



BIRTHPLACE OF COUNTRY MUSIC®

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I write to enthusiastically support the application of songwriting-in-schools program Kid Pan Alley. We recently hosted Kid Pan Alley in all 5th grade schools in Bristol, Virginia, and the program was educational, engaging, and inspiring. The creativity and expression we saw coming from the students convinced me that we will certainly bring these artists back into our community's schools again.

Kid Pan Alley, under the leadership and instruction of Paul Reisler and Cheryl Toth, is a program that effectively turns kids into songwriters during a week of artists in residency. I observed these songwriting sessions and was impressed at how *every single student* participated. "Every idea is a good idea" founder Paul Reisler teaches the students, "because when you are creative, even an idea not used this time is a something that leads you to the next one." The program was met with much enthusiasm by school leaders, local media, and our community who committed to attending the students' final performance because these are songs written by these students themselves.

The program is of high quality, as the instructors guide students through the language of lyrics, genre and style, and self-expression. Each song's line comes from a student, and these lines build upon each other in an energetic and equitable process through which students grow in their comfort with stating (and singing!) their ideas, learn to respect one another's contributions, and share in the creative process. Students also participate in creating melodies, voting on stylistic elements, and choosing the song's keys.

The program's biggest value may be something not observable in the classroom, but comes when students from underserved communities such as ours with low incomes, low parent involvement, and difficult home situations learn that their voices matter and they have something important to say.

Kid Pan Alley is a program that rallies young students to find the best in themselves and their communities through a music education program that synthesizes learning, self-expression, individualism, and community—it's the kind of program every student in American should experience.

Regards,

Jessica Anderson Turner, Ph.D.

Director, Birthplace of Country Music Museum (A Smithsonian Affiliate)

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