

# Beyond Violins

## The Suzuki School expands its vision and student population



Kindergartners at the Suzuki School gather around their teacher, Tammy King, fourth from left, while writing letters to Santa last month. The school recently celebrated its 30th anniversary and moved to a new facility on Buckhead Avenue.

tots as young as 6 months old. The school, founded in 1976 by Marlene Lerer, is based on the teaching philosophy of Japanese violin teacher Dr. Shinichi Suzuki. It emphasizes the importance of highly developed and interactive learning from infancy, and the idea is to instill a love of learning in even the youngest of children.

“Brain research shows that it’s the first years that matter the most,” said Debra Markham, who has been the school director since 1982.

And the idea is catching on.

The school just celebrated its 30th anniversary and has picked up a new name – it was formerly the Suzuki Learning Center – and has grown from 180 students to 410 since 2000. Last year, the older children – there are about 150 of them, aged 3 to 5 years – moved from a building on Cains Hill Place to a spacious facility on Buckhead Avenue. It includes a room for ballet, complete with wall-sized mirrors; a room where kids can sit at the window and paint; and a music room.

Funding for the school is totally


based on tuition, which is approximately \$1,300 a month. About 80 percent of the 60 faculty members have a college degree, a less rigid requirement than in public schools, mirroring the school’s philosophy that flexibility in the environment is a benefit.

Remember that huge orchestra of tiny doll-like Japanese children who performed at Jimmy Carter’s inauguration? They were Dr. Suzuki’s students. The Suzuki School is the only school in the country to combine the influence of the Suzuki methodology for teaching music to young children and the child-directed learning approaches of Reggio and Montessori.

Music, art, phonetics and fine-motor activities are introduced to infants. By age two, foreign language is a part of the curriculum, and, starting this fall, Mandarin Chinese will be offered in addition to French and Spanish. Literacy is highly emphasized. Classes like dance and swimming are enrichment activities the children can participate in during the afternoons.

The children are at school for the entire day. Just as in high school, they have a rotation plan to move from “pod” to “pod” for group learning of different subjects. But unlike high school, the schedule is not strictly regimented, and there is plenty of time for socialization, rest and recess.

Already there are plans for a new state-of-the-art building on East Paces Ferry Road for its youngest students, about 200 between 6 months to younger 3-year-olds, who have also outgrown the current building on Cains Hill Place.

The new building will include a 1,000-gallon aquarium with fish of the Chattahoochee, four playgrounds – including one that’s outdoors and heated an aviary, and an interactive garden and nature trail – all with a “Museum of Modern Art” feel designed by Randall Paulsen Architects. It is expected to open in June. 

[www.suzukilearning.com](http://www.suzukilearning.com)

*By Mary Logan Barmeyer*

At the Suzuki School, preschool

can mean foreign language, music and ballet – in addition to math, phonetics and fine-motor tuning – for