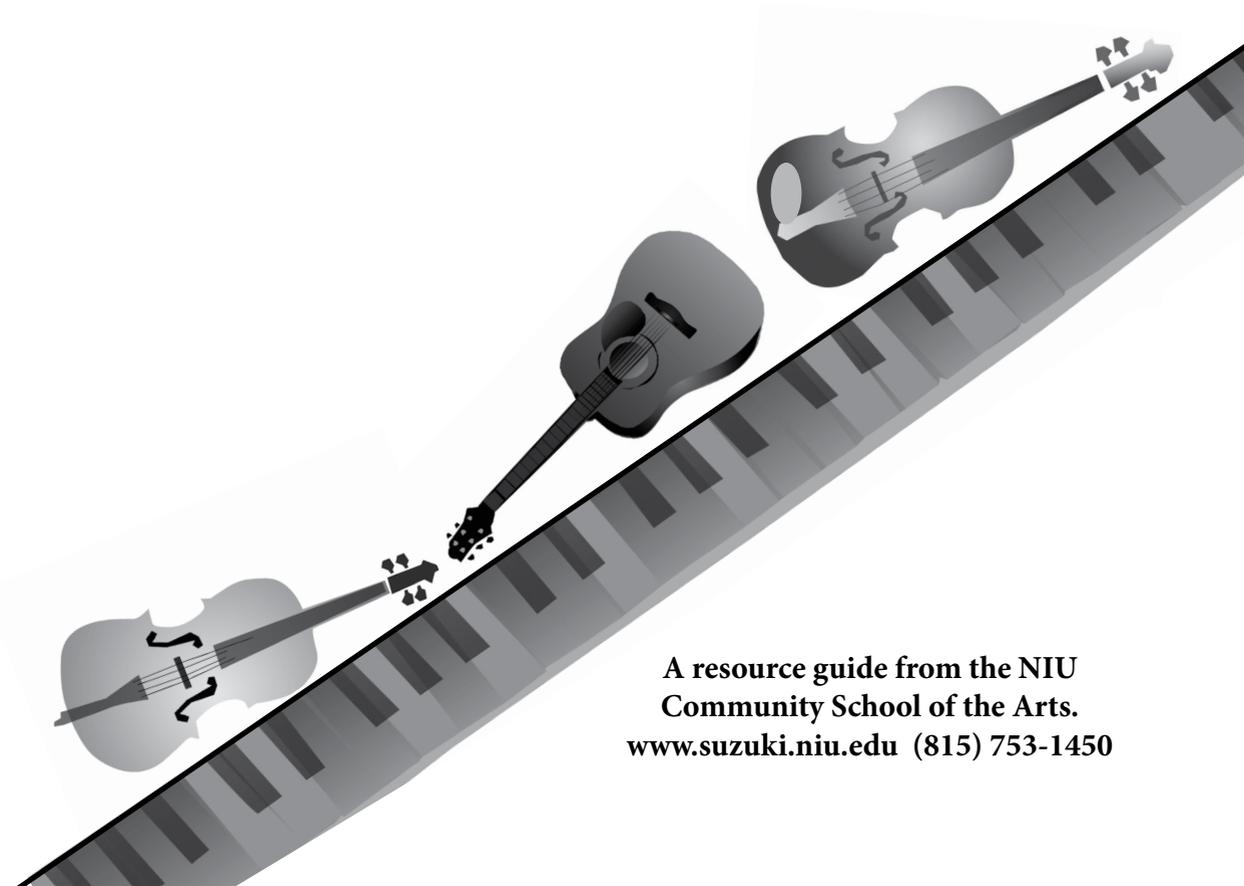
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Community School  
of the Arts**

*College of Visual and Performing Arts*

# The Suzuki Approach at NIU

Frequently asked questions about  
Suzuki Violin, Cello, Guitar and  
Piano lessons at NIU



A resource guide from the NIU  
Community School of the Arts.  
[www.suzuki.niu.edu](http://www.suzuki.niu.edu) (815) 753-1450