

musical instruments in high school outperformed those who didn't play instruments.

Churchill High School choir and drama teacher Al Villanueva suggests that an education in music can hone a student's instincts for success. "The number one thing to me is that music, or any art for that matter, provides a chance for a kid to understand what being an artist is, which means never being satisfied and wanting to get better at it," Villanueva says. "It's very collaborative, so you're making music with others, and ideally, it's this wonderfully reinforcing thing where you're learning how to support each other."

Walter says that this teamwork aspect is a unique opportunity in schools where school-based sports are no longer available. Music also gives a chance to kids who struggle academically or socially. "I hear stories every single year about students who don't feel successful in other settings — they're not athletes or popular kids — but who find great success in music," Walter says.

Few people argue that music is not a beneficial part of education, but with limited resources, schools have to ask if music is an essential part of education. To music teachers like Root, the answer is yes. "There has to be a willingness to make the opportunity for music happen, regardless of numbers," she says.

The Cost of the Arts

Strangled budgets have plagued Oregon schools ever since the passage of Measure 5, a 1990 Oregon ballot measure that shifted school funding from local to state government, though at one time Eugene schools did offer flourishing music programs.

Root says that in 1994, Eugene 4J schools had robust strings programs, and Spring Creek, Awbrey Park and Charlemagne elementary schools all had strings academies. "I would say the programs were thriving at that time," she says.

According to Kerry Delf, communications coordinator for 4J, the Eugene School District once boasted a more robust suite of musical options. "Pre-Measure 5, when the people who are now parents were growing up, we had music teachers at every school," Delf says. "We had strings programs region-wide, and every middle school and high school had a band and choir."

Villanueva, the choir teacher for Churchill High, has taught music in 4J since 1986, filling a wide variety of roles from elementary music to drama. Villanueva used to teach two choirs, but one was cut. He says that Churchill once had two bands, which were compressed into one, due to budget cuts. The school has no orchestra.

"I've never been able to teach at a high school where any of the middle schools that feed the high school have choir," Villanueva says. "It's a terrible inequity that's been going on for over 20 years."

But perhaps the biggest hit took place in elementary schools, where music specialists disappeared entirely from some schools. When music and PE were cut, teachers no longer had that time to work on lesson plans and prepare, worsening the already heavy strain.

As Root points out, cutting programs at the elementary level shrinks the pool of young musicians progressing through the middle and high school levels, a vicious cycle that reduces the number of students continuing their musical discipline at the next stage. "You can't cut the legs off and expect the program to grow. And that's what has happened," she says.

Three years ago, the 4J administration recognized that the district needed to prioritize elementary music before it disappeared completely, as well as restore prep time to teachers. In the 2012-2013 school year, 4J decided to change the way elementary music was funded.

Instead of letting each school decide for itself how to fund music, the district allocated funds for nine weeks of music and PE at each elementary school, leveling the field. This move ensured that for nine weeks out of the school year, a music specialist would teach two 30-minute sessions a week. Last year, the district bumped the number up to half a school year.

Tracy Ross, 4J's music coordinator and one of Walter's inspirations as a music teacher, says that the transition back to a full year will take some time. "Our primary focus is that all of our students have elementary music," she says. "We would love to see it go to a full year of music and PE, but there's no three-fourths year kind of thing. To make that jump to a full year is quite a bit of FTE."

4J's middle and high school music programs continue to operate on an individual basis, with one marching band at Sheldon but not the other three high schools, and a strings program at South Eugene but not at North. Only one middle school in the entire district has an orchestra.

A Resurgence of Song

When it comes to funding music programs, Walter says, the support of the administration is paramount. "One of the reasons I was willing to speak [at the budget meeting] is I believe that Dr. Berman is extremely supportive of music, and if I had thought that the district wouldn't listen, I would not have spoken," he says. "What it really boils down to is the commitment by the district, and I really believe that they are listening and working towards creating a balance between the electives and core subjects."

Despite the district's struggles to provide fully-fledged music programs to kids, 4J music coordinator Ross says a plan is in place to bring it all back. In June, Ross and 4J elementary music coordinator David Adey presented a long-term reinvestment plan to the school board that focuses on bolstering the number of music specialists in schools, as well as restructuring the program to connect music at each transition point, from grade school to middle and high schools.

Ross says 4J's music vision includes equal opportunities for secondary students, offering the same selection of music courses from building to building. She would like to see every high school in 4J offer two levels of band, a jazz band, two levels of choir, a jazz choir and two levels of orchestra. The vision also includes band, choir and orchestra at every middle school.

According to Ross, in order to make this happen, the

district needs to budget for an additional \$35,500 invested over three to five years for equipment and supplies, as well as adding 19 FTE for music instruction. The district currently has around 22 FTE.

"That's the vision in the end, whenever that happens, based on resources," Ross says. "If that \$1 million donation were to come unexpectedly, we would have a plan and a vision to move it forward."

In Springfield, elementary students enjoy a full year of music, and both high schools have a marching band. Devon Ashbridge, a communications specialist for the Springfield School District, says that while \$35 million in budget cuts over three years impacted the level of resources the district was able to provide to students, "We've put a high priority on music and arts in Springfield, and we've done our best to preserve those options for students. Part of that involved schools at the elementary level making the choice to keep music specialists in each school."

Springfield also has a reinvestment plan that involves bolstering summer and afterschool music opportunities for students. Ashbridge says that thanks to a \$70,000 grant from the Oregon Community Foundation, The Shedd Institute for the Arts will start a program called Music Matters at Agnes Stewart Middle School, where the additional funding will expand the school's existing band and orchestra, allow more summer camps and field trips and integrate music lessons with school curriculum.

And in both districts parents and kids take it into their own hands to raise money for music — Sheldon High marching band students raised \$28,000 this year for new uniforms. Schools also benefit from organizations like the Eugene Education Association, which awarded over \$11,000 last school year to support music programs in various 4J schools.

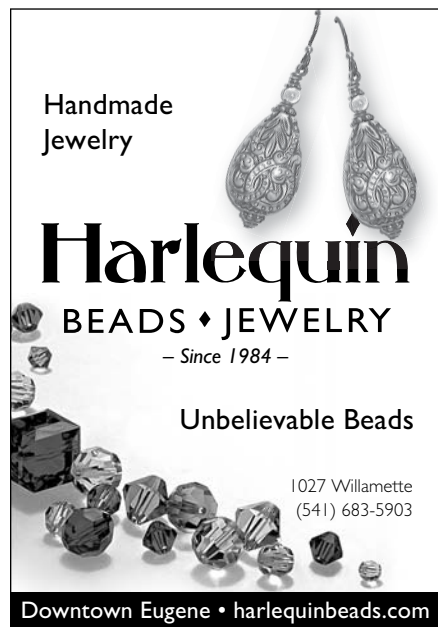
"As long as people are positively working towards the same goal, there's potential for improvement," Villanueva says. "Tracy Ross has really worked hard this year as an administrator, and she's ruffled some feathers. I've got four years until I retire, and I'd really like it if I felt like things were on the upswing when I reach that point."

Villanueva and Walter both agree that music programs thrive under the direction of supportive principals and superintendents, and when that support is lacking, it affects the entire district. Walter says that when he worked as a music teacher in the Lebanon School District, which had nine music teachers district-wide at the time, a new superintendent stepped in and eliminated six of the music specialist positions. "They cut two-thirds of the music program, with obviously devastating results," he says.

While 4J's current superintendent Berman has by all accounts shown support for music, the 2014-2015 school year is his last as superintendent, and the school board will soon go through the process of finding a replacement. When asked what qualities the school board will look for, Delf said that it is premature to ask those sorts of questions so early in the process.

In the meantime, it's up to the hiring committee to decide if 4J wants a superintendent who considers music restoration an administrative priority. ■

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