

## Hartford Schools To Receive 2,000 Musical Instruments

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VANESSA DE LA TORRE

Photo: MARC-YVES REGIS

**H**ARTFORD — The rocking out commenced shortly after the guitars, keyboards and drum set were unveiled Thursday on the Kennelly School stage.

First-graders in the auditorium rushed to open the boxes as if they came from Santa. Children tapped on keys and pretended to strum guitars — to the delight of city school administrators, who were at Kennelly to announce a new music education program in the district called Modern Band.

Over the next three years, about 2,000 musical instruments will be delivered to Hartford schools under a partnership with Little Kids Rock, a national charity that runs Modern Band, and SpreadMusicNow, an education fund created by the Connecticut-based BeFoundation, administrators said.

While Modern Band operates in 27 cities across the country, said Keith Hejna, a spokesman for Little Kids Rock, Hartford is the first school system to request and adopt the curriculum as part of its districtwide arts program.

“The way this is set up ... with some guidance from us, [students] can hop on and start playing,” said Jessica Hogan, a Kennelly music teacher.

Hartford schools contributed \$40,000 to the initiative this year, while SpreadMusicNow donated \$60,000, said Jackie Coleman, the district’s senior executive adviser for the arts. Twenty-two schools, including Kennelly, Bulkeley High School, Burns Latino Studies Academy and Classical Magnet School, are receiving the initial rollout of instruments this fall, she said.

Last month, Little Kids Rock trained 27 Hartford teachers from those schools during a daylong workshop on the Modern Band curriculum, which encourages students to improvise. After the training, Hejna said, educators can choose the instruments they need for their respective music programs.

So far, the nonprofit has given Kennelly School — home of an award-winning student drum line — more than a dozen keyboards, a drum kit, several acoustic guitars and a bass guitar with a Fender amplifier, along with extra strings and tuners.

The gifts are like a windfall, Hogan said. “Years ago, you’d want keyboards? You gotta go to tag sales.”

Kennelly music teacher Michael Pontecorvo said the school may create a piano lab; the influx of instruments “gives us a lot more opportunity for different genres of music.” Students in Modern Band can learn songs from artists such as Katy Perry, Adele and the pop-rock band Maroon 5, Hogan said.

Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, who played the piano growing up, said all Hartford students should have the chance “to play music, listen to music, talk about music and write music.” She said being exposed to music education can help students in math and other subjects.

But, she added, “I think it’s just important to learn music in and of itself.”