

## Project GRIT

4-14-26

((Nat. violin tuning))

Hicks: That's the sound of Rachel Taft tuning her students' violins at Mountain View Elementary. Taft works with project GRIT, a program that provides free after school music lessons at Title 1 elementary schools in Salt Lake. GRIT stands for Growth, Resilience, Instinct, and Tenacity, working to teach those skills to students through accessible music education.

((Nat. shifting practice))

Hicks: Taft has been involved with the program since the beginning, and has been teaching classes with GRIT for nearly 12 years.

Taft #1: "I like to say that the primary goal is to help nurture fabulous young people. And music education is a way to be able to help them get there. So curriculum wise, in our after school program, how I'm teaching, we focus on fundamentals and technique and violin repertoire and a little bit of music theory, and then play time, of course, lots of musical play."

Hicks: Fifth graders Isla and Paloma are students in Taft's class, and have been taking violin lessons through Project GRIT since they were in the second grade.

Isla #1: "My favorite part is getting to meet new people and finding out to do something I really like."

Paloma #1: "I like learning, learning like songs that I've heard of, or like, like knowing song, like learning songs that I know"

Hicks: Project GRIT operates as a part of The Gifted Music School. Outside of GRIT, the gifted music school offers private lessons through their preparatory program, and a full-scholarship conservatory. Erika Hubbard spent three years teaching GRIT classes, after moving back to Utah. She explains how there are a lot of challenges in accessing quality music education, but GRIT is able to reduce some of those barriers.

Hubbard #1: "within the realm of like, especially like classical music, violin, which I teach like, a big barrier is just getting instruments. Instruments are expensive. Another big thing is, generally people start string instruments pretty young, and that requires a lot of parent support. So if you have parents who are working multiple jobs, or have a lot of kids, or whatever else, and can't be there to help. It's pretty challenging for kids to be able to learn an instrument like that and do it completely on their own, because it's so unnatural. It's not like singing or something like that, where you don't have to figure out the tools and all of that. But aside from that, there's also just a lot of really expensive programming it's hard to fund."

Hicks: That's why GRIT's focus on title 1 schools is so important. Taft says without projet GRIT, students likely wouldn't have access to similar opportunities

Taft #2: "we talked about how music education is very cost prohibitive. And you know, when you're growing, you're a you're sizing through different violins and the lessons, you're having a lesson every week, and they're very expensive. And I think the right now where all of our attention is and our. Economy. It's very difficult to even access meals every single day for some people. And no, I don't think that they, many of them would even think, I think to take a music lesson in an ideal world, what do you think like the future of this project"

Hicks: GRIT's objective is about more than just teaching violin. The ultimate goal of the program is 100% college acceptance for students who complete the entire program. Music education is associated with positive impacts on test scores and school attendance, but GRIT's teachers see value beyond it.

Taft #3: "it's multifaceted. I think we know the facts that music expands our minds. It aids in attention, in creativity, it improves reading and science and math, and we have that data, and I also think that music is art, and art is resistance, and it empowers young people."

Hicks: Right now, the students at Mountain View are preparing to perform at the music school's annual gala.

((Gala class discussion Nat.))

Hicks: This year they will be performing a piece titled Oye Como Va.

((Oye Como Va intro ))

Hicks: Funding opportunities like the gala are important in helping expand the reach of the program.

Hubbard #3: "Well, I mean, I will say we have a long way to go in music education, access. I think there are, I think it's an incredible program, but there are still, there's gaps, because the vision of the school is for grit to be a pathway into the other programs. If students choose that, they could eventually come to Conservatory. But right now it's that's not so possible, because if you have students who have been taking private lessons every week since they were four, six or eight, even these other kids are getting group classes twice a week. There isn't personal individual lessons yet, which is really hard to find. It's really hard when they serve so many kids, and it's harder when resources are spread more thin. It's harder to get as much parent involvement. And so I feel like we have a long way to go to make it so it really is a pathway where students, if they're really motivated and want to from our grit programs, could go on to Conservatory, and that could open doors to scholarships and whatever else, but I feel like we're on the right track, but there definitely is a gap there still."

Hicks: Despite that gap, GRIT has had a clear positive impact on it's students.

Isla #2: "although violin does require lots of hard work, memorizing and honestly, a few fairly failures, I would definitely say that it's a wonderful instrument to play."

Taft #4: "I think that so many of these students that I teach music is already a part of their culture and community. And so there's a lot that I have learned from them that they show me. And then, you know, we do a lot of classical music here, and expanding, expanding their understanding of music that way. But I think music brings people together. And so from that sense, you can build a community and embed it in communities."

Taft #5: "oftentimes, when I ask students, sometimes we have scholarships for private lessons, and I'll ask a student that's been in grit, if they're interested, and they're like, No, I love group classes. I love learning with my friends. So I think there's also an element of the community that they appreciate"

Paloma #2: "Yeah, I would probably it's really fun. So like, and anyone, not anyone, could do it. But if you start learning like, it's not that hard to like, it's hard, but it's not like impossible, like, you could start at any time and get like, better. Yeah, you can get better at violin."

Isla #4: "You can't get better at flying, though"

Paloma #3: "like on a plane, or like"

Isla #5:" literally flying. You can't do that. That is impossible"

Myra: I'm Myra Hicks, reporting

((Oye Como Va outro))