

## **CANTON MCKINLEY MARCHING BAND INCLUDES FOUR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (HEARING-IMPAIRED; BLIND; AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED)**

Education privatizers puppet the phrase “one-size-does-not-fit-all” as the rationale for snatching public school tax funds to support charters and private schools. Public schools do not fit the label of one-size-fits-all. The typical public school district offers a plethora of education choices and accommodates, as much as possible, the needs of all the children of all the people.

The Canton City marching band illustrates how public schools accommodate students. The band has four students with disabilities. An article in the Canton Repository—Beat Goes on for Hearing-Impaired Drummer—features a hearing-impaired student, but also indicates the band has three other members with disabilities; two of them use wheelchairs and one is blind.

Band director, Zachary Taylor said, “Every kid deserves to be a part of what we do.”

### **Beat Goes On For Hearing-Impaired Drummer**

High school student one of 177 in Canton school marching band

**Kelli Weir** Canton Repository  
USA TODAY NETWORK

CANTON – Marissa Golden cried as she watched her son march across the football field with the McKinley High School’s marching band earlier this season.

He was doing it. He was living the dream that set for himself when he was 7.

He was doing it without the tics that she normally sees. No flapping and overextending of his arms. No wandering eyes and lack of focus. No anxiety-filled pacing.

He was focused, absorbing the energy around him and locked in on the rhythm and movement.

And he was doing it – without fully hearing any of it.

Eli Golden is believed to be McKinley High School’s first deaf or significantly hearing impaired marching band member. He’ll join the other 117 band members Friday when McKinley begins the first round of the football playoffs.

With no hearing in his left ear and only 50% of his hearing in his right ear, the sophomore percussionist follows the music by feeling the vibrations in his body.

He tells you he feels it everywhere – in his feet, in his hands, in his heart. He’ll hold his hand up to his mother’s chest and pat it, telling her, ‘I feel it, mom.’

To understand the true significance of Eli marching with the band, you need to know Eli’s story and the village of people who helped him get there.

Born two months early, Eli didn’t have a heartbeat for the first 21 minutes of his life. He then relied on a breathing tube for oxygen.

Doctors didn't expect him to survive, and his birth family agreed to take him off the breathing tube so he could die peacefully.

But Eli then started breathing on his own.

Marissa, who had been at the hospital to support Eli's birth family, accompanied Eli to the intensive care unit since his birth mother was too sick.

'There was something about him,' Marissa said. 'I couldn't walk away. I couldn't leave him. He needed someone there with him. I just felt attached.'

Marissa, who would go on to adopt Eli, brought Eli home with her more than three months later.

Eli spent the first two years of his life with a feeding tube, a litany of medications and a revolving door of in-home care, therapists and nursing aides. He was diagnosed with mild cerebral palsy, severe attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and anxiety.

As a toddler, Eli's muscles would contract so tightly that his therapists told Marissa to hand him fat foam sticks to hold to keep his fingers from curling.

Eli would use the sticks to bang on his bouncy seat as he listened to music while Marissa cleaned the house.

### **Eli Golden and finding 'his people'**

Music seemed to be the only way to soothe Eli. Before he could walk, he would army crawl over to the floor speakers of the home and hug them to feel the vibrations.

His tapping soon began to follow the beat of his Baby Einstein songs and later to the classic rock songs that he learned to love from his mother and maternal grandfather.

'We would see him tapping a beat wherever he could,' said Marissa, who didn't know about Eli's hearing impairment until he failed his hearing test at age 2.

Eli got his first plastic drum set at age 3. It lasted only three months due to its constant use.

On his fifth birthday, Eli got his first 'real' drum set.

Much of Eli's music still was noise until he transferred to the Canton City School District as he was heading into third grade.

He was enrolled in the district's deaf education program at the Arts Academy, a program that Marissa didn't even know existed when they moved to the district.

'With his love of music already, it was like two peas in a pod,' Marissa said.

The district also paired Eli with an interpreter and helped him learn sign language to communicate. It was then that Eli found his voice, his mom says.

'They (Arts Academy staff) changed our life,' Marissa said. 'It was like he found his people.'

Eli began playing the drums in the band at the Arts Academy as a fourth grader.

'And he was amazing,' Marissa recalled. 'We were all stunned. With a special-needs kid, you always expect them to do it a little differently. But he was just right along with other kids.'

Eli fell in love with marching bands when Marissa began dating John Golden, whose son played the saxophone in his high school band. Eli would eagerly go to watch him at the games.

'I had to hold onto Eli tight so he wouldn't run onto the field,' Marissa recalled.

Soon, the family's evenings were filled with band nights and watching the Canton Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps. Still, Marissa admits that she was terrified when Eli became a freshman and wanted to join McKinley's marching band.

He had participated in a summer band program that didn't go well. She worried that the harness for Eli to carry the snare drum would injure his shoulder, which often dislocates when Eli overextends his arms as one of his coping mechanisms.

But, due to Eli's insistence, she agreed.

### **Joins McKinley High School marching band**

Besides Eli, the McKinley High School marching band has three other members with disabilities. Two of them use wheelchairs and one is blind.

'Every kid deserves to be a part of what we do,' band director Zachary Taylor said.

Taylor said the adjustments the band needed to make to accommodate Eli were minimal, thanks to his interpreter Jennifer Duckworth, who has been with him at every practice and game.

Duckworth, who transitioned with Eli from the Arts Academy to McKinley, also came up with the idea to put a piece of blue tape on some of the band member's uniforms so Eli knows who he is supposed to be following on the field.

'Without her, we would be lost,' Taylor said.

She also helps Eli vent when he becomes overstimulated and needs to release some energy.

Taylor said Eli's fellow bandmates also have learned how to help Eli manage his emotions and will distract him when he's feeling overwhelmed. 'His interaction with others has been the coolest thing to watch,' Taylor said. 'They are learning how to be patient, kind and how to show compassion to students who have more struggles than them. These are skills that are going to make them stronger and better people when they go to college and get jobs. When they see people who struggle, they'll remember the lesson from high school on how to help people around them. They are learning skills that aren't necessarily taught.'

Taylor said another benefit of having Eli is that he has inspired younger students who have disabilities to join.

Dr. Ian Rossman, pediatric neurologist at Akron Children's Hospital, believes Eli's participation in marching band has helped him mature and find his sense of place.

'It's an example of when you find your niche and are allowed to excel that our differences fall away,' Rossman said. '... Given the trajectory he started out on at birth, you couldn't have predicted that he was going to be doing this well.'

[Hearing-impaired McKinley High School drummer Eli Golden 'feels the beat' \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/education/hearing-impaired-mckinley-high-school-drummer-eli-golden-feels-the-beat)

