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Link Community School gains new instrumental music program

Link Community School, an independent middle school in the Central Ward of Newark, has recently launched an exciting after school instrumental music program for its students. Twenty-five students are scheduled for lessons on various instruments including flute, violin, cello, guitar, piano, clarinet, drums, trumpet and trombone taught by classically trained graduates of The Juilliard School, Yale University and other notable institutions. Along with the lessons, students will participate in the school orchestra that will rehearse and perform throughout the year for special events at the school.

For several years Link has worked toward enhancing students' experiences in art and music as a way to broaden their knowledge and experience. Building on the school's existing music program, which features group keyboard lessons and music appreciation, the new program of instrumental music lessons and an orchestra will help students develop greater skills of musicianship, performance and music appreciation. Keisha Cleveland-Baptiste, Link's vice principal and director of studies states, "Music is a universal language that transcends all cultures and times. Link's mission is to graduate responsible, resourceful citizens who give back to others. Many of our students are creative, have a natural love of music, and have no fear of being center stage. We are delighted to have classically trained musicians giving our students instrumental lessons and teaching them how they can change the world through music in the process. Our kids are really excited about this."

Link student Temitope Adeliyi is taking clarinet lessons and hopes to master it quickly. She said, "The enjoyment of playing a musical instrument will be with me the rest of my life. I have never had the chance to take lessons and feel very fortunate that we have this new program." Jorge Vega,

8th grader, chose to take lessons on the guitar as his church is looking for guitarists for worship services. He wants to play at Link and at church. Seventh grader Andre Ariss watched the instructors perform on each instrument and was inspired to choose the violin because of the “beautiful sounds you can make with it.”

Lenore Davis, professional classical pianist and friend of Link, and Derek Mithaug, executive director of the Judith G. Wharton Music Center in Berkeley Heights, NJ collaborated with Link staff to create the program with funding from the Frank and Lydia Bergen Foundation. Ms. Davis envisions the new music program as the pilot to an even larger one, to include more instruments and more students, resulting in a full orchestra--students playing on all major instruments -- within the next three years. She has observed “enormous enthusiasm among the students who might otherwise not have the opportunity for music lessons.” Mr. Mithaug agrees and states, “This is a great program with amazing musicians instructing a group of eager students.” Some of the instruments students will use have been donated to Link and monetary donations will finance the rental of other instruments.

Link Community School, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, serves 7th and 8th grade students with a range of academic abilities from families of limited means in Newark and the surrounding urban areas. For more information about the school, visit the school’s website at www.linkschool.org.