

Presenters:

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Building a Culture of Success in Your School Virtuosi Strings

October 26, 2018, 10:45am - Music Conference Alberta

Calgary Catholic School District:

Beginnings...

The Calgary Catholic School District currently has two schools with String programs: St. Jean Brebeuf Jr. High and Bishop Carroll High School.

- The **jr. high string program** began in 1993 - principal had a vision for an orchestra at his school.
- Started with 40 students across grades 7 - 9, using 2nd-hand instruments from a local music store bought with the school's budget.
- Hired a music teacher who had cello-as-a-secondary-instrument class at university (saxophone/band major.)
- Teacher collaborated with an experienced violinist/teacher from the local public school board, and a curriculum was developed in tandem with the district's Fine Arts Consultant
- For the past 10 years, our jr. high string program has averaged 100 students annually.
- **Senior high string program** at Bishop Carroll HS was the vision of band teacher Chris Herard who in 2001 envisioned a symphony orchestra at the school. Invited students who already played a string instrument to join "String Club." Club performed a selection at each Christmas and Spring concert.
- String Club carried on for years with guest clinicians from the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra
- In 2010, hired Christina Visy as a guest clinician for just over a year, before hiring her on as a music teacher (½-time in 2 different dept's) - approx. 50 students in Strings at the time, in 3 ensembles: Beginner, Intermediate & Advanced
- students started earning credits for *Instrumental Music 10/20/30 - Strings*, and *LDC Chamber Ensemble 15/25/35 - Strings* (5 credits each)
- after 5 years, the program grew and I became the f/t Strings teacher (107 students in 2018-19)
- initially, students either owned their own instruments or rented from local string shops; in 2014, the school district supported the program fully and purchased an instrument fleet for the school

Background & Key Factors:

- Self-directed individualized learning model at Bishop Carroll High School allows for rehearsals during the school day (we're a magnet school)
- Close proximity (2 blocks away) to the well-established community-based conservatory of music (Mount Royal University Conservatory)
- Active and engaged Music Parent Society who fundraises to support our music program; Society takes care of music uniform distribution, provides scholarships, and subsidizes music camps and clinicians via fundraising activities such as The Music Gala & Silent Auction, cash raffle, spring plant sale, grocery gift card sales, etc.
- Ensembles are auditioned (except for the beginning string group) and students are placed according to ability, not grade
- Current fleet of school instruments: 24 violins/10 violas/14 cellos/10 basses
- \$200 Instrumental Strings program fee covers: accessories, music folders, replacement dampits (humidifier), rosin, shoulder rests, endpin anchors, crested Music dep't golf shirt, clip-on chromatic tuners, most clinician costs, in-school guest artist fees, accompanist fees

Professional Development/Training:

1) *Indiana University's Retreat for Violin & Viola Teachers*

led by Mimi Zweig and Dr. Brenda Brenner (1-week long in early July) - highly recommended (practical) for teachers who are starting to teach strings

2) *The Midwest Clinic (Dec 19-22, 2018) in Chicago, IL*

a) *Paul Rolland Pedagogy in the Orchestra Classroom* breakout

b) *A Band Director's Survival Guide to Teaching Strings* breakout

c) numerous string-based breakouts & orchestra reading session (for newly published string repertoire)

Resources:

- JWPepper.com - online resource for string orchestra music
- ASTAStrings.org: American String Teachers' Assoc. - the professional association for string teachers; top-notch string teaching resources and advocacy info. Excellent resources about how to start a String program in your school can be found at: https://www.astastrings.org/web/Resources/Advocacy/Advocacy_Tools.aspx
- StringPedagogy.com (Mimi Zweig, Indiana University)
- Fine Tuning: 50 Intermediate String Ensembles for Developing Solid Intonation and Tone Production (Kjos) -intonation-refining resource for intermediate strings
- Essentials for Strings by Gerald Anderson (Kjos) – scale method book for heterogeneous string ensembles (1, 2 & 3 octave scales/technique)
- StringSkills.com (Gabriel Villasurda, Ann Arbor, MI): practical downloadable resources to use in your string classroom tomorrow, including: 1 & 2-octave scales & arpeggios, rhythm-reading exercises, shifting exercises, tunes in multiple keys, 25 bowing types, finger patterns
- Christmas Kaleidoscope, Books 1 & 2 (Kjos) – heterogeneous string carol compilations for intermediate string players

String Culture at the School:

- When the program grew, we needed to add another intermediate string ensemble. Had a “name-the-string-ensembles” contest resulting in our current four string ensembles:

Ensemble Eruditio (Beginner Strings): the “learning” ensemble

Ensemble Intermezzo (Jr. Intermediate ensemble): the middle ensemble

Cantabile Strings (Senior Intermediate ensemble): the “singing” strings

Virtuosi Strings (Senior-most ensemble): our “highly skilled” ensemble

- Placement auditions
- String Info Meetings & Instrument Demos (August & early Sept); a student speaks at September orientation assembly about how to join the string program
- Annual Strings Camp (\$150 per student after \$100 subsidy from Music Society)
- Calgary Performing Arts Festival (CPAF - all string ensembles compete)
- Music Dep’t travel: past tours to Whistler, New York, Italy, China, Orlando FL
- Virtuosi Strings invited to perform at The Midwest Clinic, Chicago IL (Dec 2017) - came about via a vision for a bigger opportunity for the Virtuosi ensemble
- Annual String Fling concert (together with the String Camp and CPAF, fosters cross-pollination among the string ensembles)
- String magazines in the library (Strings/Strad)
- Fine Arts Week (pop-up concerts & string instrument petting zoo)
- Concert attendance reports & field trips (Calgary Phil/National Music Centre)
- Orchestra clinicians and guest conductors

Why Strings...?

- **Student perspectives:** community/friends/a break from academics/I love the sound of stringed instruments/teaches me discipline that carries over into all areas of life/high school music (option) credits/teamwork/opportunity to travel with my ensemble/uses my whole brain/something I take pride in
- ***Research** shows that music: engages every part of the brain, supports listening and language, aids neural processing, improves cognitive function (attention/memory), enhances speech, improves consonant differentiation in speech, improves speech & sound processing over one’s lifespan, alters brain development in at-risk adolescents, improves hearing speech in noise and auditory cognitive skills, increases sensitivity to music and sound patterns, increases phonological awareness & early reading skills
- ***Brainvolts Lab** - Northwestern University’s Auditory Neuroscience Lab:
www.brainvolts.northwestern.edu
- **The Harmony Project** provides tuition-free music education & social support to youth in Los Angeles & Southern California **harmony-project.org**
- **Fairview Public School project** (Bloomington, IN - led by Dr. Brenda Brenner, Indiana University); study is mid-way: provides violin instruction to grade 1+ students from socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods; tracking effect of violin studies on core subject grades

Calgary Board of Education:

The William Aberhart High School Strings Program is one of two strings programs at Calgary Board of Education High Schools.

There are a couple of strings programs in the form of “clubs” that have been active recently - one of them at G.P. Vanier School, to note.

The Aberhart Strings Program grew out of need. Around 2012, there was some review around the music department of how to involve a number of students who were taking private strings lessons and, though involved in band or choir, really had their passion with strings.

A string ensemble was formed and began performing at school functions and concerts as a quintet. This grew to become a special project course, outside of the timetable.

Further review led us to look back further within CBE music program history and to realize that strings programs were nothing new. There had been a number of string programs around the system decades earlier.

It made sense to develop this program into a course available within the timetable and available to all students.

Fall of 2015 was the first strings class within the timetable. It ran with several levels being offered within the class as there were beginning and advanced students within the same class.

By fall of 2016, there were 2 classes formed and around 70 students enrolled in the program.

The strings program has developed into its own identity and has provided many students with the ability to join the music program at Aberhart in grade 10 - as part of the beginning strings class.

The advanced strings class also allows those students to develop at their level and, on several occasions, come together with the wind band program to put together full orchestral works.

Further development in the strings program led to a combined strings camp with choir, this fall.

It has only made sense to have a strings program available which has made Aberhart's Music Program comprehensive and allowed students to pursue this avenue in music.