Monday Morning Checklist: Back to School Checklist for Suzuki Parents

School is about to start for many children in the United States, and teachers are preparing to open up the teaching studio and fire up lessons for the coming school year. I have been musing about the kind of preparation that I want my Suzuki families to do in order to be ready for the fall semester. Here is a checklist of some items that I think are important for Suzuki parents to consider.



- [ ] **Check the size** of the student's instrument. Many children have gone through growth spurts in the months since Spring, and this would be a good time to check that the child's instrument size and the size of the shoulder rest or sponge is still the appropriate fit. For piano students, check the height of the footstool and cushions to be sure that your child's posture is correct.

- [ ] **Renew Supplies:** Check that your child has the necessary supplies to start the new school year on the right foot. Maybe this is a good time to throw away that cracked and crumbling lump of rosin that is littering your child's instrument case with sticky rosin crumbs. Does your child have the appropriate music books? Are you ready to order your child's next book level? Do you have the recording that you need? Where is that recording anyway? Maybe it's time to buy a new one because the old one is cracked or lost.

- [ ] **Reconsider extracurricular activities:** Take a really hard, honest look at the type and amount of extracurricular activities you have scheduled for your child. Let us be honest here. You as the parent are the person responsible for setting up your child's schedule and allowing it to become overcrowded. Does your child really need to participate in all those activities? Remember a jack of all trades is usually someone who is a master of none. Simplify your child's life and stress level by keeping the amount of extra activities to a minimum

- [ ] **Schedule Practice Times:** Grab your family calendar again. Take a good look at when you can schedule your child's practice times. Maybe you need to go so far as to actually schedule these practice times on the calendar so that everyone remembers to get it done. Remember too that we are not looking for a quantity of practice time spent practicing. As a teacher, I am glad that my students practice every day. I want to see that, even if there are short practices on occasion. I want to see my students spend more time trying to practice smart rather than a lot. Much more can be accomplished with smart practice then can be accomplished with a lot time spent in practice. Ask your child's teacher for help to determine how to do a smart practice.

- [ ] **Calendar lessons, group classes, and studio events** on the family calendar. As you do so, note any conflicts and sort these out in advance. Your teacher may be able to accommodate a change in schedule if you ask in advance. Although I try to be helpful, I find it to be a very difficult adjustment when a parent calls me one or two days before the lesson that needs to be rescheduled. I may have to sit down with these parents who seem to have a chronic problem with scheduling and actually review the family calendar with them.

- [ ] **Clean out** the music bag, the instrument case, and anything else you use to hold the materials for lessons, group classes, and practices. Have your child help you do this so that the two of you can share a few giggles over some of the lost treasures you will find. You may even spark a renewed interest in practicing when your child discovers that lost dice that you used to play that practice/review game you used to enjoy so much in the past.

- [ ] **Repair and renew**. Make sure your child's instrument is in excellent playing condition to start the new year out on the best foot. Tune the piano at home. Change the violin strings and rehair the bow. Make sure you can lay your hands on the recordings that your teacher expects you to be listening to at home. If the CD is scratched or lost, purchase a new recording. Polish the instrument with the appropriate polish for that purpose. If the instrument needs repairs, take it to a reputable shop that will make these repairs.

- [ ] **Stock up on fun teaching aids** to help you and your child enjoy your practice and home learning situations. You will find these aids at your local teacher or educational supply store or on the Internet. I schedule an annual visit to several teacher stores in neighboring towns and pick up many teaching supplies for the coming year as well as generate new enthusiasm for the year ahead and spark new ideas for fun activities.

- [ ] **Renew your commitment** to lessons and music instruction. Set a high priority on the music activities your child has -- lessons, group classes, and studio events -- and allow these commitments to hold a high place on your list of things to do. Do not allow other things to distract from the wonderful good things that your child is learning in these activities.

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