Dear California Arts Council Grant Review Committee,

My name is Ulyana Wms-Kohlmeyer, Principal at John Hope Continuation High School in South Central Los Angeles. Our school is a small learning environment with three classrooms that serves approximately 59-89 students at any given time. Our students are from a very vulnerable population. The majority of our students are Hispanic and are from high poverty neighborhoods with challenging life circumstances. They have been impacted by or are at elevated risk of being engaged in the juvenile or adult justice system, depending on their age. All of the students at John Hope Continuation High School have fallen behind on their high school credits from their comprehensive campuses. These students desperately need a motivating experience to help them re-engage and stay engaged in learning, one that directly boosts their literacy skills and mathematical competencies. Music is one path that could help many of our students with this motivation.

I believe that music and our Guitars in the Classroom teacher, James Clarkston, have been and will continue to be the saving grace for several of our students. Some of my favorite quotes from our students in the program this year are “I’m not sure I would have gone to that class if there was no music ...”. Another student said “... this has helped me get motivated to continue school after my parents died...”. Another student said “... it taught me a lot about guitars... guitar class made me acknowledge and worship music in life.” Another student said “The guitar class is pretty fun and brings good vibes. We are all laughing and playing the guitar. It motivates me to play the guitar even more and it motivates me to go to class. It also makes me want to play the guitar even more in the future so when I get stressed I can just play my guitar and make music to calm me down.” Another student said “…Mr. James is so nice and patient... He made learning fun...”.

As you can see, because of Guitars in the Classroom with Mr. James Clarkston, we were able to reach and teach our students through an art form that captured their attention and motivated them to sustain it. We would be missing a crucial opportunity to turn their prospects for the future around if we do not continue such programs.

Continuing to immerse our students in literacy through music next school year will help to sustain and yield innumerable benefits such as improved academic performance, increased attendance, better work ethic, increased confidence, and it may unearth hidden passions and talents. At the end of the day, they will have strong musical skills especially on the guitar. The residency will allow them to go deep and learn to play classical, acoustic and electric instruments in that order.

I feel confident that continuing Guitars in the Classroom teaching artist residencies to John Hope Continuation High School will benefit these students on many levels and beyond, as the program has already done for our students. It will continue to provide them with opportunities to experience joy and increased academic and interpersonal success through learning to play the ukulele and guitar, and to sing and write songs together.

Please allow this letter of support to serve as an agreement between Guitars in the Classroom and the John Hope Continuation High School to collaborate together and serve here in 2021-2022. We thank you for considering supporting our school and GITC to bring the joy of making music to our students. With your help, we can improve the quality of their lives and give them affirming, encouraging and uplifting musical experiences and lifelong skills they can rely on as they take on the challenges of adulthood. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ulyana Wms-Kohlmeyer
Principal
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