

Music Alive and Well in Schools Thanks to Community-Based Effort



Kennedy Middle School student learns to play the violin.

Last spring as state budget cuts threatened to end instrumental music education in Redwood City elementary schools, the Redwood City community took matters into their own hands. With the support of the Redwood City Education Foundation (RCEF), a group of parents and local music teachers from both the elementary and high school districts came together and organized the Save Our School Music (SOSM) campaign, specifically designed to raise money to save the instrumental music program. In five short months, the campaign organized a series of events that raised a total of \$90,000 — just enough to keep the \$300,000-plus music program alive for another year.

“I took this on because as a community it is up to us to prevent further cuts to a well-rounded educational experience,” said Kennedy parent Georgia Solkov Jack, who headed up the SOSM campaign. “Kids need to learn in many ways because it strengthens them overall as life-long learners. And from a personal perspective, this program directly affects my own son, who, like many other students, really needs a break from pure academics to stretch himself in other ways.” Solkov Jack, who works as a development officer for Stanford University, brought a full range of professional strategies to quickly raise the funds needed.

According to RCEF President Jo-Ann Sockolov, the foundation has long supported music out of the conviction that music improves academic and social skills. For many students in Redwood City, the instrumental music program offers the only opportunity they will ever have to learn an instrument. In turn, the local high schools, which are governed by a separate high school district, rely on elementary schools to graduate students who play instruments to keep their band and orchestra programs alive.

While the district still needed to reduce the number of music teachers from four to three and will no longer offer instrumental music to fifth-graders, the money raised by the SOSM campaign enabled the district to preserve instrumental music instruction for sixth- to eighth-graders, which will give students the basic instruction they need to join the band or orchestra when they are in high school.

The money raised also enabled the RCEF to extend its Music for Learning program, previously offered only to second- through fourth-graders, to all fifth-graders in the district. Music for Learning is a sequentially structured general music program taught by professional educators from the Music for Minors organization. The program has been fully funded by the RCEF for about 15 years. The program provides instruction in singing, rhythm, movement and listening for younger students and playing the recorder for fourth- and fifth-graders.

“We wish we could continue to teach fifth-graders how to play a band or orchestra instrument, but this solution provides a silver lining to our loss,” said Superintendent Jan Christensen. “Now all fifth-graders, even those who would not have signed up for instrumental music, will have education in

music-making and music literacy. This program will help prepare them for learning an instrument in sixth through eighth grade.”

The SOSM campaign was a multi-faceted effort that involved close to 50 volunteers investing many hundreds of hours over about 20 weeks in a variety of fundraising activities, including a direct contribution appeal, the “Groovin’ in the Grove” music festival and pledges gathered for participating in Redwood City’s annual Fourth of July Fun Run.

“Groovin’ in the Grove” which featured an afternoon of family-oriented entertainment by local bands, high school groups and other area musicians performing, followed by an evening benefit concert featuring the popular local groups Dúo Cascada de Flores, the San Francisco Bay Jazz Ensemble, Corazón Al Sur, and Bing and the Bingtones, raised \$10,000 toward the campaign. The Fourth of July Fun Run raised another \$25,000, and the balance of the funds came from private donations ranging from \$1 to \$6,000.

The \$90,000 raised by the SOSM campaign boosted the RCEF’s total fundraising to \$460,000 — the largest amount it has raised in its 20-year history. The SOSM campaign has a goal of raising \$150,000 in 2010–11.

“We are grateful to the RCEF and our community for stepping up to the plate to make sure our students are able to learn music and benefit from many other enrichment activities,” said Christensen. “We are very fortunate to have many partners who take an interest in our students.”

For more information on the SOSM campaign, please visit the RCEF website, www.rcef.org/music.

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