

Business Plan for Amber Flores, Music Educator

Community Partner: Amber Flores, Music Specialist at Greenleaf Elementary and Laurel Elementary (both located in Gold Valley, Oregon).

Mission Statement: Equalize education opportunities for music students attending Greenleaf Elementary and Laurel Elementary, and compensate for resource deficiencies caused by a lack of district funding and overtaxed PTAs.

Vision: Ms. Flores's vision encompasses three main goals:

1. Provide elementary students at Greenleaf with the same opportunities as those provided to students at Laurel by acquiring new instruments, books, and curriculum materials.
2. Supplement out-of-date text materials and acquire more music education tools for both schools.
3. Positively impact the lives of as many students as possible by engaging them through music.

Description of Programs and Services:

Ms. Flores teaches approximately one hundred and fifty students per week at Greenleaf and four hundred and fifty students per week at Laurel. First through sixth graders receive music instruction twice a week for twenty-five to thirty minutes per session, and the kindergarteners receive music instruction once a week for twenty-five minutes. Each child in grades four to six receives about eight lessons on the guitar and eight lessons on the keyboard per year.

After-school band instruction is an elective provided to sixth grade students only; the students attend two sessions per week at forty-five minutes each, from October to the end of May. Only a few loaner instruments are available and most students must provide their own instruments, limiting participation by low income families.

Although music specialists in the Gold Valley district are subject to frequent transfers between schools, Ms. Flores has been at the same two campuses for last ten years. Her qualifications are as follows:

- BS in music education with an emphasis on the clarinet, from University of Texas, 2000.

- Master of Education, Curriculum Instruction, Reading Specialist from Concordia University, 2013.
- Fourteen years experience teaching music in the public school system, pre-k through sixth grade.
- Kodaly Level I, 2007.
- Orff Level I, 2010.

The schools:

The Gold Valley district has missed two textbook adoptions; the existing program is circa 1998 and is less culturally sensitive than it should be for the diverse population it serves.

Greenleaf Elementary is not a Title I school, but at 51% free and reduced lunch it qualifies for Targeted Title I funds. Laurel is located in a more affluent neighborhood, with a higher level of parental involvement and support.

Both schools have aging instruments, out-of-date text materials, and a lack of culturally relevant materials. Both schools have projectors and computers; however, Laurel has keyboards and guitars, while Greenleaf does not. The guitars were purchased by parents at Laurel at the request of Ms. Flores; the Laurel keyboards were salvaged from another school that was closing.

The relevant statistics for the two schools (as reported in the 2012-2013 school year) break down as follows:

Greenleaf:

- Enrollment: 154 students
- 80 kids in grades 4-6
- Free and reduced lunch /economically disadvantaged students: 51%
- ELL students: 27%
- 3 languages represented
- Students with disabilities:15%
- Hispanic/Latino population: 31%
- Spanish is the primary second language
- Fairly mobile population
- Serves a migrant camp
- Located in a rural/agricultural area

Laurel:

- Enrollment: 426 students
- 200 kids in grades 4-6
- Free and reduced lunch /economically disadvantaged students: 38%
- ELL students: 15%
- Students with disabilities: 15%

- 13 languages represented
- Hispanic/ Latino population: 21%
- Spanish is primary second language
- Serves apartment dwellers
- Located near major tech companies

The Gold Valley school district is considered to have a high mobility student population, with students frequently changing schools due to housing instability.

The situation:

At present guitars and keyboards are borrowed by Greenleaf from Laurel, and are transported back and forth by Ms. Flores personally. This arrangement is possible only because Ms. Flores is the music teacher at both schools; should she be relocated within the district, Greenleaf students would lose access to the instruments.

In the past ten years, PTA groups at the two schools have funded several big purchases at the request of Ms. Flores: guitars (\$1200) and xylophones at Laurel (\$3,000) and xylophones (\$6,000) at Greenleaf. Additionally the principals of both schools have chosen to purchase one supplemental material each for \$110 a year for the music program. The latter happens on a year-to-year basis, as the budget allows.

However, with the downturn in the economy, parent funding is stretched thin and parents are able to give less. Young families are in worse shape financially than they used to be, and teachers are finding it difficult to ask for and receive support.

The benefits of a solid music program:

Music is a vital part of a well-rounded education experience, and can benefit a student population in many ways, including the following:

1. English Language Learners (ELL) who may be struggling in other subjects due to language barriers can be opened up through music. Spoken language isn't completely necessary in music instruction; ELL students can figure out from pictures, visuals and teacher demonstration how to play the instruments. For some students this can lead to genuine engagement, a feeling of accomplishment, and greater success in the learning process overall.

Student example: A student named Juan arrived at Laurel with no understanding of the English language. Within three weeks, he figured out how to play the keyboards, through teacher demonstration and his own persistence. He worked really hard to be able to play for the class and pass the test.

Ms. Flores is particularly interested in acquiring some of the newer Spanish programs, such as those offered by Jose-Luis Orozco, which would help Spanish-speaking students feel more welcomed and represented. The songs in the program are culturally authentic and would engage English-speaking children as well, enhancing cultural understanding within the student population.

2. Music instruction is highly beneficial to children with disabilities, and can be an area where they feel a degree of success they are unable to achieve in other subjects. Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) students in particular respond to the vibration and tactile nature of guitars. Greenleaf hosts the D/HH program for Washington County, and it is vitally important that instruments are permanently available to these students.

Student example: A special education student at Greenleaf named Noelia persevered in band this year despite falling further and further behind in her academic classes. Because students don't need to be highly verbal or have a high level of synthesis or analysis to function in music, Noelia was able to feel successful and view herself as part of an encouraging social group.

Guitars are also therapeutic for students who have behavioral or emotional problems. Guitars are tactile, not too loud, and the vibrations are soothing. They have an element of "coolness" that is a guaranteed hook.

3. Music reinforces a sense of community and encourages children to work together. It is the one of the few areas of education that has retained a team aesthetic; it embodies whole class instruction with one teacher. Most of the education system is becoming so individualized (with tailored learning and onscreen instruction), that students are offered few chances to unplug and engage at a community level. In music they can feel they are a part of the school, part of a team. Music promotes empathy, creates global citizenship, and encourages appreciation for others.

When children are singing together there is a positive natural reinforcement: they can hear when it is going well, when their voices are working together. You can see their joy when they master a song, and it's a "we" accomplishment. It's positive peer pressure; they must build each other up, keep each other on track, and work together toward a common goal.

4. Music success is effort-based; students can shine in a music classroom in a way they can't shine in other classes. It is one of the few places in education without the pressure of individual test scores. When they master a new song or skill, they feel valued for who they are, in the context of the group. They forget about their problems and, for just those few minutes, they feel good enough. Ms. Flores finds this to be a key aspect of the musical experience, and strives to hit that feeling at least once a day.

Funding Objectives:

Ms. Flores has identified several funding objectives, one of which will be addressed this year:

1. Purchase a set of guitars for Greenleaf Elementary.
Specifics: Twenty $\frac{3}{4}$ sized Hohner guitars with nylon strings and five ipads.
Cost: Approximately \$1500-1600.
Types of grants to look into: Music-specific grants such as Fender and Mockingbird, and general education grants such as the NEA Student Achievement grant.
2. Purchase a set of keyboards for Greenleaf Elementary.
Specifics: Twenty Yamaha or Cassio keyboards, plus batteries and chargers, two ipads, extension cords, accessories.
Cost: Approximately \$4,000.
Types of grants to look into: Music-specific grants such as Fender and Mockingbird, and general education grants such as the NEA Student Achievement grant.
3. Supplement classroom materials for both Greenleaf and Laurel by purchasing music books. In particular, add quality Spanish language music materials to promote cultural awareness and address the needs of ELL students.
Specifics: Ten resources.
Cost: Approximately \$500-600 .
Types of grants to look into: Equity grants.
4. Purchase additional band instruments for both schools.
Specifics: Two flutes, two clarinets, two trumpets and two saxophones.
Cost: Approximately \$3,000.
Types of grants to look into: Fender grant, equity grants.
5. Purchase guitars for a newly created after school club. A hot topic now is STEM vs. STEAM; Greenleaf Elementary is a STEM school, trying to become a STEAM school. One possible approach for funding new instruments would be to look at STEAM grants, which typically fund after school programs. If Ms. Flores were to receive a grant to buy instruments for an after school program, she might be able to use them in the regular curriculum. (This would be an alternative plan for objective 1.)
Specifics: Twenty $\frac{3}{4}$ sized Hohner guitars with nylon strings and five ipads.
Cost: Approximately \$1500-1600.
Types of grants to look into: Fender grant, equity grants.

Note: any instruments acquired through grant monies will stay with the school, and not with the teacher (Ms. Flores).

Action Plan:

This year the pursuit of grant monies will address the most pressing concern (the purchase of new guitars for Greenleaf Elementary), unless a grant is found that perfectly suits one of the other objectives. Remaining objectives will be addressed in future years, in order of importance.

Achievements:

Ms. Flores understands the importance of follow-through on any grant requirements, and has a history of making good on those requirements. She and six other teachers were recipients of a joint Classroom Innovation Technology Grant in 2011-2012. As a result of that grant, she currently has the use of eighteen student ipads for one month every year. A condition of the grant is that she make use of lessons written with specific apps, and write two blog posts per year, which she will be completing during the fall of 2014.