

## **Maintaining a Quality Music Program for All Students**

Music education is valuable for young people. Citizens For Education wrote about the benefits of music education a few years ago and that article can be found on our website [www.citizensforeducation.com](http://www.citizensforeducation.com) =>Special Topics=>Curriculum=>Co-Curricular Programs. Since then, further research has shown a connection between music and increased IQ scores, better standardized test scores, better language skills, better learning of other disciplines, and can act as a therapeutic outlet for many students.

A school music program thrives based on its feeder program. Students start with music at the elementary level, move to the middle level and then on to high school. The stronger the elementary interest, the more students will continue. Other factors can influence the feeder program, such as outside interests and class enrollments.

### **Music Participation Trends**

According to CR Music Curriculum Coordinator, Lee Hauslein, there is a 30% reduction in music participation from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade (elementary to middle school). This is largely due to the addition of after-school sports programs, clubs and the opportunity to take a language in middle school. Another factor contributing to the drop in student participation between levels is that the commitment level is different. At the elementary and middle level, lessons are pull-out based, 30 and 50 minutes respectively, and at the middle school, rehearsals occur during the student's Resource Activity (RA) period. In high school, the program shifts to a broader level of instruction where co-curricular opportunities outside of the school day supplement regular education music classes. The good news is that an average of 60% of music students will continue from middle school to high school. It is the policy of the Music Department to talk to every student that doesn't continue in music to find out why. It is unfortunate that the majority of responses indicate students are simply "too busy."

The District has realized the value in capturing a student's interest at the earliest possible opportunity. Newtown and Holland Elementary schools have begun offering instruction in Guitar. Jazz Bands presently exist at Newtown, Hillcrest, Rolling Hills and Maureen M. Welch Elementary schools. Whether a jazz band exists at an elementary school is dependent upon the staff members or volunteers available to facilitate it.

The District is seeing a change in the emphasis of music education at the high schools. Student interest used to be on keyboarding, percussion instruments and melody, whereas now the attraction is on learning guitar. The district is responding by tailoring course offerings accordingly.

### **High School Music Options**

At the high school level, students with an interest in music have a variety of course selections to supplement their education. Unfortunately, some classes are not being run due to lack of enrollment. The minimum number of students needed to run a class is 18, although there has been some leeway from time to time to run classes with enrollment below that number. The district has also taken a "think outside the box" approach by combining classes of similar content and by shuttling classes from one high school to the other.

Interest and availability in the elective music classes at the high school level differ dramatically between North and South. While both schools have students in Band, Choir and Orchestra, the additional elective music classes vary. Current enrollment figures provided by the District show

that South has classes running in Music Technology, Intro and Intermediate Guitar, Music Theory, Honors Music Arranging, Improvisation and AP Music Theory. North on the other hand, is only running Music Theater, Music Technology and Intro and Intermediate Guitar. Two students at North are shuttled to South for AP Music Theory.

As a result of courses not being run at North, students at South have many more choices of music classes this year. The district does not track the number of students who have chosen these classes prior to their cancellation, though it is safe to assume that some students at North were interested but there were not enough to run the class.

The disparity between North and South has occurred because of scheduling and enrollment numbers, which in turn has precipitated a change in staffing levels at each high school. At the peak of high school enrollment, staffing levels at both high schools consisted of 3 full-time teachers in each Music Department. Over the last 5 years, the staffing level has gradually decreased to the current level of 2 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers at North and 2.4 FTE teachers at South. The phrase "full time equivalent" is used because not every teacher assigned to teach at each high school is doing so on a full-time basis. For the 2014 – 2015 school year, South has 2 teachers assigned to the high school full time where North only has one. At South, John Burns leaves the school for a portion of his day and at North Scott Slutter and Joshua Cook leave the high school for a portion of their day. In addition to their high school teaching responsibilities, the teachers who are part time at the high school are also teaching classes at the middle and elementary school levels. For example, with less music elective classes running at North, Scott Slutter, who teaches more than 120 students in Marching and Concert Band, actually leaves the building for approximately half of his day to teach instrumental lessons at the elementary level. Then, after the school day has ended, Mr. Slutter returns to North to instruct students on an extra-curricular level.

Many music classes run on an Alternate Day schedule and sometimes students simply cannot fit the classes into their schedules. Some students opt to take electives in core subjects instead of music electives. All performance classes (Marching Band, Choir and Orchestra) have an accelerated offering either within the academic class or through a higher level performance group such as Symphonic Band. However, the majority of classroom-based music electives are academic level, not accelerated or honors, and therefore carry no additional weight when calculating a student's GPA. The only honors level offering is Honors Music Arranging. This may be a factor in students opting for electives in core subject areas where more accelerated and honors options exist.

Additionally, because of redistricting, the student population at North has been declining, so there are less students overall to take the various music classes. This has a negative impact on any North student considering music as a career, and wanting to take multiple music classes in high school. According to enrollment projections, this trend will continue unless the district realigns high school sending areas.

Because only 70% of elementary students, and approximately 60% of middle school students, continue with music at the next level, the district is looking for ways to increase the music student retention rate. Two ideas are being considered. First, the district is initiating "Cluster Concerts" this year, where students from all levels and feeder schools will perform together. The South orchestra and the North band are both doing an elementary/middle/high school cluster concert. North's orchestra and choir are each doing a middle/high school cluster concert. The thought is that this will increase interest for students, after interacting with students at the higher grades and seeing the difference in the level of performance between the groups. Finally, staff

members from the middle and high schools are speaking with music students at the elementary schools to spur interest in the secondary music programs.

### **Middle School Music Schedules**

A schedule change that is being looked at for the middle schools may have the opposite effect – losing students in the music program. There has been some discussion about moving the Resource Activity (RA) period to the end of the school day. This could impact the number of classes that string teachers, who teach at both the elementary and middle levels, can teach. Since the middle school starts before the elementary school, string teachers can do rehearsals at the middle school and then go to the elementary school and teach a full day. If RA were at the end of the day, string teachers would lose 2 hours of lessons (because of travel time back and forth) at the elementary school. This would occur on every day that they had middle school rehearsals, so they could lose 6-10 hours per week of instructional time. Because of this issue, and also because of the athletes who would be missing rehearsals, Mr. Hauslein and the instrumental music teachers are concerned about this possibility and the disadvantages of changes to the RA period are being discussed.

Citizens For Education applauds the efforts of Mr. Hauslein and his team to raise awareness of the wonderful Council Rock Music Program and to increase the number of students who participate in music throughout their Council Rock career.