

A Program Evaluation
Of the
Music Department: Grades K – 12

Monticello Central School District
Monticello, New York

December 2005

Prepared by

Steven E. Schopp
Joseph R. Sugar

Music Consultants

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation was completed in November 2005 for the purpose of evaluating the music program in grades K – 12, as delivered in the Monticello Central School District. Particular attention was given to curriculum, program equity, program administration and instrumental performance levels. It is not the intent of this evaluation to evaluate the performance of individual teachers or the music faculties in individual schools. Onsite data was gathered over four days in November 2005. The consultants interviewed the Superintendent of Schools, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, the Director of Music, principals of each building, all district music teachers and two non-music teachers who work on the school musicals. Facilities were visited in each school, and several performing groups and classes were observed. Teacher schedules, the district K-12 General Music curriculum, instrumental curriculums, past concert programs, as well as various documents supplied by teachers and administrators were reviewed.

It should be noted that all of the district administrators, principals and music teachers were most hospitable to the consultants and forthcoming in their responses to our inquiries. The overall professionalism of the Monticello teaching faculty and administration was obvious from the outset and made our task both efficient and pleasant. We thank them for their honesty and cooperation.

OVERVIEW

Monticello serves over 3500 students with two K – 5, one K-2 and one 3-5 elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The middle and high school are connected and share some music facilities and an auditorium. General music is offered to all students in grades K – 5. In grades 6 – 8, all students take general music with the exception of some AIS students and some students who participate in two performing groups. AIS students, however, can participate in a performing group. Students in grade 6 - 8 have the opportunity to play in up to two performing groups and also take general music. The district has a K-12 general music curriculum that was written in 1991 and revised in 2003.

Instrumental music instruction begins in grade 5 and continues through high school. Instruction is offered on all band and orchestra instruments. Each middle school has grade level bands, orchestras and choruses. The elementary schools form beginning instrumental ensembles when students are ready and give a performance at the conclusion of the first year of instrumental study in grade 5. Elementary choruses are formed in grades 4 & 5. Elementary school students have recorder ensembles. Recorder instruction is available through high school for interested students. Vocal sectional lessons are offered to high school students.

FACILITIES

Elementary Schools

Cornelius Duggan (K-5), George L. Cooke (K-2), and Kenneth L. Rutherford (3-5) elementary schools, have well equipped general music rooms. The general music teacher in the Emma C. Chase School (K-5) must teach in classrooms using a movable cart. Supplies seem readily available and specialty equipment such as Orff instruments and various types of drums are in place.

Elementary instrumental lessons and band or orchestra rehearsals take place in both shared teaching areas and dedicated music rooms. Fifth grade bands and orchestras are formed when students are ready for a larger ensemble. They present a spring concert.

Middle School

Robert J. Kaiser Middle School has a relatively new building that is attached to Monticello High School. The middle and high school music departments are adjacent to each other, enabling shared use of some facilities such as the band and orchestra rooms. The middle school music department has a large orchestra room which is shared with the high school, a general music/choral room, and some office/practice room space. The shared auditorium

is located within the high school. The auditorium has a large stage, a new sound system and seating for approximately 900 people.

High School

Monticello High School has two band rooms, a choral room, practice rooms and office space for teachers and the Director of Music. One of the band rooms also has electronic keyboards and is set up for use by the wind symphony and various music classes.

SCHEDULING AND COURSE OFFERINGS

Elementary schools

General music classes meet once per week for 45 minutes. Instrumental lesson groups are scheduled beginning in grade 5. Choruses in grades 4 and 5 meet once per week for 45 minutes.

Middle School

Middle school general music classes and band/orchestra/chorus rehearsals meet every other day. Students receive sectional music lessons once per week on a rotating schedule to minimize the amount of time that they miss from other classes. Middle school performing groups include 3 choruses (6th grade, 7th & 8th grade and women's), 2 orchestras and 2 bands (6th grade, 7th & 8th grade). There is a co-curricular jazz ensemble and a middle school musical. These rehearse after school. The middle school utilizes a 9 period schedule with 40 minute periods.

High School

High school classes meet daily for one 45 minute period. The high school uses a modified block schedule that includes 83 minute periods in the morning and afternoon with three 40 minute periods in the middle of the day. These periods are used for large ensembles and for the chamber music program. Instrumental lessons are scheduled on a rotating schedule within the block periods. Many of the teachers are shared by both elementary and middle school and must arrange their schedules to work within the various scheduling frameworks.

Monticello High School offers up to 13 credits in music. Skill Development (as defined by the New York State Education Department) classes are available through performance classes including 2 bands, 2 orchestras, a mixed chorus and a women's chorus, as well as three levels of Performance Skill classes. Performance Skill classes offer students opportunities to develop skills on a variety of instruments including piano and guitar. Music Knowledge (NYSED) is offered through Advanced Placement Music Theory and Comprehensive Foundations of Music. Attitude Development (NYSED) is offered through Music in Our Lives I and II. In addition, the department offers electives in Chamber Music and The Business of Music, a course offered jointly with the Business Department. The Chamber Music program offers students opportunities to play

in small, flexibly grouped ensembles as well as to compose and occasionally improvise. The Business of Music course collaborates with community arts groups and brings in guest artists and speakers. Non-credit co-curricular courses include a jazz ensemble and a pit orchestra that meet after school. The pit orchestra provides music for the school musical.

RESEARCH ISSUES

In addition to looking generally at the overall program, we were asked to respond to several specific questions and issues. These issues and are as follows:

1. The K-12 Music Curriculum – overall review
2. Music course offerings – number and level
3. The high school band program with particular attention to the caliber of the program and band enrollment
4. Appropriateness and challenge of levels of music, including that used at NYSSMA evaluation festivals, experienced by Monticello music students
5. Participation in NYSSMA Evaluation Festivals
6. Size of sectional lesson groups
7. Effects on the comprehensive music education students who are removed from middle school music classes, general music in particular, for AIS remediation
8. Participation of minority student in music performing ensembles
9. Music administration

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Music Program

- There is general consensus among teachers and administrators that Monticello has a strong tradition of excellence within its music department. Some described it as a “hidden jewel,” the “crown of the district” and one of the “best kept secrets” in the area. We generally concur with that view in terms of the scope and the quality of the department.
- Despite the excellence that we generally observed within the department, we were made aware of some negative perceptions within the community that did not match our findings. We interviewed all of the music teachers in the district and all of the appropriate upper level administrators. We heard not only contrasting viewpoints, but contrasting facts. We had no reason to doubt the veracity of anything that we were told, but we believe that rumors have created much misinformation that is detrimental to a strong department.

Curriculum

- Many schools cite general music as the heart of their curriculum, but that is rarely so. Monticello’s curriculum, including its performance curriculum, is truly based on its general (or classroom) music curriculum.
- The general music curriculum is a sequential, comprehensive program, based on the New York State Learning Standards for the Arts. It has timely updates and contains useable sample source materials for teachers.
- Monticello teachers appear to strongly support and make regular use of the general music curriculum. The curriculum was frequently and positively cited. Instrumental teachers, for example, report seeing results in the abilities of their beginning students to read music.
- Student progress is assessed with longitudinal records kept through a consistent card system that moves up with the students. Teachers generally support this system and feel that it is effective for students.
- Curriculums, based on the general music curriculum, are in place for high school orchestra and in progress for middle school orchestra and for the all of the bands.

- The music theory program seems especially strong with excellent enrollments in the Advanced Placement music theory course. It should be noted that AP Music Theory is a most difficult examination and represents advanced college work. We suspect this is possible in Monticello because of the comprehensive, sequential general music program.
- Music in Our Lives is the New York State recommended course for students who desire to meet the arts graduation requirement and are not enrolled in a performing group or in a visual art class. It is designed as a one year comprehensive course without pre-requisites. We were surprised to see two levels of MIOL (1 & 2) offered. After viewing the curriculum for each level, we believe that the curriculum for MIOL 2 is really more suited to Music Theory 1 which is not offered (unusual for a school with AP Theory). MIOL 1 appears to look more like the state designed course. This semester there are two MIOL 2 sections and no MIOL 1 sections. This leads us to believe that the general non performance student may not be served unless they can take a Performance Skills class.
- The opportunity for middle school students to take general music as well as play in band, chorus or orchestra would be the envy of many fine music programs in New York State. That most Monticello students can take general music and *two* performing ensembles is outstanding – and very rare! Monticello CSD is to be commended for such an offering.
- Sectional lessons are offered to choral as well as instrumental students in Monticello High School. This is an indication of a strong, well supported music department.

Scheduling

- Teachers' schedules and class loads, with some exceptions, seem well within the norm for school districts with which we are familiar. Teacher-student ratios seem reasonable to excellent, especially at the secondary level.
- As happens in many districts, the burden on elementary music teachers is increased because their music classes must coincide with the breaks of classroom teachers. This is exacerbated by the 45 minute periods. This is a long time for young children, especially in the lower grades. A typical length for an elementary general music class is 30 minutes.

- Many teachers teach in several schools which limits student contact in each building, causes difficulty when a special event in one building changes the schedule and in some cases, leaves them without really having the feeling of a home school. The Cooke school, for example, has 3 music teachers for grades K – 2.
- It is commendable that the district has a special education specialist in the music department. We would prefer to see the schedule arranged so that she could teach all of the special education children.
- Some of the mainstreamed classes seem to have large numbers of special education students, suggesting that they are only partially mainstreamed. If scheduling demands this, we suggest that consideration be given to pre-teaching the special education within their own classroom, some time before the mainstreamed class. This can be an effective method to increase success for special education students.

Music Faculty

- Monticello has a particularly strong, experienced and dedicated music faculty that continues to deliver an excellent program. We were impressed with what they have and continue to accomplish!
- Communication appears to be a real concern within the department. We heard comments from teachers about timely communications regarding items such as festival registration or music orders and we also observed cases where guests were brought into the building for a program without informing the music supervisor or incomplete information was given. We see this as a major area of concern needing the attention of all parties.
- The chain of command, at least in terms of what we view as the norm for a school district, appears to be broken. We were concerned to hear of teachers or parents going around administrators or directly approaching members of the school board. We were dismayed to hear of personnel matters discussed in open school board meetings. We believe that this has the strong potential to damage a program for the students that we view as excellent, if not outstanding!

Music Activities

- The middle and high school musicals appear to be major activities in the district and are popular within the community. Offering such a program is commendable. Full musicals, however, are extremely time consuming, place stress on the involved students and teachers, and do compete for time with other music department activities. While we strongly support the concept of school musicals, it has been our experience that they can, and frequently do, become lightning rods for other problems within the school or music department, and have effects that go beyond the musical itself. We would advise caution in this area to be sure that issues involving drama productions do not begin to affect music department curriculum and instruction.
- Monticello's participation in state and county activities appears strong and consistent. Students, at age appropriate levels, are adjudicated at NYSSMA solo and ensemble festivals and participate in all-county, area all-state and all-state bands, choruses and orchestras. This year 4 students were designated as All-State musicians. This is commendable! The district will host All-County Music Festival in March 2006. This will be the second time in the past three years that Monticello has hosted the All-County Festival.
- Few major ensembles from Monticello travel to performances such as the NYSSMA Major Ensemble festival. Although we encourage such activity as it provides some good benchmarks for performance, we regard it as optional.

Music Facilities & Equipment

- The Director of Music and the Director of Technology are working together to create of an electronic music lab using keyboards, computers and appropriate specialized software. This has the potential to allow students to become involved in areas such as composition, sequencing and recording. Music technology is the course of today and the future.
- Music teaching facilities ranged from good to excellent. We were particularly impressed with the middle and high school facilities. The band, chorus and orchestra rooms are excellent and the general music room is large and well equipped. Practice rooms are available as is office space. One band room doubles as a piano lab which seems to work well, leaving sufficient space for the wind symphony. Elementary classrooms are well equipped and flexible, making good use of movable tables. The exception to this is the Emma C. Chase School where the teacher must teach from a cart. This places severe limitations on instruction and the number and types of materials and instruments that can be used. We hope this situation can be soon remedied.
- Teaching supplies and equipment seem to be available in sufficient quantities to support the program. Although we heard several complaints about materials arriving later than expected, we heard almost none about not getting needed equipment or receiving poor quality instruments and equipment. We are used to hearing this as a major complaint in other schools and districts. It appears that for supplies and equipment, Monticello music teachers are well supported. In terms of timely delivery, we saw no clear pattern, but we know that there are many factors currently affecting the timely delivery of music equipment and supplies. This is a problem being faced by many, if not most, districts.

Program Balance

- There is a good balance between band chorus and orchestra instruction with strong programs in each. Monticello is to be commended for offering a strong string orchestra program in an area where it is not common.
- Monticello High School offers several excellent and unique programs for its students:
 1. Chamber Music: This program meets flexibly during lunch periods, offering students the opportunity to play music in various ensembles with all sorts of configurations. Students have unique performance opportunities, work with outside performing artists and coaches, and have the opportunity to explore many types of music. This is a prime area for meeting state and national music standards in areas such as performance, analysis, improvisation and composition. We have not seen another program like it!
 2. Students are given an option for independent study in composition – something usually found only in the largest school districts.
 3. The Business of Music course is a relatively new state course, but it is offered in few schools. Monticello's quick adoption of this course puts it in the forefront of an emerging area in high school music.
 4. The Performing Skills courses allow students who may not be in an ensemble to develop skills on instruments such as piano or guitar. This is a fine program, often talked about, but not frequently offered in other schools.
- Jazz ensembles are offered at the middle and high school levels.

SPECIFIC ISSUES:

1. The K-12 Music Curriculum – overall review

We find little to suggest about the district music curriculum. It is, in fact, one of the strongest we've seen. By putting general music instruction at the core of the curriculum and by actually delivering that curriculum, Monticello is successfully applying what for many, if not most schools, is merely a goal.

Although we fully understand the pressures brought forth by state testing and having schools designated as being in need of restructuring, we believe that Monticello's curriculum is in the best interest of students. The integrity of this approach should be maintained.

For more specific detail regarding the general music program, please see item 7 on page 16 and 17.

2. Music Course Offerings – number and level

Music course offerings are generally excellent at the high school. The music department offers more credits than most of the other departments. At least three of the programs are unique: Chamber music, The Business of Music and Performance Skills. The addition of a music computer lab will add further opportunities within these areas or for new courses (e.g. music technology, recording techniques).

3. The high school band program with particular attention to the caliber of the program and band enrollment

We listened to the two high school bands and reviewed programs for the past few years as well as statistical data for the past 10 years. Over that period of time, band enrollment has ranged from 61 in 2004/05 to 90 in 1997/98. As enrollment normally varies throughout the year, these should be considered approximate and are probably initial enrollment figures. The year following the retirement of the former band director, there were 65 students in the band. The following year, with another new director in the program it dropped to 61. This year began with 79. The current figure (actual enrollment as of 11/18/05) is 70.

We note that the average number of band members during the period from prior to splitting into 2 bands was 88 while in the four years following the split, that drops to 70. During this period, there were also 3 new band directors.

Splitting the band was probably done to provide more appropriate performance levels for students and allow the group to grow, but this has not happened. As the bands meet the same period, there is no scheduling advantage. Current enrollment is evenly divided among grades 10 – 12 with about 10 more 9th graders in the program. The band currently numbers 38 and the wind symphony, 32. These are essentially wind ensembles with very small sections.

Given the circumstances of the split, the three new teachers and the small size of the groups, we are not surprised that the program has realized only minor growth (65 to 70) over the past three years. In our experience, there is always a drop between teachers, and this has happened twice in this period. There is also a normal drop of some students as they get older due to factors such as scheduling conflicts, jobs and other interests. We do not believe that the band program is best served by 2 bands at this time.

4. Appropriateness and challenge of levels of music, including that used for NYSSMA evaluation festivals by Monticello music students.

Our review of programs for the past few years showed both bands playing a good variety of literature ranging from band standards to contemporary band composers that are being played in most good high school band programs. We also saw exercises in which students were successfully meeting music standards in improvisation. We compared the levels of music played for both bands from 2000 through 2005 and saw no real difference. Note that NYSSMA Level 4 is considered high school level material on a technical basis, and Level 5 is advanced material. Level 6 encompasses collegiate and professional literature. Much of the level 3 and 4 literature is, however, musically demanding and makes up the bulk of most high school programs.

The orchestras and choirs are studying excellent quality repertoire, appropriate for a high school program.

5. Participation in NYSSMA Evaluation Festivals

We reviewed the numbers of NYSSMA solo and ensemble participants from 2000 through 2005 and noted no unusual variation for band chorus or orchestra. The percentages in terms of band participation (we did not have orchestra or chorus enrollments) fluctuated between 35% and 51% of the total program. These are very respectable numbers similar to what one might expect in an active program.

It should be noted that although we frequently heard NYSSMA festivals referred to as competitions, NYSSMA major and solo festivals are actually student evaluation festivals and involve no competition between students other than among those who are auditioning for All-State.

6. Size of sectional lesson groups

Although there are a few sectional lesson groups of 6 or 8 (generally woodwind), most groups number 3 or 4 students. A group of 8 is manageable, even if they are all present, but the reality of a "pull out" program is that there are often students missing for a variety of reasons such as tests. In our experience, these numbers are not high, and the size of the majority of lesson groups is excellent.

7. Effects on the comprehensive music education students who are removed from middle school music classes, general music in particular, for AIS remediation

We understand the concerns of the music faculty in supporting and protecting an extraordinary general music program. It has taken years to develop it to its current level and it is worth fighting for. We also understand that a school under reorganization must take strong steps to meet state requirements.

We looked at the current schedule (numbers correspond with named students) and found the following:

- *Grade 6: All students have general music. In order to accomplish this, significant changes were made in the quartet schedule involving technology and health. Accommodations were made for 12 students so that they could remain in chorus and band or orchestra. Forty-one students could not schedule chorus, but could be in band or orchestra.*

- *Grade 7: Thirteen students could not take general music, but can be in band or orchestra. One ESL student was not yet scheduled, but efforts were continuing.*
- *Grade 8: Twenty eight students do not have general music. This includes 8 who are new to the district, 11 who are in chorus and band or orchestra, 4 who are in band or orchestra and 4 who have no music because they have 2 AIS or ESL classes and 1 student who has a medical excuse.*

Of the 42 students who do not have general music, there are 6 (including the medically excused student) who have no music class. This is certainly a concern and every effort should be made to give these students the same schedule as other students as soon as possible.

Overall, 5% of middle school students do not have general music and .007% have no music. From our experience, these numbers are similar to other middle schools that must provide students with AIS and ESL services. They may even be low when compared to other schools.

Monticello's ability to provide almost every student with general music, chorus and band or orchestra is commendable and very unusual. We know of few schools (actually we can't think of one!) that have been as successful in scheduling middle school music. The middle school administrators and the director of music have worked hard to mitigate the effects on students that stem from AIS/ESL requirements. We commend them for that effort.

8. Participation of minority student in music performing ensembles

As we did not have specific demographic figures, we could only assess this by observation, but we did note reasonable minority participation in the performing groups that we observed. We suspect the percentages are slightly less than the demographics of the district, but probably better than many similar districts. The chamber music program, in particular, appears to have a relatively high level of minority participation.

9. Music administration

In our interviews with teachers, some concerns were expressed to us regarding music administration. Several incidents were reported multiple times. Most of these appear to us to be the result of problems with communication. In our view, none of these should be difficult to solve if all parties are willing to make the effort. Communication in a music department needs to be accurate, civil and bi-directional.

There were several areas where teachers reported that they did not feel supported. Yet, after speaking with all teachers and administrators, it appears to us that the support was both present and strong. But, apparently that was not communicated sufficiently to the staff. It should be noted that the strongest advocacy is usually done behind closed doors. This may be more a problem of style than substance, but it is hardly insurmountable. We found the demeanor of the Director of Music to be open and positive. He has an excellent and realistic grasp of the issues faced by the department.

We also note that the teaching responsibilities of the Director of Music take much time and lock in his schedule for the middle of every day, thus impacting his ability to meet with or observe teachers during this time period. Currently, in order to observe classes that meet during his teaching period, he must cancel class or have it "covered" by another teacher. Because so much of the high school program meets between the block periods, this is a major problem.

Building principals generally reported an excellent working relationship with the music department and the Director of Music.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Remove the teaching responsibilities from the Director of Music so that all of his time can be devoted to music administration.

RATIONALE: Although a part time position may have been appropriate in the past, the current level of activity within the department requires the full attention of the Director of Music. The Director of Music must be available to attend department activities or observe classes at any time of day without having to return to the high school to teach classes. Directing a high school band is and should be a demanding role by itself. When two major positions are combined, both suffer. We believe that many of the communication issues that we saw could be alleviated with more available time during the school day. We would also recommend some secretarial assistance for assembling programs, collecting NYSSMA registrations and music department mailings.

2. Combine the two high school band under a single band director.

RATIONALE: At this point in time, it is counter-productive to divide the bands into 2 small groups. Given the number of different instruments necessary to fill positions in a concert band, it is highly unlikely that both bands can be adequately staffed, particularly in terms of section leaders. We suspect that juniors or seniors who do not make the wind symphony and must play in a band that is primarily 9th and 10th graders are likely to drop. A larger band will be a stronger band, and 70 students are very reasonable for one band director. We suggest maintaining a single band until numbers break 100 and bands of from 50 to 60 students can be formed. At that time, with numerical support, a 9th grade band and a 10th through 12th grade band might be considered.

3. Continue updating curriculum so that the general music curriculum aligns with all phases of the music program, including instrumental music. A comprehensive, sequential music curriculum is most effectively realized when it is grounded in general music and consistently applied throughout the program.
 - a. The National Standards for arts education and the New York State Standards for the Arts provide benchmarks for delivery of a comprehensive music program.
 - b. It is recommended that any new curriculum or curriculum revisions be indexed to the national and/or state standards.

4. Realign the district music positions to maximize the possibility the elementary music teachers will be assigned to a single school.

RATIONALE: Having a full time choral/general music teacher in each building, along with a music room, adds stability and consistency to the way the program is delivered to students. Students know their teacher and have daily access to the music teacher. It is also a more efficient use of teacher time. Although this may not be possible in every case, it is a goal worth pursuing.

5. Reestablish appropriate lines of authority in the music department.

RATIONALE: Chains of command appear unclear with staff members and parents going around appropriate administrators, in some cases directly to school board members. Outside influences appear unusually strong and are beginning to undermine the program. This should be clarified immediately with issues being first directed through regular school channels, before going to upper administration or to the Board of Education.

6. Rename Music in Our Lives 2 to Music Theory 1. MIOL 1 should simply become Music in Our Lives and should be offered without prerequisites.

RATIONALE: This will better reflect the actual course being taught and will be clear on college transcripts. Music in Our Lives is designated by the State Education Department as an Attitude Development course whereas Music Theory 1 is a Knowledge course. These have very different meanings in the SED Part 100 program map. Also, schools with Advanced Placement Music Theory almost always precede that with a Music Theory 1 class. Curriculum adjustments to these courses should be made, if necessary, to be sure they align with the titles and the state requirements.

7. Consider adopting the Independent Study General Music Proposal submitted in June, 2005.

RATIONALE: This proposal, from the music department, offers a means of bridging the gap for students who can not take general music in grades 7 and 8. Although it would not replace being part of a regular general music class, it is a creative solution that is good for students.

CONCLUSION

We find the music education currently being delivered to students in the Monticello CSD to be generally excellent and in many cases outstanding. The overall philosophy of the music department, the delivery of the general music program and the elective and ensemble offerings are some of the best we've seen. We find strength in both the staff and a very supportive administration. Our findings refer to the department as we saw it in November 2005 – not as it may have been five or ten years ago. Frankly, we often joked that although we were brought into the district to assess whether the department was declining, we could easily have been making a case for recommending the program for some of the state and national awards that are available.

Yet, we were told by some that the reputation of the department has been “tarnished.” If that is so, we believe it is due more to rumors, inappropriate adult behavior and difficulty with accepting change and moving on. If there has been a change within the music department, we believe that it may have become more “adult centered” and less “student centered.”

It is time to move on to the future and focus on what's best for children. If this is done, we have no doubt that a great department will flourish!

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph R. Sugar

Steven E. Schopp