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Jefferson Middle School, Albuquerque
Principal, Ivy Langan
Project, "Motivating Minds Through Music:
Grant Amount: \$2864

1. Project Description

With a PNM Classroom Innovation Grant, hundreds of middle school students of all academic abilities and economic backgrounds at Jefferson Middle School will receive daily, in-depth, individualized musical instruction which is currently only available to students who can afford private lessons and instruments. All students will develop the skills and knowledge that can empower them to become lifelong musicians, and will also receive learning experiences that can strengthen their academic capabilities in all subjects. This PNM grant will greatly enhance every student's experience and elevate the already successful Rock and Rhythm Band program to a whole new level of academic effectiveness and benefit.

Jefferson Middle School's Rock and Rhythm Band music classes provide 7th and 8th grade students with a phenomenal, hands-on, group musical experience. It was created as an alternative to the standard music classes (such as orchestra, band and chorus) and was designed for students who love music but have no experience, interest or abilities in these traditional programs, or simply have difficulty meeting the cost and educational requirements of these programs. Kids have been flocking to Rock and Rhythm Band classes since its conception in 1996. It is the only school program of its kind in New Mexico.

In 7 years, it has grown from 30 students in 2 classes to 180 students registered for the 6 classes offered next year. The program has earned much local recognition, including feature story coverage on the local news, the radio, the Tribune and the cover of Albuquerque Journal's Venue Entertainment section. Students say they feel safe expressing themselves in Rock and Rhythm Band classes and for the first time feel like a successful part of a community.

A group of 25 students with no musical experience can be transformed into a good sounding band using an innovative, alternative teaching method. The program motivates kids to come to school everyday, keep their grades up and stay out of trouble. "This is the class that gets me coming to school everyday," was a remark shared by a student in a KUNM radio interview in April 2002, although hundreds of other past and current students have expressed this identical sentiment.

This energizing, non-traditional approach has limitations. Currently, students learned enough to perform together as a successful band and discover the wonderful experience of expressing themselves musically. What is lacking is daily, in-depth instruction in technique and more fundamental music skills and knowledge. The wide variety of instruments available for use, along with the drive to keep students engaged, limits the depth of what can be taught during class time. Since we don't have enough of one particular instrument for a class of 25 students, I have to run back and forth from the vibraphones players to guitarists to keyboardists to percussionists to singers, demonstrating parts of the songs and maintaining student involvement. This bouncing back and forth keeps everyone engaged but I am unable to provide more detailed instruction. With enough of one particular type of instrument for a whole class, this more rigorous instruction would be possible and keep an entire class engaged with new, exciting musical challenges.

We are asking for a PNM grant to purchase 16 guitars to add to the 9 currently used in the program. With a guitar in every student's hands, whole classes could receive detailed instruction in technique, chords, scales, improvisation, music theory and song writing on a daily basis.

The skills developed through this project such as discipline, goal setting, concentration, problem solving, critical thinking and teamwork will not only create more well-rounded young musicians, but these skills will also transfer to other school subjects and future job-related endeavors. Research shows that students who acquire musical skills have higher success in both language and math development, as well as greater self-confidence and self-esteem.

2. Project Objective

This project will:

- Strengthen overall academic performance by instilling in students a desire to come to school and engage in meaningful learning experiences.
- Teach kids that artistic activities like Rock and Rhythm Band classes require the same kind of commitment, dedication and focus on learning that is needed in any academic subject.
- Enable students to transfer the skills learned in Rock and Rhythm Band to other subjects in which they might be having difficulty,
- Provide adolescent kids with an active learning experience that reaches to their personal interests and helps instill greater confidence and self-respect in all aspects of their lives. It demonstrates to kids that they can accomplish things they never thought they could do but always wanted to do -- such as creating music that they personally enjoy.

3. Project Evaluation

The success of the overall Rock and Rhythm Band program has already been measured in concrete ways. For example, each year, an increasing number of students seek to be in one of these elective classes. Every year, more parents request that their children be enrolled in one of the classes. At concerts and through e-mail, parents express their gratitude about the positive effects of the program on their children. Due to its innovative approach and outstanding success inspiring students, the Rock and Rhythm Band program has captured the attention of the media, and the bands have been asked by many community organizations to perform at local events. The frequency of invitations to perform and coverage in the media continues to increase.

This project's success will be evaluated by the additional students being given the opportunity to explore their musical talents in a rigorous and in-depth manner. Everyday six classes of students will be able to demonstrate their new knowledge and skills on one of the guitars purchased through the PNM grant. This assessment will take place in class on a daily basis, during full band rehearsals and through in-class challenges. Maintaining an awareness of the progress of my students both in music classes and core classes will be accomplished through daily interactions with students and their core class teachers, periodic student surveys an in-class skills practice and testing. As a certified teacher in math, language arts, science and social studies, it is a natural process for me to help students make connections between developing skills in music and applying them to these core subject areas.

The success of this project will not end after one year. These instruments will last for years, with the potential to give thousands of New Mexican children the opportunity to play and develop a passion for music. This grant in support of additional musical instruments will give students, especially those from economically disadvantaged households, an artistic and academic opportunity that no other middle school in New Mexico offers.

4. Community Awareness

PNM will be recognized as a major sponsor of the Rock and Rhythm Band program in all flyers and parent letters sent home regularly with participating students. In addition, Rock and Rhythm Band concert programs, promotional posters, liner notes in CDs and videos (several already have been produced for sale, and more will be created in the future), and general school newsletters (mailed to all Jefferson Middle School families) will recognize PNM's contribution. PNM also will be publicly thanked at all concerts and performances, both at Jefferson and at all community events during the upcoming academic year. If a grant is awarded, Jefferson Middle School would welcome the opportunity to work with PNM's marketing division to promote this corporate contribution in ways that would advance the company's business interests.

5. Project budget

Brand ESP
Model LTD M-50 guitar
Unit price \$179
Quantity 16
Total Cost \$2864