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Celebrating the JumpStart Theatre 2020 Graduates

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Clark Montessori, Roberts Academy, and Oylar School completed their third and final year in the JumpStart Theatre program bumping the Cincinnati region graduates up to 12. Because the JumpStart Theatre showcase was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, JST will share their stories to celebrate the past three years.

Clark Montessori High School

When Clark Montessori applied for JumpStart Theatre in 2017, their staff said they wanted to start a theatre program because "a strong theatre program indicates a healthy school, and giving students a chance to connect with the surrounding community through theatre productions helps garner support for the school in the general population." Their first

production *Schoolhouse Rock Live! JR* involved 34 students who created props, set pieces, and even learned light and sound. More than 600 community members attended.

The following year, Clark chose *Annie JR*, an exciting challenge with a more complex set, tap dancing, and even a real dog to play Sandy. From this performance, JumpStart Theatre learned about Toby, a student who overcame a speech impairment to confidently perform in his first speaking role, supported by his castmates.



Remarkably, students were not the only individuals impacted by the Jumpstart Theatre program. Clark Montessori theatre staff Brenda Bushong, Mary Gibson, and Paul Tran were all enthusiastic participants who together showed up to training boot camps ready to learn and grow for their students.

Tran credits the JumpStart Theatre professional development boot camp to bring him out of his shell. "I've always been the math and science guy, quiet and observant, but as I have gone through each boot camp, I've become more and more relaxed, and I feel like I've transformed into a person who can just jump up, not care who is looking at me, and dance and sing and feel like I fit in with other people in other schools."

Hairspray JR. was Clark Montessori's last production in the program that was set to open when the school closed.

Roberts Academy

Roberts Academy joined JumpStart Theatre because they believed theatre would make a strong impact on their English-language learner (ELL) student population. They believed a strong drama program would play a critical role in both literacy development and students' comfort with English. Under the leadership of three teachers, Rebecca Stutzman, Tara Goettsch, and Ligia Cuevas Johnson, they began to see the results they had hoped for after only one year.

Stutzman shared, "During our first production *Schoolhouse Rock Live! JR.*, we saw great changes in our students. They gained confidence, their academics improved, and they were learning

songs, lines, and dances. The students who were not native English speakers made gains in their English which we saw evident through their test scores, conversational skills, social skills, and confidence levels.”



Twelve ELL students participated in the theatre productions at Roberts Academy. All 12 students demonstrated improved scores on the Ohio Test of English Language Acquisition, and eight of the 12 were integrated into regular classrooms.

Stutzman brought attention to a student named Joseph when she debuted her costume design skills in Roberts’ second musical *Aladdin JR*. He played the Genie with enormous confidence and humor. He shared, “Theatre has benefitted me from almost every aspect. I’ve gained new friends, I fit in so much better, and I’m just genuinely happier.”

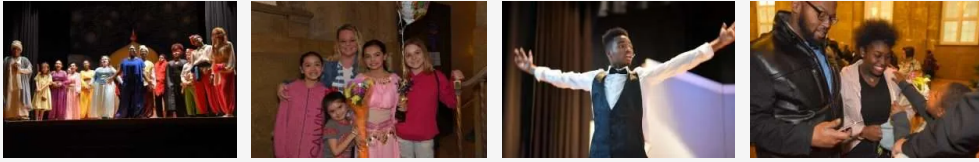
Roberts Academy began rehearsing *The Lion King JR*. during their final year in the program. A Broadway tour of the production came through the Cincinnati region in late winter and the actors playing young Simba and Nala visited the school to meet the Roberts students and chat about theatre, much to the students’ delight. Roberts scheduled their performances for early March and were lucky enough to be able to squeeze in an audience for one production before school was canceled.

Oyler School

Oyler School, which has a historically urban Appalachian population wanted to “provide the community an opportunity to celebrate the successes of students, too often lacking when high-stakes testing looms.” They hoped that the drama program would play a critical role in the community’s effort to graduate more students and see them systemically break the cycle of poverty.

A dedicated young performer named Tychod played Daddy Warbucks in their first production of *Annie JR*. and challenged himself and his castmates to strive to do their best. Tychod’s role earned him a scholarship to a Cincinnati Conservatory of Music summer camp, which allowed him to further explore opportunities

to improve his skills in musical theatre. Tychod did not have transportation to get to the camp, so his teacher, Tiffaney Hamm, often drove him because she knew that it could change his life.



The following year, Oyler performed *Aladdin JR* with an amazing set and costumes. The choreography was particularly noteworthy, full of life and energy, thanks to the patient leadership of teacher-turned-choreographer, Katie Fliehman. JumpStart Theatre mentor, Dee Anne Bryll often praised Fliehman for her patience and understanding that every student learns differently. Katie taught dance numbers to include all learning styles, breaking each one down by counts, visual elements, or musical cues.

Oyler’s theatre program always performed in front of a packed community audience that was exceptionally supportive of its students. Each scene concluded with loud applause and the curtain call was often met with a standing ovation. If they had been given the chance to perform *The Lion King JR*. this spring, it would have undoubtedly received what has become a signature community response at Oyler School, thanks to the efforts of teachers Tiffaney Hamm, Kelly Thomas, and Katie Fliehman.

Give a virtual ovation to Clark Montessori, Roberts Academy, and Oyler School! These three schools have brought numerous positive changes to the lives of their students and surrounding communities and we are excited to see where the future leads.

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