2026-2027 Gift of Music (Unit 4) and A Musical Gift (USD116) Grant Recipients

International Prep Academy 6-8 – Aaron Knight

A Sound Investment: Expanding IPA's Band and Orchestra

This grant will expand music education opportunities at IPA by providing much-needed percussion equipment and an additional viola for students in grades 6–8. With limited percussion instruments and only four shared violas, these additions will give students greater access to the tools they need to develop their musical skills and participate fully in band and orchestra.

Southside Elementary – Abby Crull

Little Music Makers, Big Stages!

This grant will provide 200 South Side elementary students in grades 2–5 with four meaningful live performance experiences at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. Students will experience music, dance, and theater while preparing through classroom activities and extending their learning through reflection, creative projects, and thank-you messages. Funding will support tickets, transportation, and a substitute teacher so the organizing music teacher can accompany students.

Centennial HS – Stefanie Eustice & Dylan Jarling

Diving into Sound

This grant will provide Centennial students with hands-on training in vocal production, sound engineering, and music recording, supporting choir, theatre, and music survey programs. New equipment will expand opportunities for advanced choir students to explore vocal jazz, a cappella, and popular music while giving students experience mixing, recording, editing, and producing music using digital audio workstations. These authentic experiences will help prepare students for future careers and college pathways in commercial music and sound production.

Franklin MS – Jaime Escatel & Nicholas Schulze

Bringing culture, diversity, and identity to the Band & Strings Room

This grant will support 278 music students at Franklin STEAM Academy by expanding the music libraries for band, orchestra, and jazz ensembles, which have tripled in size over the past three years. New music will include works by composers from underrepresented backgrounds, helping students see themselves reflected in the music they perform while learning about each composer's unique perspective. The expanded repertoire will also create opportunities for cross-curricular learning through connections to history, science, mathematics, and other subjects.

Jefferson MS – Robin Heltsley

Stands for Middle School Band

This grant will provide reliable music stands for 110 band students, replacing aging and damaged stands that frequently wobble, break apart, or cause students' materials to fall. New stands will create a safer, more functional rehearsal environment and ensure students have the equipment they need to participate fully in band each day.

Garden Hills Elementary – Brian Ford

Building the Band Part 3

This grant will provide 3–5 additional band instruments for Garden Hills, where 45 students currently share 39 instruments, with some relying on district loaners. Purchasing quality new or secondhand flutes, clarinets, or alto saxophones will give more students their own instruments and provide greater flexibility when instruments need repairs.

Yankee Ridge Elementary – Denise Campbell

Francophone: Ballet and Music

This grant will support Yankee Ridge's annual Francophone International Month celebration, reaching more than 500 students through a schoolwide performance highlighting French culture, art song, and ballet. Students will experience live vocal music and dance while deepening their appreciation for French language and the arts.

Urbana HS – Tamra Gingold

Classical Mariachi

This grant will support 35–45 students in grades 7–12 by expanding the school's mariachi music library with instructional resources and advanced repertoire. Students will explore the connections between classical and mariachi music, develop performance techniques through instruction and master classes, and research influential artists and regional musical traditions. These resources will strengthen students' musical skills while deepening their appreciation for Mexican musical heritage.

Urbana 6th Grade Center & MS – April Whyte

Broken Bows

This grant will fund 15 bows for shared string instruments at the Sixth Grade Center and Urbana Middle School, bringing instruments currently in storage back into use. The additional resources will help meet growing enrollment needs and ensure more students can participate fully in classroom instruction and school concerts, regardless of their families' ability to rent instruments.