

ETHAN

From Page A1

Ethan is ready to add some color.

“I need a gray marker, please,” he tells Portillos.

With continued determination, Ethan adds gray to the fish’s ample upper body.

“If you notice, he only shaded the top, Portillos said. “He knows the shark’s lower half is white.”

Next, it’s time for the water, for which Ethan selects a deep blue shade of marker. With his wrist driving the broad, forceful strokes, the ocean begins to take shape.

“In the second grade, Ethan really had a hard time shading,” Portillos explained. “But he really has it down now.”

Impressed by the azure aura surrounding the shark, Portillos lets Ethan know.

“That’s the best blue you could have chosen. It’s not too dark and not too light. And when you’re done, you can pick a green for the seaweed.”

Although he’s seen Ethan breathe vivid life into a barren canvas time after time, Thompson is clearly impressed as his latest creation is revealed.

“Ethan is so skilled that I told myself, ‘I need to watch this, to see if it’s really coming from him.’ Not that I thought someone else was doing it, but the work is that good,” Thompson said.

“And what amazes me is how Ethan is able to keep his

focus in a large, pretty rowdy class. He’s able to just tune all that out and focus on what he’s doing. And that’s pretty remarkable. Because there’s always a din.”

“With two younger brothers and a sister at home, he’s probably used to all the noise,” a smiling Kristeen Xiong offered.

Portillos, like Thompson a caring cheerleader and supporter, gives the finished piece a satisfied once-over.

“Now, put your name on the bottom like artists do. Artists always sign their work at the bottom,” Portillos advises Ethan.

Art is but one discipline in which Ethan shines. Described by educators and support staff as quiet but alert, motivated and focused, Ethan has collected an excellence attendance award, merit roll certificate and an achievement in iReady math, in addition to his artistic achievements.

“He never mentions any challenges,” Portillos said. “He sees what he has to do and just jumps in and gets it done. He can draw anything I tell him to. And he writes his own papers, he types. He’s able to do everything the other students can do.

“And if not, we modify.”

The well-received demonstration over, Ethan backs away from the table.

“What’s my favorite thing to draw? Anything,” Ethan said. “But the shark is my best picture, because it’s for my mom and dad.”

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