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To Whom It May Concern:  

My students LOVE the Guitars in the Classroom program! Our first grade team have been working with GITC with Teaching Artist, Jefferson Jay since the beginning of this school year. Before beginning with his classroom leadership and coaching residency, all four of us teaching first grade at this Title 1, IB (International Baccalaureate) school participated in 10 hours of pre-residency training with GITC Director, Jessica Baron and Jefferson. This helped prepare us to integrate music with literacy, science and learning through the power of song.  

Our students have learned so much. They have acquired important foundational musical understandings and skills. Each one knows how to properly hold the instrument, strum, pick, and even play multiple chords to accompany their singing. After getting down the basics, they have begun songwriting - their learning has taken off!  

My students are now able to sing, play and write new lyrics to simple folk songs. Some favorites are “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” and “Are You Sleeping” and they can work together to replace the lyrics with content from what they have learned. They have created songs about maps and cultures (Social Studies), addition and subtraction (Math), and sun, stars, and planet rotation (Science). By focusing their songwriting on STEAM topics, they are also developing more eloquent expressive language and improving their literacy skills. And that's just the beginning.  

The students are working in groups to create and perform original songs. They are learning how to be a conductor, keep the beat, and control their rhythm (tricky skills in first grade!). The impact goes beyond just learning content - there is one student who has never uttered a word in school before, who is now singing in front of the class. Music has given her, as it has all of the children, the confidence to stand up and speak out.
The next step is to compose and perform our final original songs for this school year in front of the school community. We have just started our Healthy Me unit; learning about the human body. The content lends itself perfectly to songwriting. We have already had the parents come in to participate in the writing and singing process with their children! After our school performance, we will be performing at the local theater. The children will debut experience performing on a major theatrical stage at the North Park Conservatory, a world class concert venue located a block from our campus. This will be our culminating performance.

Collaborating with Guitars in the Classroom has been transformative. Our lessons have grown into a wonderland of teaching and music. Students are engaged, excited, and present. They are coming to school on time to be there for morning songs. They are transitioning quickly to maximize our learning. They are involved in taking ownership of their own education. Not only have we seen an academic increase since the program started, but we’ve seen attendance rise as well. Moreover, we, as teachers, have grown as well. We have stepped out of our comfort zone and been challenged to tap into our creative side! The learning for both the students and us have flourished this year!

On behalf of my colleagues, Mrs. Ballante, Mrs. Valnezuela, Mrs. Bhatt and myself, I wish to recommend Guitars in the Classroom to any district or school hoping to address the Title 1 needs of their students through the arts, or to any charitable organization considering placing their trust in this organization. They have taken great care in their work to deliver this very valuable training, to support our progress, and to provide us with support in the form of instruments, accessories and materials. We hope to continue and encourage you to take the next step in engaging with them.

Most sincerely,

Dana Archer