

WESTON

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Cheryl Maloney, Superintendent of Schools
FROM: Christopher Memoli
DATE: November 7, 2008
RE: Response to 2008 K-12 Music Program Review

Please find below the Music Department's specific responses to the recommendations of the Music Program Review Committee. I found the Music Program Review Committee's report to be very comprehensive and detailed. The Music Department agreed in general with many of this committee's findings. We welcome the outside feedback and enjoy the opportunity to reflect on our practices.

I am very proud of the music program in Weston and agree with the committee's conclusion that "very few school systems of this size can boast of such a quality program." The review committee commended the Music Department on many areas of excellence such as: our highly skilled teachers, the program accessibility, the high performance levels of our students and ensembles, and the large percentage of students participating in the music offerings. As we move forward my goal is to maintain and improve our outstanding program. In particular, I am focused on scheduling at all levels; retention, support and training of faculty; continued curriculum revision; and technology integration into our teaching.

Organization and Structure:

Recommendations

- 1. Pre-school music instruction should be considered for pre-school classes in the Woodland and Country Schools. Early childhood music is the foundation and backbone of a strong music program.**

The Music Department agrees with this recommendation. Early childhood music is essential to the growth and development of young minds. In addition, we think general music should be increased to twice a week for 30 minutes in kindergarten, now that there is an extended school day. We realize the difficulty of implementing this proposal due to budgetary constraints and time constraints on the schedule. It would be our first priority to explore opportunities to add the pre-school to the music schedule on some kind of a rotation, and secondarily to discuss the potential growth of the Kindergarten music time to twice a week. Within what is possible for the schedule, the department will explore ways to develop a music rotation, or perhaps some special experiences for the pre-school program that could happen less frequently, but could enhance music for the children. Certainly the Music Department can play a role in collaborating and sharing ideas about music with the pre-school department to insure that the music teachers are building into their programs both variety and quality for children.

2. Schedule general music classes in Grades 4 and 5 at the Field School twice a week for 40-45 minutes rather than once a week for an hour.

The Music Department agrees we should have extended time for general music classes in 4th and 5th grade. The proposed model of twice a week for 40-45 minutes would be ideal. More instruction time would dramatically improve student achievement. We realize the difficulty of implementing this proposal due to budgetary constraints and time constraints on the schedule. In building the schedule for students it remains a priority to balance the experience of both the day and the week, such that students do not experience school as fragmented or rushed. The use of the 60 minute block does afford advantages of being able to vary the music block and to be interactive.

3. Instrumental classes in grades 3 – 5 should be increased from 30 minutes a week to 45 minutes a week.

We agree with the committee's findings that the structure of our elementary instrumental program minimizes disruptions for classroom teachers. We also agree instrumental classes should be increased from 30 to 45 minutes a week. More contact time would dramatically improve instruction. We are currently at the minimum contact time to maintain high student achievement. It is also very challenging for instrumental staff to cover the curriculum in 30 minute, heterogeneous classes. We realize the difficulty of implementing this proposal due to budgetary constraints and time constraints on the schedule. The department also celebrates its creative scheduling as a unique model. By developing a creative implementation model for the heterogeneous instrumental classes we are able to impact both the classroom schedule and the children taking lessons in a positive way. Students do not feel conflicted about 'missing class' because the teacher is better able to anticipate the lesson block and adjust instructional planning, and students are going and coming as a classroom group which keeps things running smoothly. The positive result for our music program is that students feel confident to explore an instrument without causing other academic stresses.

4. General Music should be reinstated in Grade 8. A variety of electives should be offered.

We agree there should be general music electives offered in grade 8. The course *Introduction to Music Theory and Composition* is being proposed as an 8th grade elective.

5. Consider restructuring the Middle School choral program in order to reduce the size of the choruses to a more manageable number of students.

We do not agree. The current set up of having a teacher plus an accompanist in the room is working quite well. We would like to see the accompanist position become a more permanent position, perhaps on the aide pay scale. Weston students enjoy the 'group experience' and comradery of the choral program, and we feel that the strength of our choral program is enhanced by its numbers and positive class climate.

6. Consider the establishment of a separate chorus for boys in the Middle School.

We do not agree. We prefer the current mixed chorus format. Many schools have boys' choruses to attract more boys into the chorus program. We currently are able to attract boys without a separate boys' chorus. In fact, the male enrollment indicates that our students agree with the current model. In addition, boys and girls often perform separate selections at concerts in our current set up.

7. Consider implementing an introductory music theory class and non-performance music classes such as music technology, guitar, or Jazz/Rock History at the High School. This will make

music instruction accessible to students who are not interested in participating in more traditional performance groups. An interdisciplinary course such as humanities should also be considered. Non-traditional performance opportunities such as African drumming and fiddling could enrich the performance program. There should be support for student led ensembles such as rock bands and student led chorale groups.

We agree with the recommendation for non-performance music courses. I am proposing two new semester courses: *Music Theory I* and *Popular Music of the 20th Century*. These courses would be accessible to all students. Non-traditional performance opportunities are already incorporated into our music program. An example of this is the orchestra performance last year with the group *Barrage*. There is currently informal support for student lead groups. We do not have FTE allocated to this type of activity. The Music Department will explore this possibility further, but we also recognize that a school of Weston's size can only provide so many 'singleton' offerings without forcing students to select between other electives such as art. Sustaining the maximum of all elective choices is a goal of the Department Heads working together in developing a strong overall program.

General Music

Recommendations

- 1. More specific grade level objectives need to be developed for the general music program. General music teachers and instrumental teachers should work together to identify specific grade level objectives for the grades in which both general music and instrumental music is taught (Grades 3-7).**

Our curriculum work is ongoing and evolving. We currently have standards and benchmarks, assessment tasks and major student learning objectives for every grade and course taught. Our curriculum is based on concepts and skills rather than specific material covered. The Music Department is constantly reviewing and revising our curriculum to include developing more connections between general music and instrumental teachers, more interdisciplinary connections with other academic areas, and the development of more content units.

- 2. In general music classes, interdisciplinary connections could occur with subjects such as math, language arts, and science. The Review Committee recommends efforts to promote interdisciplinary teaching and learning at the elementary level be strengthened via staff development and common planning time for music specialists and classroom teachers.**

We agree with this recommendation and it already occurs informally. The Music Department has discussed this recommendation and is looking at ways to continue to move these interdisciplinary connections forward.

- 3. Similar instructional approaches for teaching music reading should be implemented by both instrumental music and general music teachers in Grades 3 – 5.**

The Music Department agrees. Several teachers are currently using similar instructional approaches. We will continue to unify this part of our instruction. I anticipate that a cohesive instructional practice for reading music will be completed for implementation by the Fall of 2009.

- 4. Find ways to utilize technology in the elementary general music program. Consider using such software as *Hearing Music*, *Music Ace*, *Finale Notepad*, and *Making Music*.**

We are working with Lee McCanne and the Technology Department on developing a technology infrastructure to support these goals. More technology support is needed for this to be implemented. We are currently using several music software programs in some classrooms. Software can be implemented once the hardware needs are addressed. Infusing the music experience with varied software and technology experiences will be a shared process of our department and the technology integration specialist working together. The technology department does have a set of standards to review in the context of how they support the music program.

5. Creative music activities (composing and improvisation) should be expanded in the upper elementary grades (Grades 4 and 5) and middle school general music curriculum. There also should be more emphasis on the development of music listening skills and the study of music of different historical periods, different genres and styles, and music of other cultures.

We do not agree with this observation. We do not think the committee was here long enough to observe the Field School and M.S. general music program properly. The development of music listening skills and the study of music of different historical periods, different genres and styles, and music of other cultures are all currently a large part of our general music curriculum. It does continue to be our ongoing work as a department to review and refine our curriculum focus and in this context we will extend our discussion to weigh the balance of focus given to the different components of music across the span of the year.

6. Considering the length of general music classes in the Field School (one hour), the curriculum and instructional approaches need to be reconsidered to keep students engaged and interested.

Active instruction and engagement is important across all grade levels. We do not feel the committee was here long enough to observe the different types of instructional approaches that are being incorporated into music classes at the Field School. We continue to refine our instructional practices with the goal of continuing to make all of our classes engaging and interesting to all students.

7. General music teachers should consider utilizing a unit approach to the development of curriculum. The Understanding by Design (UbD) approach (Wiggins and McTighe) is recommended. Information on this approach can be obtained form the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

We currently do utilize the unit approach for much of our instruction. This curriculum work is ongoing. As reflected in our response to developing more grade level specific curriculum, the department is always revising and adapting curriculum to be current and integrated across grade levels. Weston has Standards and Benchmarks to guide instructional planning to achieve important music concepts and skills. In response to the review, we have a core department goal to focus on our own internal department review to compare some units to see how they interface with each other around our Standards and Benchmarks.

8. General music teachers could work together and with regular classroom teachers to design interdisciplinary curricular units.

See response to question 2. The department will be discussing a set of recommendations by grade level for possible areas where collaboration would be a natural fit between music goals and different curriculum areas. We expect this list to be completed by the Fall of 2009 for review by administration.

Choral Music

Recommendations

- 1. The High School select group is still a large choral ensemble. A smaller advanced chamber group of some sort should be developed. A Jazz Choir running one rehearsal per 8 day rotation similarly to the Jazz Ensembles is one possibility.**

We agree with this proposal. We are proposing a *Jazz Choir* class at the High School.

- 2. Specific grade level learning objectives need to be identified throughout the choral music curriculum.**

We currently do have “Major Student Learning Objectives” for all of the courses we offer. These learning objectives are frequently reviewed and revised as our program evolves.

- 3. There should be more emphasis on teaching critical response and connections in choral rehearsals.**

This currently is already happening in our choral rehearsals. There are “Major Student Learning Objectives” delineated for critical response for each course we teach. Our curriculum work on connections is ongoing. We purposely waited on formalizing this part of our curriculum in hopes of connecting it to the district wide “Global Education Initiative.” We will be discussing this initiative this year with a goal of writing these connections during the 09-10 school year.

- 4. Assessment tasks relating to major learning outcomes of the choral program should be developed. Specific criteria for evaluation should be identified. This should be done for each grade level.**

We agree. This is an area we are currently working on in our chorus classes. We are hoping to implement *SmartMusic* for the choral program in the near future. Currently we are implementing the instrumental component of the *SmartMusic* assessment tool. The development of the choral component is anticipated and an implementation plan will be presented for the 09-10 school year.

Instrumental Music

Recommendations

- 1. Specific grade level learning objectives need to be identified throughout the instrumental music curriculum.**

We currently do have “Major Student Learning Objectives” for all of the courses we offer. This year, through the use of *SmartMusic* we are designing new assessment tasks and refining our Major Student Learning Objectives for all grades. These learning objectives are frequently reviewed and revised as our program evolves.

- 2. Fourth and Fifth Grade Band classes need to focus more on the development of solid playing fundamentals and proper rehearsal discipline.**

We feel this is already happening. We find the current style of instruction works well for young learners. Our program performs at a high level given our large heterogeneous class sizes and short 30 minutes classes. There are very few elementary schools that perform at the level of our Field School students.

- 3. The teaching of theory, compositional techniques, and music history should be infused into instrumental rehearsals. Broader musical knowledge regarding historical periods and styles, compositional techniques, vocabulary, and music theory can be taught through the rehearsal of a piece.**

This already happens in our instrumental classes. We do not feel the committee was here long enough to observe this part of our curriculum.

- 4. While the High School Band and Orchestra have a well developed assessment system, including on-line assessment, regular assessment was not seen as a priority in other parts of the program. Regular and appropriate assessment (on-line or otherwise) should be implemented throughout the elementary and middle school levels of instrumental music program.**

We launched *SmartMusic* this year for grades 4-12. Our band and orchestra courses grades 6-12 are regularly and routinely using *SmartMusic*. All elementary instrumental students will be using *SmartMusic* by next year.

- 5. Assessment tasks relating to major learning outcomes of the instrumental music program should be developed. Specific criteria for evaluation should be identified. This should be done for each grade level.**

We currently have assessment tasks at each grade level. We are now using *SmartMusic* which is allowing us to assess our students more regularly and provide timely feedback.

Staff and Staff Deployment

Recommendations

- 1. Consider assigning all of the general music and string classes at Country and Woodland Schools to two music teachers.**

We do not agree. It is a priority to have a string specialist teaching beginning strings.

- 2. Two music teachers should be assigned to the Grade 4 Beginning Band at Field School as this class is very large (over 90 students) and includes students with special needs.**

There are currently two sections of 4th grade band with an enrollment of 45-50 students each. Most of our large ensembles of 60-90 students currently have two teachers. This ratio must be maintained.

- 3. The schedules of both Deanna Leedy and Colleen Toland need to be reconsidered. The time they must spend on non-teaching responsibilities relating to teaching instrumental music (instrument care and maintenance, setting up for rehearsals, music distribution, collection, and filing, preparing students for district auditions, etc.) needs to be taken into consideration when determining FTE's. This is of particular concern since both of these teachers are**

teaching multiple music specialties in multiple buildings and both seem to have many more preparations than the rest of the music staff with less time for preparation.

Colleen Toland and Deanna Leedy's schedules are improved this year. Last year, both of these teachers were teaching more than 1.0 FTE. This year they are back to 1.0 FTE. It would be ideal to have more latitude when assigning teaching loads, given the enormous amount of non-teaching responsibilities associated with teaching instrumental music.

4. Travel time needs to be addressed for teachers as most music staff travel between schools. Mileage should be recorded, reported and compensated.

We agree. Travel time is sometimes an issue, but for the most part seems to be manageable. This is a contractual issue that other disciplines deal with as well. Mileage is currently reimbursed.

Program Accessibility and Participation

Recommendations

1. Efforts should be made to encourage and enable METCO students to continue participation in the instrumental music program beyond elementary school.

We are very proud of our METCO student participation. We are the envy of most districts in terms of our percentage of METCO participation. However, private lessons would help students continue through high school and college. Ideas on how to start a scholarship fund are being pursued.

2. Establish a scholarship program for instrumental lessons so needy students who want to can participate in all aspects of the program

We especially agree because our program relies so heavily on the private lesson program. We only have band and orchestra twice a week in 7th and 8th grade. Because of this, private lessons are an integral part of our program. Ideas on how to start a scholarship fund are being pursued.

3. Consider establishing an additional ensemble for string players dealing with more popular music styles. Use the string quartet "Ethyl" as a model.

We do not agree. Alternative music is currently taught in regular orchestra class.

Facilities and Equipment

Recommendations

1. Find a single adequate space for the Country School Chorus rehearsal.

Chorus rehearsal should be in the music room. This is being addressed.

2. Replace the sound system in the cafetorium at Country School with a higher quality system that has dual speakers.

The sound system has been updated.

3. An adequate music room for general music classes should be provided in the Field School.

We agree and acknowledge that the entire building is in need of renovation. The music room at Field School was moved to a smaller room in the basement this year due to an additional section of 5th grade. This room is not large enough. Matt Lucey has indicated that the music room is being moved back upstairs next year. We recognize that this need will be met long term within the context of the Field School renovation process. The Music Department will participate in sharing program needs within the scope of the project.

- 4. It is recommended that the three elementary music classrooms be equipped with at least one MIDI work station (computer, interface, and synthesizer) for student use. Installed software might include: *Garage band, Music Ace, Print Music, etc.***

We do not agree. While additional technology is a goal, one workstation per music room would not adequately accommodate our student needs. Ideally, we would have music technology labs.

- 5. Improve the lighting in instrumental rehearsal rooms at both the middle school and the High School.**

We agree. The Middle School band room has many burned out light bulbs. The High School band room needs more light at night and on cloudy days. I am working with Gary Jarobski, Deputy Director of Facilities, to improve these lighting issues.

- 6. Install ceiling projectors and appropriate screens in the music rehearsal rooms in the Middle School and High School.**

We agree. This is an acute need and has been a departmental request for several years. We are trying to implement several software programs that require these projectors. Lee McCanne has secured quotes. We request that these projectors are included in the budget or are funded through a WEEFC grant.

- 7. Consider installing SMART Boards in general music rooms and rehearsal rooms throughout the system.**

We agree. The Smart Board at the Field School has been fantastic. This technology should be available in all classroom and rehearsal spaces. The Director of Technology is currently developing a comprehensive five year plan that looks toward outfitting all classroom spaces with Smart Board technology.

- 8. Provide a higher quality digital piano for High School chorus rehearsals.**

This piano is currently functional but dated. We will budget for a replacement.

- 9. Consider providing dedicated Piano/MIDI labs in any future major renovation of the Middle School and High School.**

We agree. This would greatly enhance our General Music program at the Middle School and Music Theory program at the High School.

- 10. Consider renovation of the both the Middle School and High School choral rooms in any future renovation project. Both need to be larger with adequate storage space for music, a multi-level design, and a higher ceiling in order for students in the choral ensembles to hear each other.**

We agree. Our choral rooms are inadequate for our program needs. In addition, we do not have enough teaching and storage space at the Middle School and High School for our instrumental and general music programs. While we acknowledge these needs, the department also recognizes that the single most vital strength of the Department is in the talents of its faculty and students.

- 11. The district would be served well with a new fine arts performance facility to be shared by the High School and Middle School. Given the size of the ensembles district wide, there is a need for a much larger performance space.**

We agree. We currently have no suitable performance space. A large community type Performing Arts Center would be ideal.

Program Administration and Support

Recommendations

- 1. Use the Web creatively to communicate with the school community. Ideally, have a music page for each school for outreach to the community about music teaching and upcoming events.**

We agree. The school system has begun redesigning the web site. We hope to use the web site as a major communication tool for our band, chorus, orchestra and general music programs. This year music programs are being posted as an ongoing note of the Superintendent's Calendar. We have also forwarded information on special student awards and honors. The consultant working on the web site is meeting with Department Heads to discuss best practices for use of the web.