

IPEI and FABG: Community Partners for Student Needs

By Heather Zimar, Ithaca College Graduate Student and IPEI Intern

BJM Students Receive New Violins With IPEI and FABG Support

Support from a Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG) Mini-Grant and Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) Red and Gold Grant enabled Aaron Buck, Ithaca City School District (ICSD) strings teacher, to purchase three half-size violins, including case, bow, rosin and string, for students at Beverly J. Martin (BJM) Elementary School. The project, "Violins for Little Hands," has helped 3rd and 4th graders start music lessons earlier and with better instruments. FABG Mini-Grants are awarded to teachers for programs that support the arts in schools. Red & Gold Grants are one-time awards to teachers, administrators, students and community members to assist with programs that strengthen and enrich the schools.

"The grants for BJM have given more students, who otherwise would not have had the opportunity financially, the chance to study the violin," Buck said. "It is amazing to see how well the students do on instruments that are well built and sound incredible. They have more pride in themselves and seem to work more."

This year more than 25 BJM students were on a waiting list to receive a beginner violin, many of which were in poor condition. The new violins have given students the chance to start lessons sooner, an important factor in their musical development and academic success. "Beginning study at an early age is easier when the child is less self-conscious and less distracted by peers or other outside activities," Buck wrote in his grant application. "Studying music helps with math skills, helps with developing focus, and supports self-confidence."

"It's really important these kids have what they need to get started," said Pat Dolson, a parent volunteer at BJM. "They're so excited they have a violin to take home."

Dolson said the grant-funded program called attention to the need for more instruments in the district. "It has started a conversation that has changed things for the district's music program," she said. "It warms my heart to give these students instruments that fit their bodies. I'm so happy that the FABG and IPEI exist to help support this program."

IPEI is a community based not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that develops supportive community and private sector relationships with the Ithaca City School District. Founded in 1996, IPEI is committed to connecting school and community through collaboration, engagement, gifts and grants. For more information, see www.ipei.org or contact 256-IPEI (4734) or ipei@ipei.org.

FABG, founded in 2001, is an affiliate of IPEI and works in partnership with the Ithaca City School District to advocate, support and celebrate all the arts for all the kids.

The Fine Arts Booster Group is celebrating its 10th year. The all-volunteer group's first effort was *A Festival of Talents*, a showcase of school talent and an art exhibit, designed to raise money for the purchase of instruments. The Ithaca City School District's instrument supply was not adequate for student interest and in disrepair. Today the district and boosters work in partnership to address student needs. The district has a system for instrument inventory and replacement. The boosters enrich this system with grants for special and unique instruments, as well as supporting experiences for kids. To see funded grant projects, visit the booster website at www.fabgithaca.org/receive.