

Dear Shirley and the Kansas Area 8 Board,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to borrow the loaner set of hand chimes. I changed schools this year and my new school has three classes of Developmentally Delayed students. I focused on using the hand chimes with these students. In the history of our school, this particular population has never performed for the school as a group in and of itself. I was determined to change this.

Our school has a holiday sing-along the day before winter break. That event became our goal. I first visualized our DD kids playing chords through visually adapted cues while our typically developing students sang. After trying several different types of visual cues (i.e. colors, names of chimes, names of the students), it became clear this was asking too much from these students. I was learning that a majority of these students struggle greatly with words containing more than 3 letters, counting past 1-5, and don't recognize all primary colors.

With the help of our wonderful Para-Professionals who attend music with these students, we decided to try assigning one chime to each student to play the beginning phrase of "Jingle Bells". This showed promise. Focus and eye contact is extremely limited with these students. We started noticing these things increasing through our work with the hand chimes. Two of our students have an aversion to holding things without dropping them. We asked a couple of our high-risk general population kids to help these students. It was wonderful to see our DD kids allow the helping kids to hold their hands and help them play. And the high-risk students, who were previously quite difficult to work with in their own music classes, shined with pride in helping them. They knew they were truly needed. It was a beautiful thing to observe.

After practicing as a part of our music class for 8 weeks, we were able to play at our holiday sing-along. It was a magical moment. Their parents were in attendance. They were SO excited! We sat them along the side of the student body so they wouldn't freak out so much when they saw all the kids looking at them.

This was uncharted territory for these students. We weren't sure how they would react. We started the assembly with a teacher asking the student body to listen and raise their hands if they recognized the song. It was a huge success! When we were finished the kids yelled "Jingle Bells" then gave a huge round of applause. Our DD kids were smiling from ear to ear. Some of them even came to music after the winter break carrying the slip of paper I had put in each chair so they knew where to sit. They were SO proud!

Because of your generosity in lending our school the chimes, I have now submitted a grant for our own set of hand chimes. Hopefully we'll have the equipment to have a repeat performance every year - and include hand chimes with our entire school population. Thank you for bringing joy into the lives of these exceptional students!!

Sincerely,
Tina Gadwood
Overland Park Elementary