

**Richard Wells
254 Hill Rd.
Harwinton, CT 06791**

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Brookfield Public School
Board of Education
Curriculum Committee
Brookfield, CT

Dear Committee Members,

It has been my pleasure to work with the Music Department in the Brookfield School District as they have reviewed the music program and explored ways to strengthen their program in the district.

Over the past four months I have visited each school, observed music classes and met with music teachers and building level administrators. I have met with the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Genie Slone and a member of the Board of Education, Jane Miller. In addition, I have met the high school band parents organization and informally spoke with students.

This review process also involved a lengthy self-assessment by the music department faculty, focusing on three fundamental aspects of the program: Curriculum – What is most important for students to learn?, Instruction – What are the best ways to deliver instruction?, and Assessment – How do we know when students have been successful and how can we use this information to improve teaching and learning in music?

The following is a summary of this process. It is in the form of a series of commendations and recommendations and is organized in six specific areas – Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Facilities, Leadership and Advocacy.

Brookfield has a dedicated music staff and has a strong desire to improve the music program. Given the financial constraints of the budget, each school has already taken significant steps to address some of the recommendations outlined in this report. I believe that significant growth is possible in the department with only a modest amount of additional resources and support.

Research has shown that the arts, as an academic subject, can have a significant role in a child's overall academic development and can provide students with critical 21st Century Skills - skills and understandings that they will need to be productive in the future.

Sincerely,

Richard Wells
Music Consultant

Brookfield Public Schools

Music Department Review

2010-11

Richard Wells – Consultant

Center Elementary School - Lynn Orzolek
Huckleberry Hill Elementary School - Margaret Fitzgerald and Nicole Yopez
Whisconier Middle School - Leah Sprague, Diana Vogel, and Adam Robinson
Brookfield High School - Scott Friend and John LaMendola

Curriculum:

Commendations:

1. The music staff has a strong desire to create the best possible music program for the students of Brookfield.
2. Over the past few years, the music department has taken significant steps towards developing a standards-based curriculum that sequences the knowledge and skills contained in the National and State Standards for Music across the Pre K – 12-music program.
3. The district has provided professional development time for music teachers to meet together to develop the music curriculum and a stipend for a music teacher to coordinate this work.
4. The staff has the content knowledge and individual musical skills to provide the program with a strong collective knowledge base to develop curriculum, including a general understanding of the standards and the ‘Three Artistic Processes’ (Creating, Performing and Responding – See attached).

Recommendations:

1. **Vision** –Vision is critical to the development of a strong music program and it can only be fully developed through the collaboration of music staff on a regular basis. Opportunities to meet as a department across the district, as well as within individual schools are critical to the continued development of a strong vision for the department.
2. **Curricular Articulation and Professional Development** - There is a need to improve the articulation of the curriculum between grade levels in the district. There should be a sequential organization of the music curriculum structured around central concepts (Big Ideas) that focus on higher level thinking skills. This is true for the entire music program. Creating a conceptual framework that is focused on what is most valuable to learn at each grade level will help make the number of objectives feel manageable for students, as well as teachers. This will require sustained professional development with the staff working collaboratively. The Three Artistic Processes might provide a starting point for this discussion.
3. **The Connection of Curriculum to Courses and Classes** - The music department should review each class or course that is being offered to measure its ability to meet these “Big Ideas”.
4. **Curricular Integration** - A structure for curricular integration should be explored. Music is a vehicle through which other subjects can be taught and can be a valuable tool for the general classroom teacher. This is an area that is already being explored at Center School.
5. **Rigor, Relevance and Relationships** – The curriculum should be rigorous, relevant to students and foster positive relationships with students.

6. **Music as an Academic Subject** – Music is often not viewed as an academic subject yet it is viewed as such by an impressive number of educational organizations (College Board, US Congress, NASSP, US Dept. of Education... See attached)

Instruction:

Commendations:

1. **Support of Administration** - Several of the recommendations that have been informally presented in the review process are already in the process of being addressed.
2. **Openness to Change** – Teachers display a general openness to change and the desire to find ways to strengthen their program.
3. **Age Appropriate Performances** - (*Center & HHES for 2nd and 3rd grades*) All students at Center School present a performance for their parents. This is done in an age appropriate fashion, informally, in the classroom. This provides a valuable opportunity for parents to understand the value of the music program and for the teacher to meet and interact with parents.
4. **Music and Literacy Link** - (*Center*) The music teacher at Center School has a strong interest in integrating other subjects into her classroom. For example, she uses storybooks in her class and has recently attended a workshop with one of the kindergarten teachers. This workshop focused on the connection between music and literacy.
5. **4th Grade Band Program** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) The enrollment in the 4th Grade Band Program is commendable. There is an overwhelming excitement about playing a musical instrument.
6. **4th Grade Chorus** – (*Huckleberry Hill*) This is the second year of the chorus, which meets before school. This group has doubled its size in just one year.
7. **4th Grade Wind Ensemble** – In its 8th year, this group meets during recess time one day per week and continues to grow in numbers every year to meet the needs of talented elementary musicians.
8. **Music Appreciation II/Early College Experience [ECE]**. During the first year of this class in 2010-2011 school year, 58 students enrolled in this UCONN music class – one of two such ECE music classes in the state.
9. **High School Band Mentors** – (*Huckleberry Hill*) Some high school band members serve as mentors for students in the Huckleberry Hill band program
10. **Computers** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) - Students have access to computers for music instruction.
11. **Enrollment Increase in Band** - (*Whisconier*) - Over the past few years there has been a significant increase in the students enrolled in the band program.
12. **Enrollment Increases in Chorus** – (*Whisconier*) Over the past two years there has been a significant increase in students enrolled in the choral program.
13. **Middle School Regionals** - (*Whisconier*) This is the second year that the middle school has participated in CMEA's middle school regional auditions - (7 out of 8 students who auditioned were selected for this year's festival).
14. **Additional Ensembles at the Middle School** - (*Whisconier*) - A Wind Ensemble, Jazz Band, and Drum Line are offered before school or during lunch. These small performing groups help meet the needs of interested students who want a greater challenge.
15. **Parent Support Group** - (*BHS*) The parent group of the high school band program provides critical support of the band program.
16. **Non-Performing Ensemble** - (*BHS*) Student interest in non-performing courses is met through an array of courses. (Music Appreciation, Guitar, Music Theory)
17. **BHS Marching Band** - (*BHS*) The high school marching band has distinguished itself in competitions.

18. **Creating an Option for High School Band Members** - (*BHS*) The creation of an opportunity for students who are interested in playing in band but not the marching band, has helped to provide access to the program for a greater number of students.
19. **Use of Community Resources** – The “Bock and Blu” program effectively combines students with area professional musicians. Also the *WCSU Chamber Choir* performs and gives workshops for the *BHS Honors Special Chorus*.
20. **Special UCONN Basketball Game Performance** - This year the BHS Band and Chorus performed at a UCONN Men’s Basketball Game in December 2010.

Recommendations:

1. **Course and Program Evaluation and Modification** – Once the curriculum has been developed based on big ideas, each music course should be evaluated, modified, and/or eliminated based on its ability to address these core ideas.
2. **Depreciation Schedule** - A depreciation table should be compiled including all school owned instruments. This inventory should include the type of instrument, make, serial number, replacement value and life expectancy. A replacement schedule should be developed that projects a schedule of purchases over a five-year span. This will avoid having to buy instruments only when there is extra money in the budget or when there is an unplanned crisis.
3. **New and Replacement Equipment Budget** - Develop line items in the budget for new and replacement equipment. Ordering all equipment at the district level might be considered. This may reduce the overall cost of these purchases.
4. **Repair Budget** – Create a line item in the budget for repairs of equipment and the tuning of pianos on a regular basis. Managing piano tuning and repairs at the district level may help to reduce costs.
5. **Celebrating Success** - Opportunities to celebrate the successes of students in the program should be developed. These opportunities should be developed both outside and **inside** the school community.
6. **Sound Equipment** - Provide quality sound equipment in each music room along with recording devices for student assessment and self-assessment purposes.
7. **Supply and Music Budget** - A line item in the budget for music and supplies should be established at each school.
8. **Quality Literature** – The literature that is chosen for music instruction needs to grow out of the core concepts that are established in the curriculum. Presenting quality literature should be the primary focus of instruction. This should include a wide variety of music that can be a vehicle for teaching critical knowledge and skills. Music concerts should be demonstrations of what a quality music program is, rather than just being a vehicle to entertain an audience.
9. **Numbers of Students and Allocation of Funds** - The number of students served should be considered when providing funding for programs, even though secondary programs are by their nature more expensive to run.
10. **Integration** - (*Center*) Provide greater opportunities for music to be integrated into the classroom. This might include planning time with classroom teachers, or even a professional development session presented by the music teacher and a classroom teacher.
11. **Communication of Needs** - The music program needs to effectively communicate the needs of the department to the principal of each school. This includes budgetary items as well as other concerns affecting teaching and learning. It is important for music teachers to be strong advocates for their program, even while understanding the constraints of the budget and realizing that not all needs can be met. This communication might include:
 - a. Articulating the needs of the school in terms of their impact on student learning and their effectiveness in meeting the goals of the department K-12.
 - b. Meeting with the principal to communicate the needs of the program.

- c. Work together with the principal to meet the needs of the department, including the use of outside funding (i.e. Bock and Blu).
12. **Instrumental Class Sizes** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) Class sizes for instrumental music are large. Smaller class sizes are critical when trying to provide and reinforce fundamental skills for beginning students. One of the HHES music teachers is teaching typing sections [seven 50 minute sections] during the 2010-2011 school year.
 13. **Integration** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) Explore options for integrating music into the general classroom.
 14. **General Music Schedule** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) The length and frequency of general music classes should be examined. An effort should be made to increase the frequency of classes. A 50-minute class is a very long class for younger students and being offered only once a week does not provide for the reinforcement of skills needed in an elementary general music program. (30 minutes twice a week would be a better option.)
 15. **Pullouts** - (*Whisconier*) The “pullout” music schedule should be reviewed. Avenues for reducing the number of pullouts should be explored. This should be done without impacting the quality of the instrumental music program. This is something that is currently being explored. In the end, it may be best to pilot this change for a year to determine its success.
 16. **Rehearsal Time** - (*Whisconier*) The length of rehearsal time should be increased. A 30-minute rehearsal does not provide an adequate amount of time. After taking instruments out of cases, tuning up, and then packing up at the end of rehearsals, little time is left for rehearsing. There is a proposal to pilot a schedule change to have a longer band period and chorus for 2011-2012.
 17. **Creating (Composition and Improvisation)** - (*Whisconier and BHS*) Opportunities for creating should be added to the middle school and high school curriculum. This might include a music composition component to a music technology class, improvisation in the drum, or songwriting in the guitar class.
 18. **General Music Schedule** - (*Whisconier*) The current general music program does not provide the skill development that is needed in music. Much like PE music students, regular reinforcement of skills is required to gain mastery. A year long program that meets on a three or four day rotation would be a better instructional arrangement allowing students to develop their musical skills.
 19. **Regional Festival (Chorus)** - (*Whisconier*) Choral students should also participate in the Regional Festival.
 20. **Rock Ensemble** - (*Whisconier*) - The possible, development of a rock ensemble with singers and instrumentalists would be a great addition to the choral program, providing an exciting musical experience for students and increasing the visibility of this program in the school.
 21. **BHS Band Enrollment** - (*BHS*) Band enrollment at the high school has been very low over the past number of years. This has been true even though students have been heavily recruited for the program. At this point, steps need to be taken to change the structure that is currently present in the band program. This needs to be done without eliminating the things the program does well. Although there is strong support for the marching band by those involved, many feel the marching band is a factor in the low enrollment. As enrollment in this group has declined, students have been more aggressively recruited. This has had an opposite effect. Given the size of the band program, it is difficult to form two viable ensembles with balanced instrumentation. By doing so, the type and quality of standard band literature the groups can perform is limited. Currently there is a Marching Band and a Concert Band, with the only difference between the two groups being that the concert band does not have to participate in the marching band (Although some do voluntarily). Given the nature of the current program the following might offer some viable alternatives:
 - Combine both the concert band and the marching band into one ensemble. Students who wish to be part of the marching band can do so and receive an additional .25 credit. Honors credit in this scenario could be offered for additional rigor (for private lessons, recitals, auditions, musical composition, program notes for concerts, etc.)

- If two viable ensembles can be created from the students registered for band then it might be possible to form a wind ensemble and a concert band. The Wind Ensemble would consist of the stronger players. Members of both groups could elect to be part of the marching band and receive an additional .25 credits. If the Wind Ensemble performs a higher-level music and can demonstrate higher rigor, honors credit should be offered.
22. **Honors Credit in Band and General Chorus** – (*BHS*) Based on a menu of points, students will have an opportunity to earn honors music credit.
 23. **Music Technology** - (*BHS*) The development of a music technology lab at the high school could enhance learning in all music classes. It would be especially valuable for students learning music theory and music composition. In 2011-2012. A music technology class is proposed for BHS.
 24. **Music Technology** – (*All schools*) To facilitate a music technology program in the district each school would need a music computer lab [Macintosh is the preferable platform]. A Macintosh platform is what is often used at the college level and is the industry standard.
 25. **Band Parents** - (*BHS*) The band parents group, “Pit Crew,” at the high school might be expanded to support the entire band program at BHS. This might require a name change to “Band Parent Club.” (The group does support the entire program even though the majority of their effort goes into financially supporting the marching band) In addition, this group might also help the middle school to develop a group that could support the middle school program.
 26. **Songwriting** - (*Whisconier and BHS*) In order to address the Music Standards as well as the Three Artistic Processes, the all guitar classes should include a songwriting component.
 27. **Suggested Course of Study** - (*BHS*) Create a course of study for the music program, providing students with a progression of courses that would prepare them for future study in music. In addition to participating in a performing ensemble, this might include also taking Music Appreciation, Music Theory, Composition, etc.
 28. **Professional Development** - Teachers should take advantage of Individual Personal Development Plans (IPDP).
 29. **Creation of a Mentor Program** – Use high school and advanced middle school band and chorus members as mentors for younger grade students.
 30. **Guest Artist Program** – Guest artists from WESCONN and the community could enhance the program by offering master classes and conducting performing ensembles. This would benefit students and be an effective professional development for teachers.
 31. **Choral and Band Festival / Town-wide Jazz Festival** – Consider offering band and chorus festivals on alternating years including elementary through high school students. A guest artist might be used as a conductor. Build on the “Band-O-Rama” festival.
 32. **Musical Accompanist for all Choral Concerts** – It is recommended that all choral concerts have a “hired” musical accompanist.

Assessment

Commendations:

1. **Student Self-Assessment** - Several of the teachers currently record student performances and play them for their students for self-assessment and instruction.
2. **Established Need** - Teachers have identified assessment as a need in the department.

Recommendations:

1. **Link between Big Ideas and Assessments** - Once developed, assessments should be connected to the “Big Ideas” that have been established for the curriculum. This will provide a framework for assessments and align the vertical and horizontal articulation in the music program. The assessments

should measure knowledge and skills that are leverage points for student growth and measure students' abilities to transfer what they have learned to new situations. This will allow teachers and students to chart student growth over time.

2. **Higher Level Thinking Skills** - Assessments should focus in part on higher level thinking skills (analysis, evaluation and creating) and not be predominantly focused on recall. (ex. Drop the needle test where students have to name the composer and the title of the piece.)
3. **Self-Assessment** – Self-assessment should be part of the assessment process, providing a valuable insight into what students know but may not be able to do. Self-assessment is also a valuable tool for empowering students to take ownership for their own learning.
4. **Common Assessments** - Common assessments should be developed and collaboratively scored by teachers. These should be directly linked to improving instruction.

Facilities

Commendations:

1. All music classes are offered in a dedicated space for music.

Recommendations:

1. **BHS Chorus Room** - (*BHS*) The Chorus room has poor acoustics in two ways – students cannot hear each other because of the reflective surfaces, and there is a bad echo in the room due to parallel walls. Acoustic panels may be able to resolve both of these issues. However it will require the services of an acoustical engineer. The Wenger Corporation may be able to provide these services free of charge.
2. **BHS Chorus Office and Ensemble Room** - (*BHS*) A small ensemble room and office would enhance the choral program at the high school. This could be accomplished by combining the two small rooms that are next to the chorus room. Creating a door with a window to this space from the chorus room would allow for supervision by the teacher when he is in the choral room.
3. **BHS Band Room** - (*BHS*) If the band program continues to grow, the size of the band room will soon become inadequate for the number of students enrolled, especially if the groups are combined. This includes physical space as well as the acoustics of the room.
4. **Whisconier Band Room** - (*Whisconier*) The current band room is too small for the current band ensembles. This causes three problems – the physical size of the room does not adequately house each group, the acoustics of the room does not allow students to hear each other, and the volume of sound is too loud for the space.
5. **Storage of Music Equipment** – The storage of music equipment and musical instruments is a concern in many of the buildings in the district.
6. **Huckleberry Hill Band Room** - (*Huckleberry Hill*) A larger space is needed for the band program. Rehearsing in the gym requires a significant amount of set-up and take-down time with the impact of reduced instructional time with students.
7. **Music Technology Room at the High School** – A music technology room at the high school would be a strong asset to the high school music program.
8. **Dedicated performance spaces at Huckleberry Hill and Whisconier** – This may be impossible financially at these two schools. It is more critical at the middle school.
9. **BHS Auditorium Lighting** – Replace and renovate lighting system in the BHS auditorium.

Leadership

Commendations:

1. The support of the Central Office Administration and Board of Education to undertake this review is noteworthy.
2. Leadership of Margaret Fitzgerald – Even with a full time teaching load, Margaret has continued to provide leadership for the department.
3. The support of Principals - Many of the principals have already begun to undertake changes in their buildings based on the preliminary report findings.

Recommendations:

1. Music Department Leadership - This review process will hopefully provide direction for the music program. However, sustained growth will only be possible with strong K – 12 leadership. This person will need to oversee many aspects of the music program including the following:
 - A. Oversee budget k through 12.
 - B. Oversee the school inventory of music equipment and its repair (Using a single repairperson and piano tuner might reduce overall cost).
 - C. Guide curriculum development initiatives.
 - D. Provide leadership and support for the staff.
 - E. Act as a voice for the music department directly reporting to the Assistant Superintendent and providing a K through 12 perspective for the department.
 - F. Provide ongoing communication and content advice for district-wide administrations (Assistant Superintendent and Principals).
 - G. Help guide and support common assessment initiatives.
 - H. Oversee a process of continuous improvement for the music department based on student work.
 - I. Plan and implement district-wide professional development.
 - J. Coordinate advocacy initiatives within the community and the schools.
 - K. Provide leadership in the formation and support of a district-wide group of music parents “Friends for Brookfield Music.”

Advocacy

Commendations:

1. **Newspaper Articles** – The district has submitted a number of articles spotlighting the achievements of the school’s music students
2. **The High school Band’s Website** - The Band’s website is a valuable resource for the band providing band members and the community with information about the organization.
3. **Bock and Blu** – This is one of the wonderful events that Brookfield Music Department sponsors. It is a great connection between the community and the music department.

Recommendations:

1. **Brookfield Friends for Music** - The formation of a town-wide music support group – Brookfield Friends for Music. This group would support the district-wide music department providing funds for guest artists and clinicians (area musicians and faculty from WECONN), piano accompanists for chorus concerts, Town-wide Festivals, scholarships for summer study, awards for outstanding students at each school, support for competitions and festivals, etc. They would also be available to assist at rehearsals and events. They could also be a powerful voice for the support of education within the community.
2. **Music Department Website** – Create a music department website to function as a public resource as well as a vehicle for advocacy.
3. **Making Connections with Arts Groups** – Make connections with arts organizations in the area and enlist their support for the growth of the music program in Brookfield.

4. **Internal Advocacy** – Advocacy begins internally. Marketing the program to key audiences within the school such as fellow faculty members, students and parents, is key for advocacy. (Of these, fellow faculty members are often ignored.)
5. **Celebrations of Student Success** - Celebrations of student success by the public recognition of students over the PA, student of the month, and performances at school events are all forms of advocacy.
6. **Making connections with the Community** – Performances for or with senior citizens can be an effective advocacy tool not only for the music department, but also for the school district. Performing for service organizations is another great connection with the community or picking a worthy cause in town and providing a benefit concert for that organization.