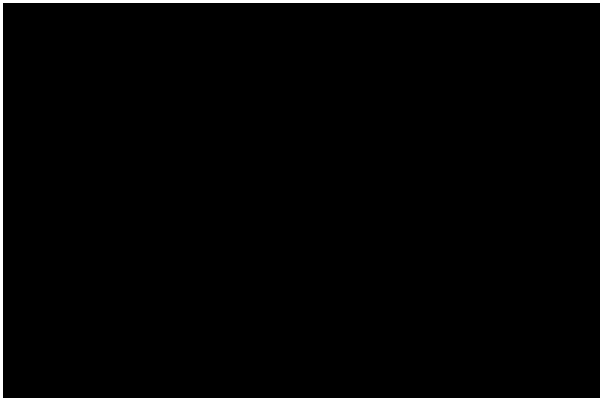


## Donation helps elementary school give students free violins



John D. Russell/MORNING NEWS

North Vista Elementary School fifth-grader student Frarazia Johnson plays her violin during the Violin Project Kick-Off Celebration at the school Monday in Florence. The Florence Symphony Guild and First Reliance Bank teamed up to purchase 30 violins for the students, who get to use the violins through middle school if they continue to play in school music.

By [SHIREESE BELL](#)

Morning News Reporter

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Students at North Vista Elementary School were given free violins in hopes of building self-esteem, an appreciation for the arts and enhancing their educational experience thanks to a donation from First Reliance Bank and the Florence Symphony Guild.

About 30 Montessori students in grades three through five at North Vista received the violins and instructional materials needed to start the project. Some students put the instruments to use during the school's violin project celebration Monday.





North Vista music teacher Diana Pauley introduced students participating in the project and directed them through several musical selections.

She said the students are excited about the opportunity to play the violin, and the program will help build students' self-esteem and enhance their education.

"I think it will have a wonderful impact on the students," Pauley said. "(I'm) just overwhelmed and have been excited about doing it.

"To watch the kids enter the classroom, I can see it in their faces that they're (eager to learn)."

Pauley said the first group of students began in October, and attend classes every Monday for 45 minutes. The next group will begin in January.

North Vista's violin project is similar to a project started at Wallace-Gregg Elementary School in 2007 with funds from First Reliance Bank and other donors.

Joan Billheimer, community development officer for First Reliance Bank, said she was interested in starting a project in Florence after watching a "60 Minutes" segment on The Strings of Soweto. She said she hopes the program can continue to expand.

"We wanted to present this opportunity to all children," Billheimer said. "I just want them to gain an appreciation for the arts."

Sharon Dixon, the school's principal, said many children wouldn't have the opportunity to play a violin and is in awe of the community support to bring the program to the school.

"It means a whole lot to us to have this project started at North Vista because research has shown that when children are involved in musical experiences, it helps them to enhance their academics as well," she said. "We're looking forward to them being excited about being in the music program."

Betsey Marlowe, president of the Florence Symphony Guild, said the project is a great way to get students interested in the arts and that one day some of the students may become members of the local symphony.



Laura Greenway, performing arts coordinator for Florence School District 1, will develop the curriculum and tracking system to determine the success of the project.

The purpose of the project is to offer hands-on experience in instrumental music that is designed to enhance critical thinking; develop musical skills using a variety of learning styles; and show educational and personal gains in all areas of instruction.

Students who complete the project will be able to keep the instruments.

*Courtesy of* **News 13** Morning News

