

An arts revival at Tonica Grade School

Students now provided opportunity to explore music and art interests

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TONICA — When schools face tightening budgets, the first victim of cuts are often art and music programs. However, Tonica Grade School (TGS) has announced students will again have access to the types of artistic training which have been proven to result in a better overall education.

Superintendent/Principal Chuck Schneider said the TGS district had cut the music program last year prior to his arrival and that the decision was the result of the dissolution of an intergovernmental agreement with another school district.

“What we’ve worked for and promised our board and the community was to strive to bring back our music and arts programs,” he said.

Schneider said the district has recently finalized an agreement with the Grand Ridge School District to hire and share a certified music teacher.

“We’ve hired a teacher and will have general music classes back in the elementary, K-5 grades and we’re also happy to be able to get the band and choir started again for our older students,” he said.

Since some students didn’t have the chance last year to explore an interest in music, Schneider said the beginning band classes will be open to multiple grade levels.

To bring back an art program to TGS, the district has entered into an agreement with Young Rembrandts, an after-school art program which was recommended by parents who told the school the program was looking for schools to partner with.

According to the Young Rembrandts’ website, it was founded in 1988 and has since grown into an international franchise providing art education to thousands of students by teaching a step-by-step method to draw, the fundamental skill of visual arts.

Young Rembrandts franchises partner with preschools, elementary schools and community centers to either augment or supply art programs.

“There are visible academic benefits for children that participate in our program. Young Rembrandts’ students have fun while developing fundamental art literacy and improved academic abilities. We are passionate about helping children develop the skills they need to be successful,” Young Rembrandts founder Bette Fette said on the website.

“It’s for kids who want to go, parents do pay a fee and it’s after school, but we have about 17 kids go on Thursdays for about an hour. Our students have been very excited and their response has been positive about the opportunities they now have with both art and music,” Schneider said.

He added these types of programs provide students who learn in a different way a chance to be able to express themselves and bring out their creative side.

“For kids who aren’t sports-oriented, music and art provides an avenue for them to have an interaction in the school environment and to explore something they can be passionate about. Doing any type of critical thinking exercises helps bring about better skills,” Schneider said.

Acknowledging that the expense of musical equipment can be inhibitive to families, TGS will try to have an array of instruments available for their students.

Schneider said the challenge with these programs is that available funding impacts the ability of what schools can offer.

“It’s important for the school to have well-rounded programs and it’s also important for families to support them through fundraisers and by always encouraging children to take advantage of what’s offered, because if interest wanes it’s hard to continue to justify it in the budget,” he said.