

## **MBUSD Board Subcommittee Examining the K-12 Music Program**

### **Report to the Board of Trustees**

TO: MBUSD Board of Trustees  
FROM: Subcommittee Examining the K-12 Music Program  
SUBJECT: Report Summarizing Research, Findings, and Recommendations

On April 15, 2020, the MBUSD Board of Trustees convened a Board Subcommittee on MBUSD music programs. The Subcommittee included five music teachers, three parents, a union representative, MBEF's executive director, two district administrators, three school site administrators, and two members of the Board of Trustees. The Subcommittee was tasked with the following charges:

1. Examine and discuss the Status Report prepared by John Benham and Associates for the Manhattan Beach Music Boosters
2. Examine patterns in music enrollment and how to best utilize our excellent music program
3. Review the structure and pathways of the music program, and research best practices in other California districts with successful music programs
4. Recommend ways to maintain a strong K-12 VAPA (Visual and Performing Arts) program within the confines of our budget constraints
5. Submit recommendations to the Board of Trustees as soon as reasonable, but no later than December 1, 2020.

This report outlines the Subcommittee's activities, research, and analyses, followed by recommendations. The recommendations at the conclusion of this report were informed by research combined with the insight of our subject matter experts--our music teachers. These recommendations include opportunities to build on our program's strengths, remediate challenges the music program is facing, and increase enrollment. Teacher and parent members of the Subcommittee urge the board to carefully consider these recommendations and believe that implementing these recommendations will benefit our students and provide significant economies of scale for the district.

The information presented here is supported in more detail in Music Subcommittee documents including the Benham report, detailed survey results, detailed research notes, and more, which can be found in the Subcommittee share drive.

#### **Subcommittee Activities**

The Subcommittee held 10 meetings beginning in May of 2020 and concluding in November 2020. Meetings were held over Zoom and also occasional small group conference calls. To accomplish the charges set forth by the Board and make efficient progress, we established the following working groups within the Subcommittee:

- Benham report review and summary
- MBUSD Music survey
- MBUSD enrollment trends and analysis
- Best practices in similar districts
- Current studies and research in music education
- Alternate funding options
- Recommendations from MBUSD music teachers to maintain and improve music education in MBUSD

Typical meeting agendas included round-table updates, presentations from one or more working groups, discussion, and planning.

## **Latest and Greatest in Music Education**

Music education trends and best practices were determined by reviewing relevant published research, analyzing the latest developments in K-12 music education and curricula, reviewing California public policy regarding music education, and studying other California school districts with successful comparable music programs. Key takeaways from the research include:

### *Access for All*

In July 2020, the California State Board of Education adopted the *California Arts Education Framework for Public Schools, Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*. This framework supports the California Public Schools Arts Standards and emphasizes helping students have successful experiences in music, and the necessity for inclusive arts education for every student in California. One element of the framework that we saw elsewhere is the importance of multiple entry points for arts education. This reflects a nationwide focus on VAPA access for all, which is of critical value for inclusion and student empowerment.

MBUSD participates in the LA County Arts Education Collective. In October 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors formally adopted the Arts Education Collective's *Blueprint for Arts Education*, which includes the following declarations (among others):

- "Every student has the right to fully develop their creative, artistic and aesthetic potential, as well as the right to special protection from policies and practices that exclude or preclude certain students or populations from equitable access to powerful and coherent arts learning."
- "Every student has the right to be brought up in school and community environments that value and protect the arts as essential to the full development of each student and that demonstrate those values/ beliefs in their public policies and practices."

MBUSD's own *Arts Plan*, approved by the Board in 2007, outlines guiding principles for MBUSD arts education, including:

- "A complete education, which emphasizes deep understanding of multiple subjects and disciplines, includes a comprehensive education in the arts."
- "Although scheduling the arts into the school day can present challenges, the arts must be seen, not as an add-on, but as an essential part of a well-rounded education."

### *Music Education Best Practices*

Over the past decade or so, emerging trends in music education have coalesced into identifiable best practices. The published articles and research we studied provided insights and recommendations for high-quality music programs. At the elementary level, these include:

- Consistent and ongoing general music instruction for all students in grades K-2
- Third grade music instruction which "sets students up for success" and bridges students from general music (K-2) to music performance (the third-grade music wheel helps with this at MBUSD)
- Twice weekly band, choir, and strings in grades 4 and 5
- Elementary music class sizes not exceeding the number of students in a regular classroom
- Clearly communicated pathways to secondary music programs through graduation

## Secondary best practices:

- Access points for students in middle and high school (introductory level classes)
- Opportunities for students to switch instruments or area of focus
- Single-gender choirs
- Teachers, administration, and counselors who never discourage a student from music
- Supportive administration and teachers who demonstrably celebrate VAPA similar to athletics

## *Successful Music Programs in Other California School Districts*

Subcommittee music teachers contacted their counterparts at school districts with respected music programs, including Irvine, William S. Hart (Santa Clarita), and Santa Monica-Malibu. Irvine and Santa Monica-Malibu (SMMUSD) are most comparable to MBUSD, and there were important similarities and differences between districts, including:

- Varying levels of early music education. MBUSD has short-term general music instruction for all in first and second grades, with additional enrichment programs like the beloved “Three Piggy Opera”; in SMMUSD, 80% (but not all) of PreK-2 students receive regular general music instruction via the Ed Foundation’s PSArts program; Irvine has bi-weekly general music instruction that is mandatory and considered core curriculum for TK-3.
- All districts have 100% of 4th and 5th grade students participating in music performance instruction. Irvine and SMMUSD both have instrumental or choral music twice per week in grades 4 and 5, whereas MBUSD and William S. Hart are once per week.
- All districts offer beginning choir in secondary. Irvine and SMMUSD also offer beginning instrumental music in middle and high schools.
- Secondary enrollment: In SMMUSD, 65% of their middle school are enrolled in music, and 33% of their high school students. Irvine has slightly higher numbers, with 35-40% of high school students enrolled in music. In MBUSD, 26% of MBMS students take music, and at Costa only 18% of students are enrolled in music. This is consistent with the Benham Report finding that our secondary enrollment is 48-73% lower than would be expected for a district with our caliber of music program.
- SMMUSD (9) and Irvine (11) have many coordinators in their Educational Services Departments. Both have full-time VAPA (Visual and Performing Arts) coordinators (Irvine has a VAPA Director and Coordinator) to support all arts programs, including drama and visual arts. The VAPA coordinators provide oversight and support in VAPA programs, facilitate district-wide collaboration and professional development, coordinate curriculum, write grant proposals, and help with all kinds of VAPA scheduling and administration. MBUSD does not have a VAPA coordinator, nor any other coordinator in their Educational Services Department.
- Funding: MBUSD is fortunate to receive grants from the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation (MBEF) that support certain music education costs at elementary and secondary levels, with additional support from parents and other boosters. Irvine benefits from generous grants from The Irvine Company that cover about 25% of their music program expenses, and their Ed Foundation covers another 50%, leaving the district to fund about 25%. SMMUSD has significant local funding--their elementary music and VAPA coordinator are completely funded from a large parcel tax, their Ed Foundation also provides support, and a local use tax contributes to their district funding.

This report represents only a small portion of the research conducted by the Subcommittee. Detailed analysis and conclusions can be found in documents in the Music Subcommittee share drive, including the results of the California school music program survey; music curriculum research; the *MBUSD Arts Plan*, approved by the MBUSD Board in 2007; the *California Arts Education Framework for Public*

*Schools, Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Arts Framework)*, adopted on July 8, 2020 by the State Board of Education; and the *Arts for All Children, Youth, and Families: Los Angeles County's New Regional Blueprint for Arts Education*, adopted by Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on October 13, 2020.

### **MBUSD-Specific Survey Research**

The Subcommittee conducted surveys of all MBUSD 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents and students, and all 9<sup>th</sup> grade music parents and students. The survey return rate was exceptional, averaging over 40% for both categories. Key conclusions from the survey responses include:

- A student's experience in the elementary and middle school music program is the driving force behind the decision to continue in music; students who have a positive experience and feel successful in music generally choose to continue.
- By 9th grade, scheduling is the predominant factor when a student discontinues music. Of students that did not continue in music, 70% said that scheduling was the main reason; 64% of current 9th grade music students said they would have to take zero period the following year to fit music into their schedule.
- Fulfilling the promise of "music for all" requires developing beginner access points for students at MBMS and Costa, as our current structure may inadvertently be excluding new/transfer students. Of 6th graders, 71 students (1 out of 3 responses) said that they had no experience in MBUSD music. For 8th graders, almost 50% of respondents had no MBUSD music experience. Additionally, across the grades, between 42–80% of students not currently taking music indicated that they would consider taking a music class, many of them saying they would want to take a beginning class.
- The MBUSD music program offers a unique and essential environment for students to be among peers and find community, offering critically important social and emotional benefits as students progress through adolescence. Of 9th grade music students, 86% said one of their favorite aspects of the music program was being with friends/making new friends; 74% said being part of a music community.

These survey results informed some of the recommendations at the conclusion of this report. Detailed survey results are available in the Subcommittee share drive.

### **Increased Enrollment in Music Leads to Many Benefits, Including Reduced Instruction Costs**

Subcommittee members carefully examined historical enrollment numbers in the district and participation in the music program. This data was compared to the national averages for music programs of similar qualitative excellence.

Despite winning a Grammy award six years ago, the present stability of the music program is uncertain. District budget constraints make it challenging to fund courses with low enrollment and, unfortunately, enrollment in choir especially has been declining. Teachers at MBMS have recently advocated for removing a class period from the bell schedule, which if adopted, would likely reduce enrollment in all VAPA electives (in addition to STEM, other electives, and world language classes), particularly in the 8th grade. Early in 2020, MBUSD reduced music funding as part of district-wide budget cuts. The remaining faculty – 7.30 FTE Certificated and 3.12 FTE Classified – has been stretched to maintain high quality music instruction. Add to that the challenges of COVID-necessitated distance learning, and the picture isn't ideal. Fortunately, we have exceptional instructors, an engaged community, investment

from MBEF, and supportive administrators. We need to build on these strengths to improve the program and boost music enrollment.

The successful 2017 implementation of the MBEF-funded 3<sup>rd</sup> grade introductory music wheel increased participation in instrumental music in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades to the level of the national average for comparable quality programs (65% in 5<sup>th</sup> grade). Unfortunately, at MBUSD, attrition between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades remains considerably worse than in similar districts. Despite this, music classes have the highest average class size of any academic department at the secondary level with, 50-60 students in the large orchestras and bands and 40-50 in the largest choirs. Enrollment in Mira Costa's Marching Band/Colorguard can top 100 students. For a district with limited finances, this represents an important overlooked financial value: increased enrollment in music leads to reduced instruction costs. Put another way, it is cheaper to have a high-participation music program than a low-participation music program.

This is where 5th-to-6th grade attrition becomes a financial issue. High quality music programs typically experience no more than a 15% drop in enrollment from grade-to-grade. Last year, MBUSD had a fifth-to-sixth grade music enrollment drop of 61%. If that enrollment drop were in line with national standards, the MBMS music program would be fully enrolled and providing great value for the district while also providing wonderful benefits for students.

Why does music enrollment drop in 6th grade? One possible reason may be student experience in music at the elementary level. As noted in the survey results above, students continue in music when they've had a positive experience. Twice weekly instruction in 4th and 5th grade would go far to help students thrive and be successful. In addition, elementary music teachers are critically important in supporting students, creating meaningful opportunities, and encouraging student progression. Music teachers at all levels can benefit from professional development and collaboration. Another possible reason is that fifth grade students (and parents) are strongly encouraged to enroll in the "exploratory wheel" as they plan for middle school. The MBMS exploratory wheel is similar to programs in middle schools throughout the US, and offers many benefits. Unfortunately, because 6th grade students have only one elective (and students in Learning Center have no electives), encouraging students to choose the wheel also pulls students away from a rewarding music pathway that takes them all the way through Costa graduation. Music education through high school is associated with improved brain development, social belonging, and emotional wellness, not to mention economies of scale. Ideally, when planning for MBMS, students (and their parents) would be encouraged to stick with music, and new and transfer students would be invited to take an introductory music class.

The music enrollment decline continues as students at Costa have a limited number of classes they can take and therefore must choose between academic classes that are impressive for college admissions, and music classes, which are similarly impressive, but have the added benefit of providing a creative outlet, a sense of family (or community), and the pure enjoyment and sense of accomplishment that comes with learning and performing ensemble music. When the rate of music enrollment decreases at Costa, those students lose the precious academic, emotional, and social benefits of music education.

In addition to losing music enrollment to the MBMS wheel and schedule conflicts at Costa, music enrollment in secondary is lower than it should be because of the high number of students at MBMS and Mira Costa who did not attend elementary school in MBUSD. Our instrumental music program starts in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Unless new/transfer students come from districts with similarly robust music programs (our research shows this is not usually the case), they are broadly disenfranchised from participating in the current music program with few or no access points available for beginners, especially in instrumental music. This has a doubly negative impact as not only do these newcomers not have access to a fantastic program, they also miss the opportunity to make friends in music classes,

which tend to be welcoming and inclusive. It would be beneficial to all students to have introductory instrumental music classes at MBMS and Costa.

**Recommendations**

The wealth of information gathered by the Music Subcommittee – through surveys, enrollment analysis, current research and investigation of best practices – has led our music teachers and parents to create these recommendations to maintain and grow a robust, high quality music program. These steps will increase access for all students and maintain the district’s current high standard of music instruction. They should also reduce attrition from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade and drive participation at the secondary level. This will have significant academic, social, and emotional benefits for all students, whether they continue in music or not. Furthermore, while there are additional initial costs associated with many of these recommendations, as secondary enrollment increases, the district should realize class-size economies of scale and ultimately reduce costs. The timing for these recommendations varies, but we need the healing force of music now more than ever for our students and our community.

The Board of Trustees established this Subcommittee knowing that music is an important tool for brain development, a positive contributor to social and emotional well being, and a good value financially. Our music program is exceptional. Let’s keep it strong for current and future students.

Priority based on impact: A very high impact, B high impact, C less impact	Implementation timeline	Estimated additional cost/FTE	Recommendation
A	Ongoing	0	Third grade: continue weekly 45 minute instruction in general music/introductory music wheel
A	Ongoing	0	Music teachers work closely with community stakeholders (e.g. Music Boosters) and music Subcommittee to develop a comprehensive annual publicity and retention plan to be deployed by students and boosters (including existing programs like This Is Costa, Costa band mentoring, elementary music tour, etc). Capture plan in writing by end of 2020-2021 school year.
A	ASAP	3.0 FTE	4th & 5th grades: implement 2x/week 45 minute music instruction in strings, band, and choral music
A	ASAP	TBD	Additional music teacher PD/coaching for all music instructors to ensure students have successful experiences in elementary music, and positive experiences with the music program
A	ASAP	0.4 FTE	Introductory orchestra and band music classes created and offered at MBMS
A	ASAP	0.4 FTE	Introductory orchestra and band music classes created and offered at Mira Costa

A	Ongoing	0	In regards to secondary bell schedules, carefully consider current and proposed options in relation to impact on student ability to take VAPA and other electives
B	Immediately	0	MBMS transition outreach communications to emphasize enrollment in music equally with the exploratory wheel
B	ASAP	1.0 FTE	K-2: Weekly 30 min general music instruction year-round by certificated music teacher.
B	Next year	TBD	PD for district-wide music collaboration and curriculum development, with curriculum supporting state standards to be reviewed and adopted by May 1, 2023
B	Within 3 years	0	Consider a class/credit limit exemption in secondary for VAPA courses in recognition that VAPA courses are strong contributors to social and emotional wellbeing
B	Within 3 years	0.5-1 FTE	Create and hire a VAPA coordinator position to provide support throughout the district (maybe ramp up)
C	Ongoing	TBD	District provides and clarifies budgets for sheet music, equivalent to textbook costs for other classes
C	Ongoing	0	Continue quarterly board Subcommittee meetings for the purpose of collaboration, providing support, investigating grants, and continuing research (e.g. surveys)
C	3-5 years	TBD	Explore potential alternative music classes in secondary (eg keyboarding, guitar, music composition)