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Paul Morse Wed Sep 08 2010 2 0 Recommend

Grade 1 tunes in to new music plan

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Inner-city Hamilton school kids will be making a different type of music, thanks to an innovative program that introduces orchestral instruments much earlier in the curriculum.

A \$125,000 seed grant from a local philanthropist will help bring a pilot instrumental music program to Grade 1 students, to be debuted at King George Elementary on Gage Street North starting this year.

The four-year program, called An Instrument For Every Child, will expose the Grade 1 class at King George to violins, violas, cellos, trumpets, trombones, horns, flutes, clarinets, guitars, mandolins, accordions, recorders, percussion and two ethnic instruments such as the balalaika.

Next year the children will begin taking lessons on their instrument of choice, all free of charge.

The funding came from Hamilton businessman Paul Lloyd, president of home security firm Pasword (CRQT) Protection.

"It's going to be wonderful," said elementary education superintendent Kryz Croxall of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

"It won't be large to start with because this will be a pilot year."

Croxall said music is an integral part of the provincial elementary curriculum, but is generally limited to instruments such as recorders and rhythm instruments. Learning orchestral instruments doesn't begin until Grades 6 or 7.

"Kids that are really enthralled by the support they get in their music classes in Grade 1 will have the opportunity to select an instrument and they will be provided with that instrument and lessons right after school."

An Instrument For Every Child in Hamilton is modelled on a successful German program that grew from 300 children seven years ago to more than 50,000 kids today. It has also expanded to Venezuela.

Hamilton's version is the brain child of Astrid Hepner, a professional saxophonist and chair of the Hamilton Music Collective, and is in partnership with the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra.

"The idea is to expand it to as many schools as logistically possible," Hepner said.

More than just another music program, An Instrument For Every Child is a social project at heart, giving children a chance to learn teamwork and relationship skills through music, she said.

The four-year AIFEC program will bring a qualified music instructor into the King George Grade 1 class for 45 minutes once a week this fall to "supplement" the classroom teacher's music lessons.

The children will learn about beat, rhythm and music notation, and be introduced to the instruments over the course of the year.

Hamilton Music Collective and the school board are working with Long & McQuade Musical Instruments to supply child-sized instruments where necessary.

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Grade 1 tunes in to new music plan: Students from Adelaide Hoodless School participate in the Jazz in the Hubs program brought to their school by the Hamilton Music Collective and the Mohawk College Jazz Band. Their working to make music a part of every students curriculum with their "A instrument for every child program".

Cathie Coward/The Hamilton Spectator

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