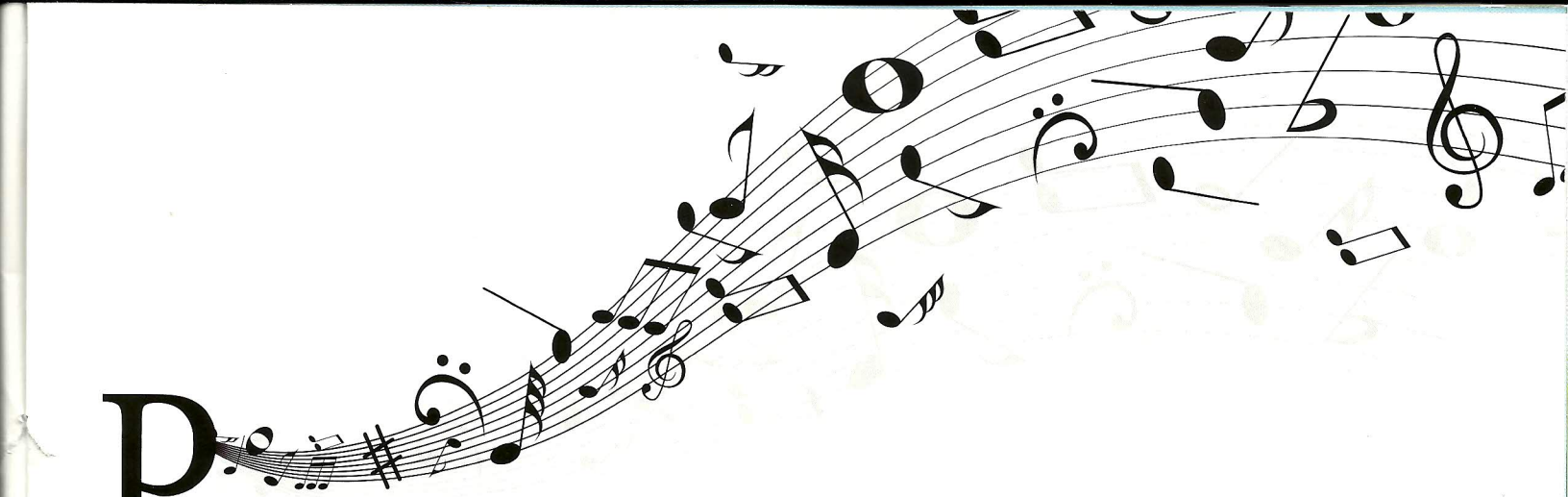


Arts in the school can show up on report card

BY CHARLENE OLDHAM
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Preparing six different classes for seven different grade levels every day can be tough for band director Brad Glore, especially considering he spends part of his precious plan time driving the two miles between the high school and middle school in Park Hills.

"It's challenging in the fact that every group is different," Glore says, who arrives around 6:30 each morning before tackling a section of high school marching band, three sections of sixth-grade beginning band broken down by instrument type and one class each of seventh- and eighth-graders to round out the school day. Then there are the after-school practices, games and festivals during marching band season that can mean 14-hour days for Glore.

"In the fall, marching band is a big part of what I do because it takes up so much of my time," says Glore who has been the district's sole band director for 19 years.

Around Thanksgiving, the marching band transitions into a concert band, but that doesn't necessarily mean Glore has an easier schedule ahead.

"The jazz band is extracurricular. They come in before and after school. The jazz band is really a big part of the PR program for the band," says Glore, who explained he tries to work year-around with the group, which plays at many events around the community.

All that leaves little time for recruiting. And adding other classes during the school day is pretty much out of the question in Central R-3, which employs four music teachers districtwide to serve its student body of around 2,000. Glore said he would love to have an assistant band director to help boost the band's numbers, which fluctuate between about 75 in marching band and 60 in concert band, or add to offerings he just can't justify.

"I really can't be at the high school more hours of the day because I'm needed at the middle school. But I try to be an adviser to kids because, number one, I want them to be successful as students, but I also want them to be able to participate in my program. But it's a challenge. It's probably one of the biggest challenges in the high school program – to keep them interested, eligible and engaged."

Studies show keeping kids engaged can be a lot easier if they are involved in the arts. A 2010 report by the Missouri

Alliance for Arts Education found correlations between student participation in fine arts and positive discipline, attendance and graduation rates and higher standardized test scores. In one specific example, the number of violent infractions and other serious disciplinary problems that required out-of-school suspensions or suspensions of more than 10 days was 1.26 per 100 students for districts with low levels of arts participation. That number dropped to 0.69 per 100 students for districts with high levels of enrollment in fine arts classes, according to the study, funded by the Missouri Arts Council.

"That's one of those areas that people don't think about," says Ben Martin, executive director of the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education. "It can actually be a cost savings because administrators can focus on what they are supposed to be doing rather than acting as the policemen of the school."

Those positive impacts didn't just occur in well-off districts that could afford fancy theaters and specialized art classes like sculpture and photography, Martin says, who explained the research team made a point of comparing schools with similar income levels to control for economic factors.

"And among those students, not only was the correlation still there, in fact, it was more dramatic. It works at that level regardless of economic circumstance," he said. "It provides such an achievement narrative for students – so many positive outcomes, in attendance, achievement, graduation rate and behavior – that they really cannot afford to cut arts programs in schools. But the economic pressures are so overwhelming that sometimes administrators don't feel they have a choice."

In places like Lansing, Mich., those pressures led district officials to eliminate art, music and physical education classes at the elementary level in an effort to slash \$6 million from the budget last year. In Illinois, the Chicago Sun-Times reported that among the 1,700 teachers cut in the summer of 2013 in Chicago Public Schools, 98 taught visual or performing arts and 61 taught music, according to figures from the teachers' union.



Brad Glore seeks to keep high school musicians interested, eligible and engaged in Park Hills.

In Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education dictates students must receive a minimum number of minutes of arts education in elementary school, middle schoolers must have access to a certain number of minutes of instruction and high school students must earn at least one fine arts credit to earn a diploma. Those and some other protections – including a recent addition to the Missouri School Improvement Program’s “Items Not Waived” checklist – calls for districts to provide “adequate instruction in physical education and fine arts.”

“So that was added just in the last year. But the problem with that is there are not specific penalties associated with not checking that item off,” Martin says. “I think it’s really just more of a checklist of items that districts have to keep on their radar, but it is one of those protections.”

While Missouri schools must offer at least some arts education at every level, the recession has led some districts to cut the number of classes and programs open to students.

“We have a lot of anecdotal evidence that not so much have programs been eliminated as reduced,” Martin says. He added plans are in place to conduct another study of arts education in the state over the next year or so. “So we’re hearing that and we want to see if that indeed is the case and what impact that may have had.”

In some district such as Hancock Place, it’s meant some fine arts teachers haven’t been replaced as they moved to other positions within the district or jobs elsewhere. And, while the St. Louis County district still offers band and choir to its high school and middle school students, one teacher has been responsible for both areas over the last few years, leaving less time for full-year classes devoted

to specialties including guitar and piano or extracurricular activities like state choral competitions or high school musicals.

“For students to excel in music, they need experiences outside of the classroom just as an aspiring athlete ought to have the opportunity to kick a ball outside of gym,” says Emily Mauro, who was the district’s secondary vocal music teacher before taking a part-time reading position at the elementary school following the birth of her son. “I do not blame the administration for making their decision, but I regret it on behalf of the students who remain. When it comes to arguing for the importance of music education, I can blather on about the repeatedly demonstrated correlation between robust music programs and academic performance.”

Indeed, a growing body of research shows arts education can have a significant and long-lasting impact on students, particularly if they struggle socioeconomically. Low-income students who had significant access to fine arts offerings in high schools were more than three times as likely to earn a bachelor’s degree as low-income students without those experiences, according to a study from the National Endowment for the Arts. The report also found that low-income high school students who earned few or no arts credits were five times more likely to leave school without a diploma than low-income students who earned many arts credits. But the true value of arts education can’t be quantified with studies and statistics, said Mauro, who has since moved out of state.

“Music education does not exist in order to boost attendance or improve ACT scores. Music education exists – or needs to exist – in our schools for the same reason that art and music exist in all cultures across the globe; human beings crave beauty. We yearn for opportunities for self-expression and creativity that cannot readily exist in other academic areas.”

That is especially true for students who don’t excel academically or athletically, educators say. And while he loves his job as band director, and has even filled in as flag line coach some years, Glore can’t imagine successfully handling vocal music or anything else considering his current challenging school schedule.

“I would use that as the very, very last resort because you are not really going to be able to find a person who is equally comfortable doing both. You wouldn’t ask your football coach to coach basketball or your science teacher to teach art,” says Glore, who was already hard at work at band camp in July. “And if your goal is to make the program smaller, then you’re robbing the kids of a vital opportunity. That class, at least in their minds, might be the most important class they take all day.” ●

