

Education Spotlight



SHS MUSIC PROGRAMS

The past two years of COVID-19 safety protocols have posed significant challenges for educators at every level and across all kinds of programs. No programs have faced more challenges than Sisters High School's vocal music programs — yet Director Rick Johnson says his students have persevered, and he sees a bright future ahead.

The program is presenting the musical "Oklahoma!" in a run of three evening shows Thursday, February 24, at 7 p.m., Friday, February 25, at 7 p.m., and Saturday February 26, at 7 p.m., and with a matinee show on Sunday, February 27, at 2 p.m. For more information visit <https://sites.google.com/ssd6.org/oklahomatix>.

The show marks a triumphant return from the doldrums of pandemic distance learning, when students were singing to their computers in their bedrooms at home. Even after the return to in-person education, teaching vocal music wasn't exactly straightforward.

"I spread the choir across the entire room," Johnson said.

Every student was masked — and so was Johnson. He had to teach vocal technique "without being able to actually demonstrate with my face!"

Events where the choir or jazz choir would sing were cancelled. But through it all, the students kept up their spirits, adapted, and overcame. At Sisters High School, students who had been in the program pre-COVID mentored younger students in the culture of teamwork and collaboration required to make a vocal ensemble work.

Safety has been the first priority. The production of "Oklahoma!" may — if case numbers continue to trend downward in Deschutes County — be the first opportunity for the students to perform without masks onstage, though Johnson noted that any student who feels more comfortable in a mask can wear one, regardless of requirements.



While Johnson sees some "rebuilding years" ahead, he says that the music program at Sisters Middle School is strong and students will come into high school prepared to learn.

"We're going to go further, because there's more appreciation for what we have and what they're capable of," Johnson said.

Working together to put on a big musical production like "Oklahoma!" inculcates the values the Outlaws' program prides itself on.

"The musical has brought the kids back together as a team," Johnson said.

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