



Initiatives in Action: Youth Success Initiative



We can do more together.

Music Makes The Grade!

It's 2 o'clock in the afternoon at Stevens Elementary School in Wheat Ridge. The music room risers are filled with students standing at the ready, violins tucked under their chins, bows poised to slide across the strings.

Music teacher Traciann Heisler patiently counts, "1-2-3". Scratchy and sweet, the melody is a familiar one. *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

"This has been a dream of mine since forever," beams Heisler, as her students play on.

This is the first year for the Stevens Elementary Violins. 32 students ranging from kindergarten to third grade are part of this new musical extra-curricular string section. It's made possible through Mile High United Way's Lights On After School Program which provides funding for quality after school programs for thousands of students each year throughout metro Denver.

Lights On After School is part of Mile High United Way's Youth Success Initiative which strives to provide students with the support they need to succeed in the classroom, graduate from high school and move onto higher educational opportunities.

Rather than potentially being left unsupervised after school ends, studies show that when boys and girls regularly participate in positive, enriching after school activities, their school day attendance and academic performance goes up.

And that is exactly what Heisler is hoping the violins do for her students. She is tracking how the skills used to learn an instrument- focus, reading music, counting time- translate to classroom work and performance.

"It's so exciting to see them progress. I can't wait to see where it goes," says Heisler.



TOP: Practice time for the Stevens Elementary violins.

BOTTOM: Learning to play the violin is helping students focus in the classroom

Music Makes The Grade! - cont.

As for the students, many of them had never picked up an instrument before. But, now they confidently read music, count time and can't stop talking about their new found talents.

"I was better than I thought I would be," says six-year-old Salvador Martinez Serrano.

"I had never learned to read music, but I caught on real fast," says 9-year-old Marissa Twitl.

"Mozart inspired me," says 9-year-old Patrick Martin.

"My parents watch me practice," says six-year-old Aliyah Rothstein.

"The kids need this," says Stevens Elementary Principal Marie Norby-Loud. "Without the funds provided through Mile High United Way's Lights On After School, we could not provide this unique learning experience for our students."

Safe, fun, motivating and educating, Lights On After School hits all of the right notes!

For more information about our Youth Success Initiative, please visit our website at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

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Mile High United Way