

IPEI Red and Gold Grants for Kindergarten and First Grade Listening Centers

October 22 is the deadline for the first round of Red and Gold Grants from the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) for the 2012-13 school year. Red and Gold Grants provide one-time funding for Ithaca City School District (ICSD) classroom and/or school projects developed by teachers, staff, students or community members that strengthen and enrich the curriculum, and have a positive impact on students and actively engage students. Application procedure information is found at www.ipei.org.

Of all grades, Kindergarten is perhaps most in need of differentiation of instruction, for students arrive at very different instructional levels, some benefiting from extensive pre-school experience, and others new to formal education. One way that Cayuga Heights Elementary School Kindergarten teacher Stephanie Nisbet addresses this need is through her Listening Center made possible by an IPEI Red and Gold Grant during the 2011-12 school year.

With the help of IPEI, Nisbet purchased eight headphones and eight MP3 players, along with a portable CD player and related materials. "I have been able to build listening center time into my small group rotations during my daily literacy time block. I can have an entire small group of four to six children either listen to the same story all at the same time, or they can each listen to a different story

using the MP3 players." This provides Nisbet with the opportunity to select stories suited to each student, individualizing instruction as she addresses different needs.

Beverly J. Martin Elementary School first grade teacher Sharon Nelson

also took advantage of an IPEI Red and Gold Grant to support her classroom's listening center. She purchased MP3s with pre-loaded songs, as well as 40 books from the Scholastic Best Sellers collection that is correlated with national standards. Nelson reports the need to establish a listening center schedule because students wanted to listen each day, often several times a day, brimming over with enthusiasm for the



listening center.

One bonus that arose from having this material in the classroom is that some students, who previously did not want to read aloud to a partner in the classroom, were now eager to record their voices. "It was an exciting time for our classroom because students realized that they could practice reading fluency and expression. Several students read at a quicker pace and with more expression as they tried to sound like the MP3 tracks that they had just listened to," Nelson noted. In addition to increasing reading fluency, Nelson points out that students improved their listening skills, a vital benefit arising from the Red and Gold Grant.