

Grant Brings Student Dancers Together

Dance instructor Patrick Johnson has been a semi-permanent fixture at Dickinson School for 10 years. He teaches kindergarten through fifth grade students the basics of dance, one hour a week for each class. It's not a lot of time to put together a public performance. Yet Patrick manages to make it happen every year, and what he does in a few months is amazing.

He teaches dance routines related to school curriculum. This year students learned Mexican, African, Native American, Middle Eastern, Japanese, Chinese, African and Dutch dances. The dancers held two performances on May 19.

high stepping and stopping. They concentrate on staying together and moving to the music.

Patrick put a new twist on the dance program for 2006 by involving kids from Grand Rapids Christian High School with the Dickinson dancers. The cross-cultural, cross-class and multi-age approach adds a new dimension. He aims to expose the younger students with fewer means to the older kids' resources and talents.

"With the age and racial differences, as well as the economic disparities between the schools and the students, we hope to bridge a gap. We hope to give each of them a view of who lives just across town," Patrick said.

The program this year is funded through the Excellence in Education Program with a grant from the Mary I. and Robert C. Pew Fund at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. In all, Excellence in Education made \$108,065 in grants to schools in the city of Grand Rapids.

His students dress in just hints of costumes—a vest or hat, a belt apron or a colorful wraparound skirt. His staging is not elaborate, but the programs are full of contemporary and classical dance steps. The kids look they have a blast running, twirling,

Dancing is just discovery, discovery, discovery.

—Martha Graham, as quoted in the New York Times (1985)

