

JOSE VERGARA

Music Teacher at Miramonte Elementary

Jose Vergara is a music teacher at Miramonte Elementary (LAUSD). Prior to becoming a full-time music teacher at Miramonte, he was a general education teacher for fifteen years. Since 2009, Jose Vergara has volunteered countless hours to run the modern band music program at Miramonte, with the support of the national organization, Little Kids Rock.

Four times a week, when every teacher is wrapping up the day after a long day of teaching, you can find Jose Vergara preparing himself for band practice with his students. The diverse members of the music program consist of approximately 40 students, ranging from 3rd graders to 7th graders from various classes. Throughout the years, Jose has touched the lives of students in his class and in his band by helping them maximize their academic and musical potential. The first generation named themselves "The Big Deal" and the second generation has named themselves "The Next Big Thing." The band names indicate that students believe in themselves as much as their teacher believes in them. Unsurprisingly, those are not the only lives that have been touched by his relentless drive for success.

He has also changed the lives of the youngest students on our campus; all of which now believe that they too can someday be as spectacular as the kids in "The Big Deal" and "The Next Big Thing" because they see their brothers, sisters, friends, and neighbors accomplishing what some might consider the impossible.

In Mr. Vergara's music program, each student is prepared to perform several renditions of classic rock, pop, hip-hop and rap hits from the 70's to the present. He has developed the gifts and talents of students by building and strengthening students' self-esteem, confidence, showmanship, and artistic abilities. He teaches students, most of whom, if not all, have never touched an instrument or performed before a live audience. He teaches them how to play different instruments such as guitar, keyboard, bass guitar, and drums. Jose Vergara's students not only learn how to play multiple instruments, they also learn the technical aspects of audio/visual preparation. All students are involved in setting up the stage, laying out cables, maintaining equipment, and setting up acoustics and instruments. Students are also required to choreograph dances and sing as well. Students harmonize and rap their lyrics with the precision of some of the most popular artists of all time. At the end of a performance, students discuss their performance and reflect on the experience. Jose Vergara has managed to provide a safe, respectful, nurturing, and supportive environment, where students have learned to respect each other's talents, while also forming a support system for each other when facing individual and/or group challenges.

Under the tutelage of Jose Vergara, his students have recorded a song titled "One Voice" with Taboo from The Black Eyed Peas and have performed with Carlos Santana during the inauguration of the Carlos Santana Arts Academy. They have also performed for notable musical artists Rascal Flatts, Joshua Radin, Siedah Garrett, Jesse & Joy, drummer/producer Narada Michael Walden, Joe Robinson, Michael Beinhorn, and Heidi Joubert. His students have also been interviewed and featured on Univision's national TV program "Aqui y Ahora."

In May 2014 Jose Vergara was the recipient of the Apple Platinum Award given by United Teachers of Los Angeles. The award recognizes excellence in education and dedication toward students in the teaching profession. What makes this award extra special is that fellow teachers nominate the candidates, which goes to show you the deep respect and admiration his peers have for Mr. Vergara and his modern band music program.