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Last spring, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting author, musician and youth advocate Buzzy Martin. Our school librarian invited Buzzy to come and speak to our fifth and sixth grade students. This visit came about due to the fact that she had read some excerpts (censored for age appropriateness) from his book *"Don't Shoot! I'm the Guitar Man"* to them. Our students were very moved by the book and his message to kids that are faced with the enticement of gangs in their daily lives. They wanted to meet him and they had many questions for him. She was able to contact him and he decided to take on another adventure: elementary schools.

This was our first upper grade assembly of this nature, as it was for Buzzy as well. While elementary school level may seem like a young age at first due to the mature content of his book, it is a story that should be told to our youth who are curious about the myths of gangster and even prison life. It was amazing the questions, insights and misconceptions that our students shared with Buzzy in his one hour visit. They also enjoyed his music as well!

Buzzy and I have spoke at great lengths about the current plight of our nation's youths, especially our young males of color. After working with the youths in the juvenile court system, he has learned that getting the message out that: "prison is not glorious", can't come soon enough. For some of the youth in juvenile hall, it may be too late. They have already accepted that they will do "life" if it earns them respect in their gang. However, I believe his book and message shared in *"Don't Shoot! I'm the Guitar Man"* can and in fact is making a huge impact on today's young ones: one child at a time. Waiting until students are twelve and older to persuade them that gang life is not the path they want to take, is proving to be too late!

Sharing Buzzy's message of the power of music and family is one step towards helping our children to not be "at risk" but instead to be "at opportunity". We thank you Buzzy for your story and for your heart for our country's youth!

--Dana Pedersen  
Roseland Elementary Principal

