

The Halls are Alive with the Sound of Music

☰ Kahn persuaded APS school officials to greatly expand the elementary school arts program. ☰

It may be a stretch to liken Janet Kahn to Julie Andrews, that bon vivant who brought the joy of music to the von Trapp family, but even so, Kahn has been hugely important to the expansion of music and other arts in New Mexico’s biggest school district after budget cuts left little of those joys to elementary school children.

About 12 years ago, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) drastically reduced art and music instruction at every elementary school, leaving students with little in the way of creative learning and expression. When the decision was made to restart a fledgling program, Kahn was hired for the job. The art and music teachers she works with say her charisma and personality made a tremendous difference to the support for the program.



“She (Janet Kahn) is tireless. It comes from being passionate and knowing how necessary art is in their lives,” ---APS art teacher.

“Her sense of integrity shines through and that’s why she’s respected and been able to do so much with the program,” says Rick Wild, who teaches music at APS. She managed to help grow the program from a tiny team of

“Through the arts, children learn differences are ok.”

11 music teachers and 11 art teachers to 88 teachers for 85 elementary schools.

“She’s had a strong vision of what it is to bring art and music into children’s lives, into their education, their development as human beings, and why that’s important,” says Wild. “She really is amazing. You want to do a great job because it’s going to reflect on her.”

“I love my teachers and I feel that what we bring to kids is just so terribly important,” Kahn says. “What they do for these students truly makes a difference in their academic and personal lives. The need to be creative in some way is really what makes us human and not just our opposable thumbs.”

“It’s all about art and what we want kids to know and have,” says art teacher, Gina Medina. “She is tireless. Janet allows us to create a real and varied curriculum within the standards and we can talk to her about ideas.”

Is art important?

Why bother with arts at all, some

might ask, when there is so much push these days to improve test scores and graduation rates? Really, it’s a mistake to separate the two says Kahn, because they enhance each other.

For students struggling with academics, sometimes it’s the connection to an art or music class that keeps them in school. “If your day is only filled with those things that you are struggling in, it’s harder to stay in school,” she says. “But if art or music is part of your day, then maybe you’re willing to show up – and study.”

The arts are a form of communication that doesn’t require words. For English language learners, the arts are a wonderful way to level the playing field in the classroom. Some children learn better

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Q & A: How Does Return to Work (RTW) Work?

Q: I retired last year. Is that Return to Work program still around?

A: The Return to Work program is still alive and well. It is scheduled to sunset in 2012. It will end on July 1, 2012 unless a new bill gives it a second life.

Most importantly, if you intend to take advantage of returning to work as a retiree, you must have a 12 month layout immediately before applying for permission to participate in the Return to Work program. The layout must have started sometime after your retirement date. If you have been doing ANY kind of work for an ERB employer in the 12 months before you apply you will not be approved for



Return to Work. You must have a request approved by ERB BEFORE you begin working under the RTW program

If you plan to work less than .25 of what the full time equivalent of your new jobs full time hours or earn under \$15,000 in a fiscal year you do NOT need the one year layout as you are not in the Return to Work program. You can work, as an ERB retiree, indefinitely under this rule.

If you have any questions about coming back to work for an ERB employer after retirement please call ERB at 1 (866) 691-2345 to make sure you are not jeopardizing your retirement income.

Member Profile Janet Kahn

kinesthetically, for example, than others do. Dance and drama teachers know very well how movement can be integrated into the classroom. The arts are a great way to use different teaching approaches to fit different learning styles. “No two children learn the same way,” Kahn says, “so a teacher needs to have a bag of tricks that’s wide and deep.”

Classroom teachers get support for arts

Kahn is eager to help classroom teachers supplement the art and music instruction their students receive, but recognizes the challenges. “The stress level of our classroom teachers is off the charts,” Kahn states. “They know students need the arts, but if it’s not going to be tested, they don’t feel they can fit it into their curriculum. So we offer a summer workshop for elementary classroom teachers that focuses on integrating the arts across the curriculum; this year we’re focusing on integration with math. By

making the workshop very participatory, by demonstrating the connections to content standards - and by giving them lots of free supplies, we have found that their confidence and comfort level with the arts is greatly increased. And as a result, we find that these teachers are much more likely to incorporate the arts into their daily classroom instruction.”

Networking with the community

Knowing how difficult the first few years can be for beginning teachers, the elementary Fine Arts program initiated an in-house mentoring program so new teachers can work with experienced teachers for their first two years. A partnership with the University of New Mexico College of Fine Arts and College of Education now places UNM students in art and music education programs with APS elementary art and music teachers for their student teaching experiences.

Kahn also works with over 40 arts-related community individuals and organizations

to help them bring their programs and services to students and teachers. “We are so fortunate to live in a community with such a wealth of arts resources to share with our schools.”

Not just yet

Kahn has been married to husband Charlie for 38 years. He buys and sells cattle and also grazes them outside of Mountainair when rains bring grass. They have two grown children, son Zach who’s studying in Colorado to become a physician’s assistant, and daughter, Jenni, a speech therapist, who also lives in Colorado with her husband and two children. Charlie loves to cook – beef, of course – and Janet loves historical novels and movies.

She’s thinking more these days about retirement, but isn’t ready to. “I need a plan, but I haven’t done that yet. I need something to retire to,” she muses.

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New Summer Retirement Seminars at ERB

ERB is offering special summer seminars beginning this summer. Since many educational employees have the summer off these seminars will be held during the day at two different Albuquerque locations. There will be three different seminars. Preregistration required for all seminars. Maximum participants – 25. Minimum – 10. All seminars go from 9.00 am to noon.

Questions and Answers: Thinking About Retirement (June 2 and July 7)

In this session we will informally discuss NMERB retirement benefits including Retiree Health Care Authority benefits.

NMERB Albuquerque office at 6201 Uptown Blvd. NE Suite 204.

Exercises from Ready or Not: Your Retirement Planning Guide (June 9 / July 14)

In this session participants will engage in interactive activities from 2 of the chapters from the book. Participants will receive a personal copy of the workbook. Be ready for an interactive session of discussion and small group work. **There will NOT be a specific discussion of NMERB benefits.**

NMERB Albuquerque office at 6201 Uptown Blvd. NE Suite 204.

Financial Planning for Retirement (June 16 and July 21)

In this session, held at the New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union training center at 3434 Pan American NE, participants will receive specific information about their personal ERB pension benefits. Paul Swanson of ERB will discuss pension benefit options as well as overview New Mexico Retiree Health Care benefits. In the second part of the session Joe Dooley and John Habe, Financial Consultants with NMEFCU, will discuss how to prepare for the financial realities of retirement.

New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union training center at 3434 Pan American NE.

To register, visit the ERB web site (www.nmerb.org/seminars.php) and fill out the registration form to get information on the location. We'll notify you of any seminar schedule changes.

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