

## The Redding Schools Story



Fifteen years ago, the public schools in Redding, California had no strings program. It had been eliminated along with many other strings programs around America as a common solution to budget problems. Mike McLaughlin, the school superintendent, had read about the benefits of young students playing an instrument and decided to try an experiment. He targeted Cypress Elementary School because it had the highest percentage of those living in poverty, the lowest reading scores, and an excellent music teacher on their staff. All third graders received two music lessons per week and the opportunity to become a member of the first performing group called 'Strings and Things.'

The Cypress experiment was successful from the beginning. Within the first year, reading scores for Cypress students went from the lowest in the district to near the top. Attendance levels increased, parents and other family members became more involved, and behavior improved.

The experiment at Cypress was so successful that after four years it was replicated throughout the entire district. As these students graduated from their elementary schools,

they had the opportunity to audition to become members of the elite and award-winning Sequoia Strings.

Now, Redding's strings program is thriving. There are hundreds of enthusiastic students involved in strings instruction. The Redding School District performed a study of graduating 8th graders who had been involved in the strings program for all three years of middle school. The results clearly favored the strings students on all variables including grades, attendance, and behavior.

In 2000, Classics for Kids Foundation (CFKF) became involved with the Redding schools, offering a grant toward a \$22,000 purchase of excellent stringed instruments. CFKF committed afterward to an ongoing relationship with Redding. Local arts champion and CFKF Board President Emeritus Judy Salter organizes fundraising performances featuring renowned artists and students from around Redding that raise more funds for stringed instruments. These events will provide many more quality stringed instruments for years to come for Redding's young musicians.