

## Education

# Newark Teacher Raises Funds For Filmmaking Program at Rafael Hernandez School

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Emmy-nominated filmmaker MaryLou Bongiorno explains the technical process behind 3-D movies to Rafael Hernandez School students.

Courtesy of Tierney Fitzmartin

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NEWARK, NJ - When Tierney Fitzmartin brought in guest speakers last school year to explain the technical, behind-the-scenes process of filmmaking to her drama class, her students' interest in the topic ignited.

Fitzmartin especially saw her students get excited when Marylou Bongiorno - a Newark-based, Emmy-nominated filmmaker who has worked on programs that have appeared on Bravo, IFC and PBS - explained how 3D movies are made.

"The kids loved that," said Fitzmartin, who is going into her second year of teaching at Rafael Hernandez School of Performing Arts School. "It's a whole new generation. They're

very tech savvy. I have a student in sixth grade who is already shooting things with his iPhone and found this cheap editing software."

She wanted to feed into that spark through a dedicated filmmaking program, something the school didn't have. But Fitzmartin wouldn't let a lack of funds, equipment or even a dedicated media center hold her back.

To get started, she received a grant from [Newark Arts](#) for items including a camera, tripod and a set of batteries. To make up for the rest of the equipment like laptops and external hard drives, she started an [online fundraising campaign](#). So far, the campaign has raised about \$345 with a goal of \$595.

The program will include film classes, screenwriting classes, and a film club that will create news broadcasts with the equipment. The Montclair Film Festival and the school district's Arts High School will also provide curriculum and guests artists too.

Fitzmartin expects about 80 students for the filmmaking program. Between a separate fundraiser and the grant, she was able to get three dedicated laptops. With a fourth laptop, fewer students will have to share a computer and her drama students could use them.

While the students have Chromebooks at the pre-K through eighth-grade school, they lack the ability to handle filmmaking software and are used for other classes.

Many of the middle school students are already showing interest in Arts High School in the district, which has a film and television department. To even be considered for the competitive public magnet school, students would have to submit their own storyboards, Fitzmartin said.

A filmmaking program like this would give students - many of whom are low-income and come from diverse backgrounds - an opportunity to tell their own stories, Fitzmartin said.

"We need more directors from all different backgrounds and that's what we have in Newark. That's very important."

Fitzmartin said she's using curtains to partition off a section of the library for the program.

"It'll work," Fitzmartin said of the slightly odd configuration. "We'll make it work."

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