

Music enthralls students at Tapestry Magnet

Amanda Karioth Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

Delilah Sills believes that every child who wants to learn to play a musical instrument should have the opportunity to do so. "It would make the world sound amazing and it would be a happy place with beautiful music," she said.

Delilah is a second grader at Apalachee Tapestry Magnet School of the Arts (ATMSA), and she's been playing the violin since the first grade. She enumerated the various benefits she's gained from her instruction.

"You make new friends. You hear music and you get to learn how the process goes. I love the violin, playing it, plucking it, learning new songs, learning new patterns, and making new memories that I can look back on when I grow up and say, 'I had a good childhood.'"



ATMSA second graders continue refining foundational skills they gain as first-graders. AMANDA THOMPSON

Her classmate, Trenton Penny, is also enthralled with the violin. He enjoys exploring new rhythms and refining foundational skills related to the proper hand and finger placement.

"We do 'candy cane' fingers when we hold the bow. Your fingers should be curved like a candy cane," he explained. Though he easily rattled off examples of the mechanics of his playing, he confessed "I'm not that good at describing my feelings about playing. I like using my violin to do that for me."

This is exactly what their strings teacher, Jimmy Gillis, is hoping for. "When you have trouble expressing yourself, that's a source of frustration," he said. "A class like this helps them with that. They're learning that to express yourself, you have to have a skill

See MUSIC, Page 4C

Music

Continued from Page 1C

set, whether it's language or violin skills."

Gillis has been teaching music at ATMSA for more than 20 years, and he developed a full-time strings program more than a decade ago. "That's a unique thing," he said. "If a public school has strings, it's usually a fifth-grade program, but it's very rare to have it start as a first-grade program." He knows of only one other public elementary school in the state that offers a class like this to first-graders.

There are no costs associated with the pro-



Jimmy Gillis's violin students gain confidence and skills. AMANDA THOMPSON

gram. Students have access to instruments, music and instruction as part of the regular curriculum. As a Title 1 school,

ATMSA has a large concentration of low-income students and Gillis explained, "it would be hard to get parents to think of

investing in something like this for a first-grader, but the school provides everything for them, from head to toe."

Starting at such a young age creates a unique opportunity for students to develop not only musically but socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Gillis can describe what's happening to his students' brains using words like "corpus callosum" and phrases like "myelination of the neural pathways", but aside from that, he affirms that this program simply helps them grow into who they're going to be.

"They're more confident, they learn how to focus, their attention span increases, they're better able to problem solve. They're juggling a lot of things in their mind as they play these instru-

ments. You're taking all the skills you've learned, and you try to apply those skills to make your playing artful. If you're just hacking through the pieces, you're not going to get a lot of those great benefits. You have to really learn how to play, and as you do, you're gaining more tools for self-expression. The more you can express yourself the happier you become. My students, they just seem really happy to me."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).