

Westwood Public Schools

Performing Arts

Curriculum Review



Performing Arts Curriculum Review Committee
4/1/2013

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Performing Arts Curriculum Review Committee met monthly throughout the 2011-2012 school year. The six-member committee was comprised of members from elementary, middle and high schools in both drama and music, as well as a parent representative, as listed below:

Administration:

Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent

Heather Cote, K-12 Performing Arts Director, WHS Music Teacher

Thurston Middle School:

Allison Sanders, Music Teacher

Jennifer Walsh, Drama Teacher

Elementary School:

Erica Yennior, Sheehan School Music Teacher

Parent:

Jennifer Aries

The goal of the performing arts review was to examine the current program, and make recommendations to the curriculum and the program in order to ensure that Westwood students have an engaging, challenging, and sequential performing arts curriculum.

There has been a shift in the focus of music and theater education since the last formal curriculum review, done in 2003. Without taking away from the intrinsic musical value that a performing arts education offers students, the scope has been widened to encompass not just skills specific to content, but also skills that are critical to college and career readiness. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills addresses this shift by encouraging Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Innovation. As a part of their arts education, students should learn not only the skills specific to the discipline, but also the skills that prepare them for college and careers.

Music/theater programs/curriculum used to be primarily driven by performance. The only music electives offered were those performed in public, i.e., band, chorus, and orchestra. The focus was mainly teacher driven/directed, and the concert performance was the benchmark that the program's success was measured on.

The Westwood theater program does, in fact, already work in this new direction. Although there are some components to the coursework that feature performance (whether public or in-class), the curriculum is not driven by the performance aspect. Students who take drama class focus equally on skills related to:

- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Self and peer assessment
- Literacy—reading, writing, creating
- Technology

The music program is in the process of undergoing this transformation. One concern is that as a student progresses further through their K-12 education, fewer and fewer students can participate in music. By the time students reach grade 9, if they haven't continued with a performance class, they cannot be involved with any music during their high school years. With the expansion of other non-performance electives, students are given this chance to continue to study music through high school in a non-performance setting. This shift from solely performance toward a whole music experience is a new way to look at music education.

In addition, teachers are being challenged to help students in both types of classes take a more active role in their learning. We focus on this through assessments, both formative and summative, as well as through student feedback and self-assessment, which is becoming a staple in our curriculum. The changing technology offers a great chance to involve students more actively in their learning, through music programs such as SmartMusic and platforms like Google Groups and SoundCloud. Through new assessment measures in use in Westwood, teachers are able to

address both musical/theatrical skills, as well as evaluate student growth in areas not specific to performance, such as:

- Integrating curriculum with other subjects
- Critical thinking and listening skills
- Critical self-assessment/self-awareness

The recommendations of the committee are made in the context of these changing trends in the field of music education. We are committed to providing a comprehensive music/theater education for the students in the Westwood Public Schools from K-12. Students should have experiences in all aspects of the arts so that they have skills as well as an appreciation and working knowledge of the art form. The arts program in the Westwood Public Schools needs to provide educational opportunities, both for students who will continue to be active in the arts as performers, composers, directors, etc., as well as students whose lives will be enhanced by the arts as listeners, viewers, and audience members.

II. REVIEW PROCESS

During the 2011-2012 school year, the Performing Arts Review Committee examined Westwood's performing arts program and researched best practices in music and drama education. The work included:

- a review of the standards established by the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, as well as a review of the nine national standards;
- a review of current program status and offerings in Westwood;
- a review and redevelopment of the department's mission statement;
- research on trends and best practices in music and drama education as provided in journals and publications;
- visits to programs in area schools, which were identified as having diverse performing arts programs; and
- extensive discussions about our current practices and curriculum implementation.

The review of Westwood's program was completed in June 2012, with a revised mission statement for the program and the articulation of recommendations to guide future work.

III. MISSION STATEMENT

The Westwood Performing Arts Department provides an environment in which students develop the skills and capacity to create, respond, and perform. Whether engaging in the arts as a performer, director, composer, writer, designer, or technician, our students develop the processes and skills critical to the arts:

Create

- Engage in the creative problem solving process
- Develop technique and craft with increasing proficiency
- Make discoveries about one's self and the world

Respond

- Listen and see critically
- Critique one's own work and the work of others
- Recognize and appreciate a wide variety of styles in the arts

Perform

- Communicate ideas and feelings through performance or exhibition
- Take risks
- Present something new as an individual or a collaborator

We equally invite all of our community members—both within the school and the larger community—to engage in and experience the richness of being an audience member.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAM

The goal of the performing arts program is to provide opportunities for students to explore the various areas of the arts, while at the same time developing skills related to life-long learning.

The Westwood Public Schools Performing Arts Department offers instruction in music, K-12; and drama, 5-12.

A. Overview of the Elementary Music Program

General/Instrumental Music:

Kindergarten	1x per week	30 minutes
Grade 1	1x per week	45 minutes
Grade 2	1x per week	45 minutes
Grade 3	1x per week	45 minutes
Grade 4	2x per week • General music • Instrumental	45 minutes each
Grade 5	1x per week • General music 1x per week • Chorus (1/2 year only)	45 minutes each
Grade 5 Band¹	1x per week	30 minutes
String program/Orchestra	After school	45 minute group classes
Grades 1-5²	1x per week	60 minute orchestra

Elementary Drama:

Grade 5	1x per week • Drama (1/2 year only)	45 minutes
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¹ Grade 5 Band is an elective. Band is scheduled during the school day at a time that is convenient for music teachers and classroom teachers.

² Run through the Prodigy Program, a tuition-based lesson program.

Fifth grade students receive one-half year of drama, which serves as an introduction course. The general music teachers teach this class, and participate in discussions and professional development to ensure best practices in their teaching.

Elementary Staffing:

The elementary level is staffed by 4.0 FTE general music teachers (who also teach the drama component) and two part-time instrumental teachers (.8 and .6). The strings teachers are stipend positions.

B. Overview of the Middle School Program

Upon entering middle school, all students select band, chorus or general music for grades 6 and 7. In grade 8, students may choose either chorus or band as an elective. Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, general music will also be offered as an elective for grade 8.

Band/Chorus meets for the full school year, every other day, for 43-minute periods. General Music meets every other day for a quarter, for 43-minute periods. Orchestra meets during x-block twice per week, and is tuition-based through the Prodigy Program (students are not graded in orchestra).

All middle school students are enrolled in drama for one term in grades 6, 7, and 8.³

Middle School Staffing:

The middle school staff includes 2.0 FTE music teachers and 2.0 FTE drama teachers. The orchestra teacher is a stipend position.

³ In 2011-2012, a term is 45 days. In the 2012-2013 school year, terms at Thurston will become trimesters, and students will be enrolled in drama for 60 days in each grade.

C. Overview of the High School Program

Upon entering Westwood High school, students may choose music as an elective. Course offerings include:

- Concert Band
- Wind Ensemble (by audition)
- String Orchestra
- Piano Lab
- Music Theory (contingent on sufficient student enrollment and staffing)
- Drama 1
- Drama 2
- Drama 3 & 4
- Technical Theater

All classes meet for the full school year, seven days out of an eight-day cycle for 47-minute blocks.

High School Staffing:

The high school staff consists of 1.4 FTE music teachers and 1.0 drama teachers.

D. Co-Curricular Programs

In addition to music and drama classes, The Westwood Performing Arts Department offers opportunities for student participation in the arts outside of the school day. These opportunities can include the middle school musical, middle school jazz band, middle school select chorus, the high school play, the high school musical, drama club, high school jazz ensembles, Passing Notes (*a cappella* singing group) and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. For the majority of students, participation in these activities is an extension of their classroom learning. However, for other students, co-curricular offerings provide an opportunity to participate in the arts, while concentrating their study during the school day in other areas.

E. Community Connections

The performing arts department is active in engaging the community and promoting the arts. From year round concerts and theater shows, to service work, teachers and students are actively engaged in bringing music to the community in Westwood.

The Westwood Performing Arts Staff actively seek out grant opportunities to enrich the students experience in the arts. Through generous grants from the PTO and WEF, **Jazz Night** was established, to bring students from both the middle school and high school together to play a concert with professional jazz musicians from the community. March celebrates **Music in our Schools Month**. Elementary music teachers open their classroom for families to visit and participate in class, while the high school celebrates the talents of all the arts students as a part of the annual **Encounters with the Arts**.

The **Tri-M Music Honor Society** at Westwood High School works to make connections outside of the high school department. They do community events such as performing at the senior center as a part of the “Westwood Sings” program. One of their goals is to raise money through events or projects to benefit other communities. The creation of their own CD, and performances at the annual Charity Concert, encourages and fosters students’ desire to form their own student-led ensembles. And through these events, they donated \$1,500 to Project Step in Boston. In the 2013 year, they are raising money to help a music program rebuild after Hurricane Sandy, as well as donate to a scholarship program at Western Connecticut State University.

Performing Arts Students have won numerous awards and recognitions. Music students have been accepted into **Eastern District Band, Chorus and Orchestras**, at both the Junior and Senior Levels. This past year, two went on to be accepted into the **All-State Chorus**. The Westwood High School Drama 3 and 4 performs each year at the **Emerson Drama Festival**, where many students have won awards for both acting and directing.

Both the Middle School and High School musicians perform outside of the classroom also, such as in the Memorial Day Parade in Westwood, as well as other events over the years such as the Town Hall Tree Lighting Ceremony, and the dedication of Veterans Park.

V. PERFORMING ARTS STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the curriculum review process the committee identified program strengths and articulated recommendations to guide the department's work in several areas:

- A. Program Opportunities and Participation
- B. Curriculum and Instruction
- C. Assessment
- D. Instructional Technology
- E. Professional Development

These findings are outlined below.

A. Program Opportunities and Participation

To what extent does the program provide Westwood students with the opportunity for proficiency development? To what extent has the performing arts department program been supported by the school community?

Strengths:

- The commitment to a robust 4th grade instrumental program during the school day provides an opportunity for all students to explore a musical instrument.
- A comprehensive theater program that allows students to study drama from grades 5-12.
- The developmental, skills-based focus of the middle school drama program (rather than a performance-based program) that focuses on the development of broadly applicable skills

such as critical thinking, self-assessment and group-assessment in addition to drama skills such as acting, vocal projection, improvisation, etc.

- An extensive co-curricular program that provides opportunities for broad participation such as jazz band, acappella, plays and musicals.
- A strong general music program K-8, that includes both performers and non-performers, with sufficient instructional time.
- A very active parent group, Westwood Friends of the Performing Arts, that supplements the Performing Arts Department's resources.

Recommendations:

- Secure additional staffing to alleviate large class sizes at the middle school and to support a curricular strings program.
- Explore possible models for implementing an elementary all-town chorus.
- Expand piano lab to include a second year course to accommodate student interest for further study.
- As the size of the high school chorus expands, explore establishing an audition-based choral class.
- Establish a curricular string program that is akin to the opportunities for band and choral students.

B. Curriculum and Instruction

To what extent is an organized, up-to-date curriculum in place? To what extent are researched-based instructional practices being implemented?

Strengths:

- Existing curriculum is aligned with all state and national standards for music and theater education.
- Students are provided with a variety of musical and drama experiences that both explore skills of the discipline and real world/life skills.
- The K-12 Performing Arts curriculum ensures that all students get experiences in a variety of art forms as a part of their education.
- Teachers use both teacher-directed and student-directed techniques in their classes to engage students in their own learning.
- The focus in the performing arts curriculum is on skill development as well as non-performance skills, such as critical-thinking, creating and self-assessment.
- Students in the performing ensembles often play together for many years. This familiarity creates a culture that is safe and encourages them to take risks.

Recommendations:

- Create a K-12 dynamic curriculum map aligned to power standards to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment (i.e., 5-12 Drama, 3-12 Instrumental Music, K-7 General Music, and 5-12 Chorus).
- Frame curriculum units around engaging essential questions.
- Reframe ensemble classes from their traditional focus only on performance to a more comprehensive musical experience.

- As part of the curriculum mapping process, revise the elementary music curriculum with a focus on depth over breadth.
- Align Grade 4 Instrumental (Band) with Grade 4 Advanced Recorders—same concepts, standards.
- Identify opportunities for spiraling knowledge and skills across grades.
- Identify essential common/benchmark experiences for transitions from grades 5 to 6, and grades 8 to 9.
- Establish written curriculum for high school chorus and piano lab courses.
- Identify opportunities for meaningful cross-curricular connections (e.g., Grade 2 sound, etc.)
- Increase opportunities at the middle school and high school to enroll in non-performance classes and/or alternative ensembles (e.g., music theory, Grade 8 “rock block”)

C. Assessment

To what extent are assessments that reflect student learning goals in place, being implemented, and being used to inform instruction and improve student achievement?

Strengths:

- Teachers are continually collaborating on creating common assessments, especially for those who are teaching the same grade level.
- Teachers who teach classes that “feed” into each other are collaborating on how to build from simple assessments

(elementary) into more complex assessments (HS), while still measuring the same musical outcomes.

- Informal assessments consistently happen in performing arts classes, especially as part of the rehearsal process.
- Teachers have developed many formative assessments to use throughout the year to not only track student progress, but also to teach the students how to self-assess, therefore gaining independence in their own learning.

Recommendations:

- Develop common assessments for benchmark grades around power standards (grade 3, grade 5).
- Develop common assessments for all courses taught in common.
- Expand assessment methods for middle school and high school performing groups taking advantage of technology to examine growth over time.
- Articulate common expectations for proficiency through department rubrics.
- Continue to revise and update drama assessments (performance tasks, rubrics) so that students and teachers are able to see growth over time.
- Expand the use of SmartMusic as an assessment tool and feedback mechanism, including into the grade 3 and 4 recorder classes.
- Expand the use of Web 2.0 tools, e.g., SoundCloud, for ensemble and individual self-assessment.

D. Instructional Technology

In what ways is instructional technology being used to facilitate powerful teaching and learning?

Technology is becoming integrated more and more into the performing arts. However in some cases, the successful use of technology is dictated by teaching space. Teachers who have a dedicated space have more opportunities to use technology than those who don't.

Strengths:

- The teachers in the performing arts department are eager to use new technology to help students learn and assess.
- Technology is currently being used not just for teacher benefit, but also for the students to learn how to use it at home to further their own learning.
- Increasingly, students are provided opportunities to use technology both for composition and for music-making.
- Many teachers are using technology to facilitate self-assessment (both individual and ensemble).

Recommendations:

- Increase teacher access to recording equipment and student computers for assessment purposes.
- Ensure that middle school and high school students learn how to use the technology and web platforms in order to independently record and self-assess their performances.
- Budget for student subscriptions for applications such as SmartMusic.

- Explore opportunities to leverage technology for the dissemination of student performances (e.g., posting videos, recording, etc.).

E. Professional Development

To what extent is there a focus on improving the skills and capacity of teachers to implement the curriculum? To what extent does the professional culture promote collaboration to support student learning and achievement?

Strengths:

- Faculty has time to meet together and collaborate through Reflective Practice and Professional Learning Communities to discuss teaching, learning and assessment.
- Faculty meets both as a K-12 group, and in smaller discipline/level specific groups during professional development time to discuss department goals, student learning and instruction.
- Teachers have the opportunity to attend conferences and workshops out of the district that are often funded by the district. This gives them a broader perspective of what is going on in music and theater education around the state and region.

Recommendations:

- Provide opportunities through professional development for both departments to work together to examine student work as it relates to the district determined assessment measures.
- Provide opportunities to bring workshops/speakers into Westwood for the faculty to work with.

VI. APPENDICES

A. Resources

Asmus, E., Lee, K., Lindsey, A., Patchen, J., Wheatley, K. (1997). Discipline-Based Arts Education: A Conceptual Framework for Learning and Teaching the Arts. *Visual Arts Research*, 23(2), 114-123.

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Conway, C. (2002). Curriculum Writing in Music. *Music Educators Journal*, 88(6), 54-59.

Hanley, B., Montgomery, J. (2005). Challenges to Music Educators: Curriculum Reconceptualized. *Music Educators Journal*. 91(4), 17-20.

Massachusetts Art Curriculum Framework, November 1999

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/arts/1099.pdf>

Partnership on 21st Century Skills (P21) “4Cs:” Critical thinking and problem-solving, Creativity and innovation, Collaboration, and Communication

<http://www.p21.org/>