

PEAK Award 2019

Owensboro Public Schools: Arts Sampler Program

Owensboro Public Schools (OPS) enjoys a rich heritage in the arts. Since 1871, generations of tradition, have fed into our innovative programs and created excellence in all art forms. Our emphasis on hiring outstanding teachers and supporting them has resulted in high retention of qualified staff and cohesive programs across all grade levels. We ensure every child receives the support they need in the arts (equity) and continue to give our highly diverse community a place to celebrate their contribution. We have found it is best to build successful students from participation in our proven programs, and our arts teachers are excited to initiate this innovative program for our district.

Program Objectives

In the fall of 2017, our district faced both challenges of enormous student population growth and limited building space. Our administrative team challenged our arts programs to create an arts curriculum to involve *all* students in the arts. This effort removed a number of other offerings deemed not valuable to our students and exposed every student to all arts programs for the first time.

We chose to create an arts sampler for all fifth graders that placed students in choir, band, orchestra, theatre, dance, visual art, and physical education. Following an initial exposure through choir, band, orchestra, and dance, each student was allowed to choose one of these to continue for the remainder of the school year. Students choose one or two arts classes in their sixth-grade year, and most students continue this involvement through high school graduation. To address the students without financial means, we chose to outfit every student in the sampler with new Yamaha instruments in band and orchestra for their first two years in these programs. Parent response to this decision has been extremely positive. We wanted a truly equitable opportunity for arts participation for all students. With 74 percent of our school district's students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, we knew providing instruments at no cost for two years would eliminate that participation barrier.

Program Scope

We began the Arts Sampler with one school, Owensboro Middle School South, a school with a student population of 600. The program has now expanded to two campuses, iMiddle and Owensboro Middle School (OMS), our district's two sixth through eighth grade middle schools. We currently have more than 1,100 students involved in the arts at the two campuses (96 percent of the school population).

Program Uniqueness

Variations of this program have been attempted in other school districts but never with the complete support of school board funding. Learning from others, we set a limit of two years of free instrument provision to encourage commitment from instrumental music students. We

modified instructional strategies using Suzuki teaching as a model. Our teachers entered the process considering what attracted them to their art and how to give their students the same experience. By focusing on making beautiful tone, engaging art, and creating a meaningful connection for each student, we discovered many students with ability who would have never been part of our program in the past. Using school-owned instruments allows students to switch to new instruments without any expense for parents. Following our OPS traditions, we are fully committed to supplying instruments for families that cannot purchase/rent instruments due to financial need. Our arts program benefits from all performing arts positions, and their budgets are supplied through the Central Office Fine Arts. This removes student fundraising efforts for curricular arts programs.

Program Costs and Funding Sources

The OPS School Board funded two additional staff positions in the arts to allow growth in dance and visual art. The initial instrument purchases of \$150,000 were supported by the board. These instruments will remain in our inventory for 10-15 years of service, allowing more than 8,000 students to be exposed to instrumental music. The ample budgets supplied to all programs remove fees from the equation throughout students' middle school arts experiences. The Arts Sampler also allowed our district to restructure staff at OMS, placing increased emphasis on the academic core, as well.

Degree of School Board Involvement

The OPS School Board is firmly committed to the arts; the arts are included in our mission statement and goals. Focus on the whole child starts at the top with our superintendent, Dr. Nicholas Brake; Dr. Matthew Constant, Chief Academic Officer; and our administrative staff. In addition, each of our school board members are avid arts supporters who regularly attend arts performances in our schools and welcome more than 8,000 audience members and 3,500 performers to our annual Fine Arts Festival held at the RiverPark Center each spring. The Arts Festival has become a signature event for our district over the past 20 years, bringing our school community together to celebrate the arts. Our decision to invest deeply in the arts for our students was based on the tradition of success across all arts disciplines and our Fine Arts goal: **Every Art for Every Child in Every School.**

Program Progress Assessment Toward Stated Goals

The percentage of students involved in the arts continues to grow throughout our district. Since each program is taught by certified arts specialists, our students receive quality instruction wherever they choose to enter the arts. Our arts staff have responded by adding new classes and this ensures students may enter our programs when they are ready to engage in the arts. Parents are consistently pleased to find their children have abilities that are discovered in their schools, and they support the efforts of their children.

We find the longitudinal research ([Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art](#) by James Catterall) rings true that student involvement in a quality arts program significantly and positively impacts the success of our children across all measures. Our district currently supplies

a music and visual art specialist for each elementary school. We also supplement our physical education teacher-led dance program with our arts partner, Owensboro Dance Theatre, and supply 18 weeks of focused dance in each school. Our theatre programs in grades 6-12 are vibrant, and we are excited to welcome an elementary theatre program at two of our elementary schools. Our high school arts programs are robust in both number of students and depth of course offerings. With Advanced Placement classes, introductory classes, collaborative teaching in instrumental music, and differentiated levels available in all art forms, there is always a place for every child to become part of the arts. The success of our arts programs is measured with an annual festival and competitive events with support for individual students to carry on their arts participation beyond graduation.

The results show every arts program is vibrant with full enrollments and a consistent commitment to welcoming *every* child into the arts. Listed below are our accomplishments over the past two years:

2018-19

- The OMS Band was chosen to perform at the 2020 Kentucky Music Educators Association.
- Seventeen students were chosen for Kentucky All-State Choir-Band-Orchestra.
- Eight students judged as Distinguished in the Kentucky State Orchestra Solos and Ensembles.
- The OHS Marching Band was a State Semi-Finalist at Marching Band Championships.
- The OMS Band placed seventy students in District Band Clinic.
- OPS initiated a new Elementary Visual Art program serving every student in grades K-5.

2017-18

- Every musical ensemble rated Superior in State and District Festival.
- Fifteen students were chosen for Kentucky All State Choir-Band-Orchestra.
- The OHS Rose Curtain Players won Kentucky Thespians and performed at International Thespians.
- Seventeen OHS seniors accepted scholarships in the arts across all Art Forms. These students continued in each Kentucky University as well as regional conservatories.

Districtwide, our focus on the whole child has resulted in robust enrollment growth, and our district has become a school system of choice for families valuing the arts and an excellent education in an equitable way for all.

OWENSBORO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

August 21, 2019

Kentucky School Board Association
PEAK Award Nomination
260 Democrat Drive
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear PEAK Panel of Judges:

During my seven years of service on the Owensboro Public Schools Board of Education, we have seen tremendous growth in all of our 11 schools. The increase in student enrollment is largely due to the innovative program offerings initiated by our visionary superintendent, Dr. Nick Brake, our supportive school board members, and our dedicated administrators and teachers. Owensboro Public Schools has become a system of choice for parents and students who are attracted to our programs. With our student enrollment growing by twenty percent, we have been faced with school buildings that limited our choices. Our challenge became how to find success for our growing student population.

Owensboro Middle School was significantly beyond capacity. Considering our choices, we looked at the success of our outstanding arts programs and realized with some adjustments, these programs could enable us to move forward while protecting the Academic Core. We decided to remove a number of electives not producing results and support the programs consistently creating success for our students. Planning began in January to allow the fine art teachers to adjust their programs to become an *Arts Sampler* for all fifth graders. Each student has several weeks to experience choir, band, orchestra, dance, visual art, and theatre. After sampling all options, students then choose choir, band, orchestra, or dance to take for the remainder of the year. In sixth grade, we continue our tradition of allowing students to choose two arts classes.

During my tenure as Board Chair, our board fully supported this sampler initiative and funded two additional arts positions to serve the increased number of students. We also funded musical instruments for all students to sample while in the program. Students choosing band or orchestra were also supplied instruments through the sixth grade, allowing students and parents to fully explore the arts before making a financial commitment. This gave our teachers the chance to adjust instrument choices to fit the needs of their students.

The results have been tremendous, and the number of students continuing in the arts has increased across all arts programs. Innovative teaching has resulted in the discovery of many student talents never uncovered before with students from every neighborhood and socio-economic background involved in all arts. For the first time, there is a waiting list to enter Owensboro Middle School, and our arts classes are often cited by parents wanting to enroll their child in our schools. Our highly diverse district celebrates all cultures, and the arts have become the place where all students create together at our schools.

Each year, our school board welcomes parents and students to the Fine Arts Festival at Riverpark Center. In the Spring of 2019, our 20th Festival presented six days of events to over 8,000 audience members and nearly 4,000 performers. Visual Art filled the lobby, and the stage was filled with various performing artists of all grades; excited families filled the halls to capacity nearly every night. Our entire community gathered under one roof, creating a unity our society is often missing on many levels. Our *Arts Sampler* continues the OPS goals of Tradition in the Arts, Innovative teaching and learning, and Excellence in all areas.

Sincerely,



G. Dan Griffith, CEO

JEREMY EDGE
1810 FIELDCREST DRIVE
OWENSBORO, KY 42301
270.316.4075

September 3, 2019

Dear KSBA PEAK Award Panel:

I appreciate the opportunity to address you regarding the arts programming at Owensboro Public Schools. As the father of two daughters that are currently right in the middle of it, I can say that the Fine Arts Program has been a real blessing to our girls. I have a third grader at Sutton Elementary that is just beginning to get her feet wet and a seventh grader at Owensboro Middle that has been engaged in the arts at school for a few years now.

My oldest daughter, Addison, has been involved with the local dance theater since she was about 3 years old so she was extremely excited when she began to get even more exposure to other art forms back when she was in third and fourth grades. She was selected to be a part of the Sutton Singers, the elementary school's choir, and did that for a year. She enjoyed that, but the big thing she tells me that made a difference for her was getting to fifth grade and being part of the "arts sampler" program. As part of that program she was exposed to choir, band, orchestra, and dance. Having the dance experience already, she decided to go further with band and is now an excellent saxophone player. She is currently playing in the seventh grade band at the middle school and loves it, and told me today that she was the only seventh grade saxophone player invited to go to Louisville for a competition later this year.

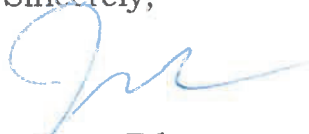
Admittedly, I was somewhat skeptical about all the arts programming and, as a parent, was somewhat concerned about what the students were missing out on in the classroom. I realize that I was not grasping that the children are actually becoming more well-rounded individuals and they are gaining the insight that an education helps you expand your horizons beyond just sitting at a desk repeating facts and figures. I have seen in Addison that she is a more creative writer when it comes to her language arts classes and that she is a more resourceful thinker in math and science. She currently has an A average in every class and that is right on track for every grade she has had since they started keeping grades in elementary school. She also excels at all the various standardized tests that the state government requires her to take. She has taken the experience from the arts programs and carried them over to the rest of her life.

My younger daughter, Haley, has had a similar experience in a much shorter period of time. Haley is a performer and is involved in dance and gymnastics. She was also just one of a handful of third graders selected to be on the Sutton Singers. For her age, she has an extremely strong voice and has a great deal of fun being able to do something like that in school. The biggest thing I have noticed with Haley is that the arts – in this case, her singing – has given her confidence like no other. We were recently eating at a restaurant and they started having karaoke and before I knew it, she was up there singing a solo in front of about 70 people. I personally do not have that sort of confidence and I speak in front of people on a fairly regular basis. In addition to that, when they ask where she got such a great singing voice, I told them she gets it at school. Haley, like her sister, excels in the traditional subjects at school and I do think that the arts programs have helped instill that success in her.

As a parent and a taxpayer, I do think what the system is doing in related arts makes a ton of sense for the students in the Owensboro Public Schools. There are 1000s of kids in OPS that would not have this opportunity under any other circumstance if it were not happening through our system. We have over 80% of our population on free/reduced lunch, those kids are not buying a \$500 instrument, or paying \$65 a seat for a show at the local performing arts center, or spending \$300/month to join the local dance troupe.

This is the type of program that every Kentucky school needs to be looking at; it cuts across all boundaries of race, gender, and socioeconomic standards and improves the lives of our children in the classroom and outside it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Edge', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeremy Edge



owensboro bands

Owensboro Middle School Band

Jason Smith – Director
jason.smith@owensboro.kyschools.us

Kara Smith – Director
kara.smith@owensboro.kyschools.us

August 28, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Kara Smith, and I am one of the band directors at Owensboro Middle School in Owensboro, KY. For the past three years, our school, with the support of our school district, has implemented an arts sampler program where students can experience each fine arts program that we offer. The intention of this sampler is to allow the opportunity for all sixth-grade students to try band, choir, and orchestra with no obligation. Following the course of the sampler, the students and their families are able to decide which program best suits them. As a teacher involved in this innovative process, I can attest to the benefits it has had on our students.

In a typical middle school setting, students decide to join band, choir, or orchestra as they are leaving elementary school. The arts sampler provides the chance for arts teachers to reach all students as opposed to just the number of students that initially sign up. Within our band program, we have seen an increase in student interest following the arts sampler experience. There are many students who would not have considered joining band, because they doubted their abilities or didn't know if they would enjoy it. Now, we are able to offer a hands-on opportunity that affirms the students' choice and shows them the success they could have in band. The arts sampler also has value in our school community, because it makes the arts more inclusive and accessible for all populations. The majority of our students would not have the means to study music privately or attend events that expose them to music at this level. The arts sampler provides equity for our students regardless of background or socioeconomic status.

Another benefit our students gain from this unconventional system is that they acquire the ability to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. We offer two different instrument families (woodwinds and brass) in the band portion of the arts sampler. We require that students play one woodwind and brass instrument. By the end of the arts sampler, the students are able to form an educated opinion about which instrument fits them the best. The students that join band following the arts sampler are able to enter band class knowing what type of instrument they should play, because they have had hands-on experience with each one. This has increased student success in the beginning weeks of band instruction.

From a teaching standpoint, I work to ensure that each child feels like he or she is actually a member of the band. I treat their instruction during the arts sampler just as I would the first several days of my band class. My goal for each student is for them to feel welcomed, included, and successful throughout the process. The arts sampler also offers me the opportunity to form a relationship with the entire student body instead of a select population. Many students at our school have chosen to be in band, not only for music, but because they feel safe, cared for and nurtured in the band room.

The arts sampler at Owensboro Middle School is an innovative approach to music instruction that affords all of our students a chance to learn and thrive in fine arts. It is evident from our experience that this method improves student success, includes a diverse population, and strengthens the student-teacher relationship. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kara Smith, Director
Owensboro Middle School