

About 300 local theater kids will benefit from grants meant to help programs struggling through the pandemic

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Two students from the 2018-2019 theatre season at Oyler School were part of the JumpStart Theatre program.

Tri-State school theater programs were preparing for their spring productions when COVID-19 erupted in 2020. The income they'd hope to earn from ticket sales never came, and fundraising chances were sparse, threatening the sustainable future of local programs. But grants from the Educational Theatre Foundation are injecting new energy into seven local schools.

"All school theater programs have really been affected by this [COVID] but especially those that are sort of very frail and new in their establishment," says Lori Valentine, program director at the Educational Theatre Foundation.

She said grants between \$1,500-\$3,000 were given to schools that graduated from a three-year JumpStart Theatre program, which helped with training, materials and funding to produce an annual musical.

That included helping teachers with no experience in musical theater direct a show and receiving the rights to a Broadway Jr. musical show free of charge.

"They're sort of in a frail position, getting started establishing their program, and then the pandemic hits," Valentine said. "So the seven schools that applied for the boost grants, were schools that have already graduated from the program, and were producing shows on their own when the pandemic hit."

The Austin E. Knowlton Foundation and an anonymous donor funded the "boost grants" allocated through the foundation.

The schools receiving the grants are:

- Aiken New Tech High School
- Clark Montessori High School
- Felicity-Franklin Middle School
- Finneytown High School
- Gilbert A. Dater High School
- James M. Gable Montessori High School
- The Oyler School.

Valentine says about 300 students in the programs will benefit from the influx of funds.

<https://www.wvxu.org/education/2022-02-09/educational-theatre-foundati>