



## Education

# Rock and Roll Academy gives students some keys to success



[Gary Porter](#)

**Grace Dempsey, 11, plays keyboard in the music studio at University Lake School as part of the Rock and Roll Academy, which gives students more freedom to explore music.**

By [Andrea Anderson](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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- [Students pick up keys to success at Rock and Roll Academy](#)

**Delafield** - Fifth-grader Grace Dempsey plays the piano and the guitar, she doesn't like the music written by her sister and when Justin Bieber is mentioned, her face wrinkles in disapproval. However, one thing Grace and Bieber have in common is a fever for making it loud.

"It's breaking the rules," Grace said. "There are no rules . . . we can learn and do whatever we want because it is our band."

Grace is breaking out of her classical confines and entering the world of rock at University Lake School's new Rock and Roll Academy, a Colorado-based music education program for students in grades five through 12.

Without sheet music or scales, students learn to play by ear and by collaborating with fellow earnest rock stars.

Founded in 2003 in Telluride, Colo., by Mark Galbo, a musician and music instructor, the program embodies the education philosophy of University Lake, according to Paul Atkinson, head of school for University Lake.

"This is a nice complement because it is not necessarily a traditional music class," Atkinson said. "It is hands-on, project based and interpersonal like many of our classes."

Atkinson admires the program's structure, which allows children to be entirely in charge of their success. They form the band, choose the band name, select the instrument (or instruments) they want to master, pick the songs they want to cover and resolve any internal conflicts that may arise individually - all creating strong leadership and team skills.

"A major thrust to the program is that it takes advantage of social and emotional needs and learning that must occur with children," Atkinson said.

The academy is open to more than University Lake's students. The after-school program invites students outside the private prep school in Waukesha County's Lake Country.

Chris Labri, a fifth-grader at Erin Elementary School in Washington County, joined Rock and Roll Academy last week. He has played the drums for three years, and he likes rock, heavy metal and, for the moment, "I guess I would have to say Neon Trees or Maroon 5."

Chris said getting involved in Rock and Roll Academy lets him expand his passion for music in different ways.

"My school doesn't have the best equipment, and I just like that I get to experiment and play to get better," Chris said. "This will make me be more of an open person, I think."

A facilitator, not a teacher, monitors the children during class from 3:30 to 5 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. The facilitator is there to guide and assist when needed on how to play an instrument, provide feedback and resolve conflicts, including "family" meetings when band members are not getting along. Other than that, the students are in control.

Barbara Stephan, a singer and voice coach for the Waukesha County Conservatory, is the facilitator for the Rock and Roll Academy at University Lake and stands behind the trial and error music education process wholeheartedly. She flew to Colorado to witness Galbo's program in action and walked away

stunned by the applicability it has to everyday life.

"Kids need to be succeeding socially and emotionally in order to retain better," Stephan said. "It's teaching compromising, negotiating, leadership at the same time as music."

Stephan, who was taught music in the traditional manner, said this is nothing like how she was taught to play music or to teach music.

"I sat there while I was taught rudimentary things and it was very limiting - and it still is very limiting," Stephan said. "Letting the students explore the space and having them come to me is vital."

Stephanie Christiansen, a fifth-grader at University Lake, also plays the piano and violin and now plays the guitar at the academy.

"This is really awesome compared to school," Stephanie said. "It's a fun experience because we get away from schooling and can just chill out."

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/rock-and-roll-academy-gives-students-some-keys-to-success-6j8rue1-194405761.html?ipad=y>