Kristin Umbarger-Keene

Dear Parents of Vale 1st-4th graders,

One of the things we continuously work on during music class here at Vale Elementary is matching pitch. Though many arrive at Vale already singing in-tune, “matching pitch,” or “singing in-tune” takes effort for most children, at least at first. One of the things all 1st-4th graders do at the beginning of each school year is sing *Happy Birthday* alone so I can hear each beautiful voice and assess each student’s ability to match pitch (sing in-tune). Here is how I score that assessment:

Scores:

1. Did not attempt to sing at all
2. Sang, but did not use head voice
3. Sang in head voice and sang one phrase in tune
4. Sang at least half the song in tune
5. Sang entire song except high note in tune
6. Sang entire song in tune

The goal is to sing all songs “in tune,” with a beautiful sound, breath support, and emotion. However, in the fall I am simply assessing the ability to match pitch. Throughout the year students practice singing almost every time they come to music class, where I use the assessment data to help guide my teaching. For example, if a child already scores a “5” for matching pitch, I will give that student much more difficult phrases to sing/echo/create, whereas a child who doesn’t yet use a head voice will be given vocal sounds to echo, such as sirens, cats meowing, or coyotes howling. Along the way we work on posture, breath support, and singing with meaning, dynamics, energy, and style, which are all possible regardless of the ability to match pitch.

I will be following up with a second formal assessment toward the end of the year so each child can see how he/she grew. If you have questions or comments about this process, or would like to discuss how your child is doing in music, please contact me at kumbarger-keene@cashmere.wednet.edu or at 782-2211.