About Smart Start

AN ENGAGING, NEUROSCIENCE-BASED, EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Smart Start is an Early Childhood Music Education (ECME) curriculum designed to awaken a curiosity for music in children, ages 0-6. This group curriculum was developed by The Royal Conservatory (RCM), in collaboration with neuroscientists, and RCM's most accomplished music educators. This umbrella of experts combines 60 years of thought leadership in music education, with science-backed research to deliver the rich, developmental benefits, to all children, in their earliest possible stages of learning.

With each child's developmental stage in mind, the Smart Start curriculum consists of 30-weekly classes, varying in length by age group, delivered by a specially trained music teacher. Lessons are filled with fun and engaging activities that guide the child through foundational music principles fostering cognitive development. Smart Start empowers every child and their family to experience the wonder of learning music, while benefiting from the advantages of early cognitive education.

SMART START PHILOSOPHY

Every child should have access to high-quality music education, from the earliest age possible. The RCM's extensive work with neuroscientists has shown that music training, in the stages of early childhood, is linked to an improvement in cognitive function. Using this insight, the Smart Start program was created to nurture the core developmental traits of reading, memory, and IQ through music education. Thus, making music the cornerstone for continued lifelong achievement.

BEST IN CLASS TEACHER TRAINING – THE SMART START INSTITUTE

DEVELOPED BY LEADERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC PEDAGOGY, SMART START IS A COLLABORATION WITH NEUROSCIENTISTS AT THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY RESEARCH CENTER

The Smart Start Institute will be providing training, certification and licensing to all potential Smart Start music educators. To maintain consistency and the highest quality of learning, all Smart Start teachers must complete a 30-hour training course along with written assignments, video submissions and one year of mentorship from Smart Start Mentor Teachers. This course covers how to best incorporate cognitive skills and use Smart Start materials. It is offered both online and in-person. Asynchronous (Digital) learning options are being developed to mirror the current in-person course and will be available by January 2024.

Prospective Smart Start teachers should have strong musical skills, but do not need to have experience teaching young children. This course is ideal for music educators who wish to broaden their teaching profile.

AGE-TARGETED CURRICULUM

Unlike many ECME competitors, Smart Start does not group different age ranges of children together. Instead, Smart Start groups children by age to cultivate their musical and cognitive skills, offering seven distinctive courses, focusing on ages 0 through 6. Each course delivers a range of unique activities, which aim to spark an enthusiasm for learning, while fostering musical ability and building cognitive growth.

RESEARCH-BASED

All course activities have been reviewed by Dr. Sean Hutchins, the RCM's director of research and in-house neuroscientist, who has documented the cognitive, perceptual, and linguistic outcomes of children in Smart Start. Findings show a connection between development of skills, such as vocabulary size and pre-reading ability, and an improvement in early childhood musical ability. Putting years of research into practice, The RCM has shaped Smart Start to foster achievement, beyond what is expected in normal development, in every child.

SMART START
A program by **The Royal Conservatory**

CONTENT AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Smart Start curriculum is based on content standards specific to each of the seven early childhood age groups. These fully align with Head Start ELOF and Performance Standards, and the National Music Standards. All aspects of Smart Start, from expectations, activities, lesson plans, to communications with families, directly support Head Start outcomes in ELOF. Many ECME programs claim such alignment but fail to show how and where this alignment happens.

DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE SONGS AND ACTIVITIES

Smart Start is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The curriculum leverages a wide variety of songs, games, rhymes and listening experiences, collected from different time periods, and global cultures. Repertoire is unique for each age group, so children will always be exposed to a new variety of activities as they progress through the learning groups.

INDIVIDUALIZED AND MEASURED COGNITIVE, SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MUSICAL OUTCOMES FOR EVERY CHILD AT EVERY AGE

Smart Start teaches advanced musical concepts from early childhood onward. Since the curriculum is progressive, when a child reaches the final courses, they will have gained experience in playing pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments, basic sight-reading, ear-training, and composition. To celebrate the progress of every child, educators will deliver a tool to track developmental milestones. With this preparation, the child will have a solid understanding of music theory and be able to begin private lessons on the instrument of their choice, with a marked advantage over the typical beginner.

SUPPORTED BY DIGITAL RESOURCES

Smart Start classes are supported by digital resources for both parent and child. These contain music and lyrics for the songs used in class. They also provide parents with descriptions of

Smart Start's musical and cognitive goals along with personalized data for their child. They are intended to help the parent continue the child's learning at home and provide some extra visual context to support their in-class experience. Parents will also have access to weekly, age appropriate and fun activities along with additional resources and articles for continued learning.

Smart Start Teacher Training

The power of Smart Start training will transform and enhance the mindset and technique of the teacher for the collective benefit of every child.

SMART START TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM INCLUDES:

AN INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE SKILLS

Unlike other ECME programs, activities in Smart Start use activity prototypes to explain the process of both cognitive and musical learning in each lesson.

RESEARCH ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING MUSIC

During a four-year study of 246 children in Smart Start, we documented improvements in vocabulary size, phonological memory, rapid symbolic and non-symbolic naming, and singing accuracy. Our research also indicated that children who remained in the program longer, experienced a greater increase in both musical proficiency and cognitive fundamentals. Regular standardized testing showed results above the baseline for normal development.

AGE SPECIFIC CONTENT

Each activity in Smart Start is based on content specific to each of the seven early childhood age groups. Teachers learn to identify these age-specific stages and how the child can be best stewarded through musical activities.

SPECIFIC MUSIC TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR SINGING, MOVEMENT, PLAYING INSTRUMENTS, MUSICAL LITERACY AND BABY CLASSES

Smart Start activities immerse every child in the musical experience, using specially designed, phased teaching techniques. This differs from standard ECME programs, which are based on "joining-in" and repetition. Instead, Smart Start creates authentic encounters which foster exciting musical ideas. This comes from our teachers learning to create and teach rich processes for deeper learning.

ACTIVITY DESIGN TO FOSTER CREATIVE THINKING

Smart Start pedagogy gives children the tools to formulate their own creative responses, by activating higher order thinking skills – especially, cognitive flexibility. Teachers learn to recognize and develop these skills to inspire ingenuity from the earliest ages.

TEACHING PRACTICE

Teaching Smart Start, involves learning a more challenging repertoire, and honing new educational skills and strategies. As such, the RCM provides low-stakes assessment opportunities – we give teachers feedback, and an environment for discussion, which encourages professional growth. An extended practicum continues this support beyond the end of training.

ORIENTATION TO OUR PROGRAM RESOURCES

The training program gives teachers many opportunities to explore the Smart Start content and resources using different lenses, e.g., cognitive skills, musical concepts, musical medium and specific age groups.

TAUGHT BY TRAINED, PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS:

Training instructors are Smart Start Mentors. These, well trained, musicians also have a rich background in teaching children using the Smart Start approach.

2023-2024 Pricing

Provider Licensing	$299 yearly
Teacher Training	$499 ($299 for teachers of licensed providers)
Teacher Licensing	$129 yearly
Registration Fees	$30 per student per semester ($20 in summer semester)