Hillcrest Elementary students collaborate with Aggies on new school mural

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By Arie Kirk |

Principal Eric Markworth was looking for a way to create a brighter and more inviting entrance to Hillcrest Elementary, and with the help of a fifth-grade class, he got just what he wanted.

Jennifer Jenkins and her fifth-grade students partnered with Utah State University's ArtsBridge program to create a mural 4 feet tall and 16 feet wide. It hangs in the main entrance of the elementary school and captures school spirit, the student body's diversity, historical events and Utah's landscapes.

"I'm ecstatic," Markworth said. "I think it just really turned out even better than what I imagined."

The students are excited about the finished project, too.

Ten-year-old Nicole Nye said she hopes that when people walk into Hillcrest years from now, they will marvel at the mural. When people walk in the door, she thinks they will ask, "Did a professional do this or kids do this?"

Jenkins expressed similar sentiments, saying that the project was the students', and if they enjoyed it and learned from the experience, the effects of the mural will be lasting.

"If it's meaningful to them, it will be meaningful for generations," she said.

Kellianne Dymock, an ArtsBridge scholar, led students in the project. She and a second ArtsBridge scholar met with students twice a week from January to the end of April. Dymock said the content of the mural, which ties in with fifth-grade curriculum, was student-driven and individualized.

"I'm delighted with how it turned out," she said.

Dymock, a senior at USU studying elementary education and early childhood education, said there were 24 students who worked on the mural, six kids per panel. She said the theme of the mural is "Changes Over Time."

The first panel of the mural is about social studies. It includes farmers, a soldier, a pioneer and a depiction of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The second panel captures Utah's landscape, including mountains and an arch. The third panel has flags and faces. Dymock said it portrays the nine nationalities that are represented by students in Jenkins' class. The last panel features Hillcrest and tied to the building is the house from the movie "Up," floating in the air with balloons.

To border the mural, students wrote "Welcome" in nine different languages.

The completed mural, Jenkins said, is a "perfect representation" of her class.

Nye helped paint a cactus and leaf in a portion of the landscapes panel. She said she chose that part because she likes summer and autumn.

Dymock said they only gave the students five paint colors - red, yellow, blue, black and white. Kyle Ransom, 11, said this helped him learn about the color wheel because to get any other colors, they had to mix the paint.
"I liked mixing all the colors," Ransom said, but, he added, "It was hard."

Ransom worked on the Hillcrest panel. He said he added a canal to the mural because, in the summertime, he likes tubing down the canal that neighbors Hillcrest.

"It was really fun painting," he said.

Laurie Baefsky, program director of USU ArtsBridge, said ArtsBridge is a service learning program that offers "active arts" to participants. ArtsBridge, Baefsky said, is "a really powerful tool to get the arts back into the schools in a meaningful way."

Dymock said the project brought art and curriculum together in a way students will remember.

"Anytime they think of art in the future, they're going to think about this project," she said.

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