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Greenfield Union expands music program

Turnaround Arts grant helps district's students connect with musical possibilities

By Claudia Meléndez Salinas, Monterey Herald

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Greenfield >> William Bradle has been at Mary Chapa Literacy and Technology Academy since October, but the music teacher already has an ambitious vision for the school: to have a thriving rock band, to put on a musical every year, to assemble a choir, a band program and a percussion ensemble.

“Those are my big cornerstone pieces,” he said. “Other than that, the big overarching goal is to have students connect with music in a big way, and music for more varied angles, have them connecting to music through varied disciplines.”

To that end, Bradle, 28, is welcoming students to his class to the music of American composer Steve Reich, who helped pioneer the “minimal music” style, while displaying a painting of Piet Mondrian, a contributor to the De Stijl art movement. It’s Bradle’s way to help students connect with the “vast possibilities of music.

“My goal is to bring them closer and closer to the art of music, not just something we learn about in school but actually something they identify with, something they can pick a favorite artist or a favorite style to listen to,” he said.

Bradle’s vision fits right into that of Mary Chapa Academy, which was designated as an arts school three years ago. It’s a vision that has so invigorated the school that it has expanded to the entire Greenfield Union School District, where now there’s a music teacher at every school.

“Music appreciation and the arts is a way of life in our district,” Superintendent Kimberly Berman said in an email. “Our governing board recognizes that students thrive in environments that provide enrichment and opportunities for expression.”

Bradle joins veteran district teacher Janice Hurlburt, who now will concentrate at Vista Verde Middle School; Matt Huott, who joined the district last year and is now at Cesar Chavez Elementary; and Laura Carabay at Oak Avenue Elementary.

Through the Turnaround Arts grant, which provided professional development for teachers, students at Mary Chapa have seen a significant increase in arts education, something that can be seen in the school’s day-to-day activities. There are two murals now adorning the walls of the schools and concerts galore year round.

“Just this week alone, I think we’ve enjoyed a musical performance at every one of our school sites,” Berman said. “Our halls and buildings are filled with the masterpieces our children have created in our schools. We know students who have early musical and art training will develop the areas of the brain related to language and reasoning. It also leads to a greater sense of achievement and engagement. By honoring what comes naturally to our children, we are fostering true artists and musicians here in Greenfield.”

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