

Music, PE Teachers Bring Comfort and Connection to Elementary Students

When formal distance learning began in late August, AUSD's elementary PE and Music teachers had two ambitious goals. In addition to providing their regular curriculum, they wanted to provide social-emotional support to students. They also wanted to create equitable opportunities across the district. And they had to do so within the constraints of online learning and not having teachers at every school.

"It was important for us to provide equity and access across the island," says Bonnie Nelson Duffey, (aka "Miss Bonnie"), the music teacher at Bay Farm School who now teaches third grade music across the island. "And we knew we wouldn't be taking an easy road to get there."

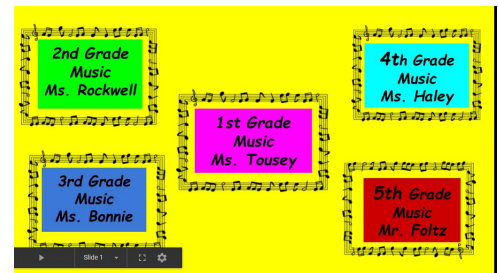
Though the path may have been challenging, the resulting programs provide insight into the creative ways that AUSD teachers are both converting online constraints into equitable opportunities and providing community for students who have been sheltering in place since March.

"Warmed, Soothed, and Loved"

AUSD's elementary music team is comprised of five teachers (two of whom work full time and three of whom work part time). Music instruction is made available by grade level several times a week; students from all of the elementary schools can tune into those lessons.

The teachers use their Google classrooms to post educational posters and links to lessons that the students can use on their own or while following the teacher's lead. Those lessons cover music concepts (such as beat, rhythm, tempo scales, and reading music), famous composers and performers, and video and audio recordings of music of different genres and cultures. (This month, for instance, Lynn Tousey, who teaches music to all of AUSD's first graders, posted both classical and jazz versions of "Sleigh Ride" for her students to explore, plus [a video of the Ronettes singing it](#) - for a little extra dance practice).

5th grade music teacher Dan Foltz is using the online platform to teach his students how to play different parts to a song (e.g., piano, recorder, ukulele, vocals, and rhythm - using body slaps and a plastic cup - for *Clair De Lune* this week). By practicing all the parts, the students get a more holistic understanding of how a song is put together.



Music teacher Lynn Tousey uses a puppet to keep her first grade students engaged online.

The teachers also focus on social-emotional learning - by asking students what they are thinking and hearing, for instance, and helping them feel engaged. Tousey and Nelson Duffey also use puppets to talk to their students, and several teachers provide visiting hours (via Zoom) for

students to have a time to interact with their teacher and peers.

"I want my students to be warmed, soothed, entertained, loved, and engaged while they are learning about the language of music and building their brain," Tousey says. "My nickname is BIG MAMA for a reason. I want my kids to love coming to music and have fun." (Speaking of fun, Miss Bonnie made up a song about her music classes to the tune of the SpongeBob SquarePants theme - think "Who teaches you music from inside your screen...It's Miss Bon-nie" to get the idea).

The teachers have also taught the students how to make musical instruments - a homemade shaker made of a water bottle with beans or beads inside, for instance, or using a box as a homemade drum. "We don't expect students to have musical instruments at home," says Nelson Duffey, "so we have fun creating them ourselves! The cardboard toilet paper roll kazoo was especially 2020!"

"Creating Shared Experiences"

AUSD's elementary PE team is composed of two full time, two part time and one student teacher -- each of whom teach one grade level across the district. Students receive live Zoom classes every week, all of whom are helping students with Social Emotional Learning. "It's our number one focus," says Beth Clifford, who teaches second grade. "It's vital for these children to have a way to make and keep connections across their PE community."



To do so, the teachers include instruction in techniques such as mindfulness, yoga, and breathing. They also align instruction and activities with lessons that may be being taught in class. When first and second grade students were reading "How Full is Your Bucket," for instance, the PE teachers issued a "Kindness Challenge" encouraging students to find ways to use their "super power of kindness"

in their own lives.

"One of the things that's exciting about this year is that by teaching the same grade across all the schools, we're creating shared experiences across the district," says Heather Demarest (Coach D), who is teaching first grade this year. That shared instruction includes special days such as Crazy Socks Day and Field Day. Adds Clifford, "This grade-level approach shows that the PE dept is unified, collaborative, and giving students across the island equitable access to PE experiences."

Make no mistake - all students are still learning about ball skills, hand eye coordination, fitness, balance, anatomy, and health (using household objects for equipment as much as possible). They are also having an opportunity to connect with each other and have fun. This is key during the pandemic. "As specialists, we are able to help students connect with each other and the larger school community," Demerest says. "We see them - they're talking to each other."

Clifford says the learning curve was very steep when she first started using Zoom and other online platforms to prepare her lessons. But coordinating with Demerest (who was more comfortable with the technology) and lots of brainstorming and practice helped her get up to speed. “The more you can collaborate, the easier it is to apply,” she says.

“I am deeply appreciative of the initiative, hard work and passion that our incredible specialists have put into continuing these important enriching experiences for our students,” says Chief Academic Officer Sara Stone. “Approximately half of our elementary students are currently signing in to these classes. We know that music and physical education are important for mental and physical health. I hope that more of our students will begin to take advantage of this in the new year.”