**Music Lessons**

Our music lesson program is continuously being scrutinized for a variety of reasons. There are concerns regarding missed time in “academic” classes, should a child be required to attend lessons in school when he/she takes private lessons, should music teachers have six periods a week to teach a student when all other teachers only have five, etc. Here are a few thoughts on the subject to help justify the importance and value of our lesson program.

1. There is a misconception that we teach “private lessons.” In reality we may have a few lesson classes in the district that are one-on-one due to the student’s ability level or the instrument they are studying, however the majority of lessons are small group, and many of them are not all that small.
2. Many of our music classes have enrollments of 30 to 70 students. It is impossible to address individual needs in the large group setting. The music teachers use the lessons to evaluate each student’s needs and assign the appropriate accommodations.
3. Many of the teachers use the small group lesson for testing and evaluating. If they were to listen to each individual in the large ensemble play alone, it would take many days, and certainly be a waste of valuable large group instruction time. Additionally, students might be put into the stressful situation of playing alone in front of their peers. Despite the fact that we have many talented and eager students, not all of them enjoy playing alone in front of others.
4. Lesson schedules are organized on a rotating basis to minimize the impact on any one class. The students know that they are accountable for either attending the lesson or providing a signed “Music Lesson Absence Form” from the teacher. The form indicates the reason that a student missed a lesson:
5. Class average below 78%
6. Class absence over 3 for the marking period
7. Class work cannot be made up, i.e. guest speakers, test, review for test, etc.
8. Lesson classes are determined by instrument and ability level. In band, we may be instructing students on fifteen different instruments and a variety of experience levels. In orchestra, we have five different instruments, and in chorus, numerous voice parts, with the same variety of experience. Each instrument/voice, at each experience level, is equivalent to a different subject. The skills, the challenges, the material and the instructional strategies are unique, and not effectively taught in the large ensemble class setting.
9. Research continues to validate the effectiveness of small group instruction and especially the use of chamber ensembles. Many of our teachers utilize chamber music for instruction on a regular basis. This is considered a more advanced form of music performance, requiring mature musicianship and placing a high degree of accountability on the student. The very nature of chamber music requires the students to effectively utilize all of the elements of cooperative learning, which is also highly regarded in educational research. These chamber ensembles also afford us the additional opportunity of providing music ensembles for special events and celebrations. If it were not for the small group lessons, we would likely not be able to prepare for those types of performances. The research also indicates that “pull out” lesson programs do not compromise a student’s academic growth, as a matter of fact, some studies indicate that students participating in “pull out” music lessons experience superior academic growth as compared to the rest of the student population.
10. Students are encouraged to study privately outside of school, as a matter of fact that is generally considered to be one of the strengths of good quality music programs. However, the lessons can still provide a valuable opportunity for small group instruction on techniques required for the large ensemble. Frequently, students have not yet received instruction on certain skills by their private teacher, or the particular skill is required to play a certain piece of music. The skills are taught in the large group, but due to the large number of students, must be perfected, reinforced and evaluated in the small group lesson. Independent “seat work” as you may see in other classes is not an option for a music performance class. The result would be cacophony and a waste of valuable instructional time. The skills can be assigned as homework, but the teacher will not be able to monitor the progress of the students on an individual basis.
11. Excusing students that study privately from small group lessons would present an additional set of problems:
12. It would be impossible for us, as a school district, to certify whether a private teacher was indeed qualified or not to teach a particular instrument.
13. If a student was not attending their private lessons regularly, or if the teacher cancelled lessons frequently, the student would not have consistent instruction. We would have no control over those situations.
14. Students occasionally discontinue lessons for extended periods. Placing them in and out of the lesson schedule would create confusion for the music teacher as well as the rest of the staff.
15. Generally, our highest achieving music students study privately. If those students were not included in the lesson groups, we may not be able to supply small groups for the various functions as listed above.