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Raggae lesson in Belton, South Carolina



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By *Frances Parrish* of the Independent Mail

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BELTON — The third-graders walked around the room and played bongos and maracas while they sang Bob Marley's song "Three Little Birds."

KEN RUINARD/INDEPENDENT MAIL Breonnah Edwards (left) plays a guiro while singing the Bob Marley song "Three Little Birds" with fellow Belton Elementary School music students. The students learned about the origin of reggae music as

Why in the name of Miranda Lambert are Belton children listening to reggae? It's all in the name of diversity, which is why music teacher Gena Boggs is teaching her students the history and characteristics of the genre.

part of a diversity awareness program.



KEN
RUIINARD/INDEPENDENT
MAIL Teacher Gena Boggs at
Belton Elementary School
leads a dance with students.

"This can open the door to different music and even thoughts," Boggs said. "It prepares them for the world we live in. We have to be aware of people around us."

Belton Elementary School is just one of the campuses teaching the students about different cultures this week. Students have participated in activities such as sitting with different people at lunch, reading fairy tales from different cultures and learning different music.

To show the school's diversity, teachers had their students place a dot in the state or country where they were born.

Besides South Carolina, students placed dots in California, Alaska and Tennessee. On the world map, some students placed dots in Belgium, Germany and Wales.

"We felt like it would be another way to build community in the school, and to teach them to appreciate other for how we're alike and different," Principal Tracy Hedrick said, "I think the kids have enjoyed it and were excited to see that not everyone is Belton-born and raised."

Deanna Chitwood, 8, said this week she's learned about what makes her classmates different and about other cultures.

"I think it's fun because when I get older I want to travel all over the world," she said.

The diversity initiative started as the capstone project for a leadership class at Furman University last year. The project was centered around the concept of a unified South Carolina.

"Our team came together and came up with a program to encourage young people to talk about diversity in a nonconfrontational way and even a fun way," said Clemson University's Frankie Felder. . "We thought how do we strengthen the community?" Felder is senior associate dean at Clemson's graduate school.

City of Anderson-based Anderson School District 5 piloted the program

under the guidance of Felder and her leadership class. Students in nine of the district's schools participated in different activities created by teachers and principals. One school hosted a local artist while another taught students what it was like to have a physical disability.

This year, the program has grown to include some schools in all five of the Anderson County school districts as a way to expose more students to diversity, an important concept for people of all ages to understand, Felder said. She added that some employers consider college graduates unprepared for the workforce because they cannot work with others or cannot communicate with people from diverse backgrounds.

"The concept to learn about different cultures is identified as important," Felder said. "We can ensure opportunities for students to grow up as respecting citizens. It's our social responsibility to grow responsible leaders. They are our future."

Schools and district officials said they want to continue the tradition of diversity week. Felder said she hopes to have all the schools in Anderson County incorporating diversity into classes in the near future.

She plans to spread the initiative through Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties as well as across the Upstate and eventually across the state.

"Once we get a solid model in Anderson County, I hope the state Department of Education can help promote the initiative statewide," Felder said.

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