

NYSSMA Curriculum Committee Meeting
Monday, August 31, 2020
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Meeting began at 7:02 p.m.

Introductions by Fred Weingarten, Curriculum Committee Chair:

Mary Carlson, Collegiate Member, Nazareth

Nicki Cole, Bath School District, Band, Grades 4-6

Jennifer Davis, Vocal, General Music, Chautauqua County

Craig Knapp, General Music, Chorus, Grades 3-6

Gary West, Director of Fine Arts White Pines

Ann Trombley, Nesin Cultural Arts

Conversation:

Jennifer Davis – Vocal, General Music at Chautauqua Lake:

I've been deciding how to space kids. I emptied my room of my piano and music stands. I'm considering 12 feet versus 6 feet spacing. Some are doing 8 and 10. Twelve feet is the NYS guideline, though it depends what the school has decided with its architect. When our principal looked at the blueprint, he said 6 feet is needed, which means that 31 kids can fit in the room. So I said I'd spike the floor with two different colors: blue x's at a 12-foot distance shoulder-to-shoulder with a rectangle and 6 feet with purple rectangles between the blue rectangles; then I can call on either group to sing different parts. Though, if they're wearing masks, I might not know for sure if they're singing. I'll try to vary my instruction, so not all kids are singing all the time. I will try to have instruction on Google Platform, so that will allow time for hand-washing. My physical setup is tape on the floor. I got rid of all cloth chairs, because apparently cloth is bad. I will vary my instruction so not all students are singing at same time. I learned from remote teaching – all students are expected to record and upload video and audio of them singing. So I'm relying on online stuff to supplement things I can't do in person. Regarding concerts: if kids can perform in an empty auditorium, great. I also have the skills set to do virtual pieces. Guitar: I have some kids learning guitar remotely, some in the classroom. Each guitar will be assigned to the student. General Music: For space reasons, we'll travel and push into classrooms where the kids will already be, rather than having them come to us.

Nikki Cole, Bath School District, Grades 4-6, (husband teaches 7-12):

This year I'll have ensembles and lessons, but will follow the 12-foot protocol spacing of students. I'll be getting PPE for instruments – bell coverings, wind defenders. Originally we were all going to make our own, but district agreed to buy it premade, prefabricated. The kids will be separated into Blue and White, Day 1 & 2's and will come in for those days to play in their ensembles. So we'll have weird instrumentation and smaller groups, but they'll still be able to play and have fundamentals and work on ensemble skills, although not in a way that's traditional or ideal. Lessons will have to be flexible in terms of scheduling groups. We can't have a lot of kids in the band rooms for lessons, so

the ensemble will be in the auditorium. In the band room we have to be careful about the amount of students. We should be getting the capacity number tomorrow. We'll also do our lesson schedule by marking period. We usually submit a whole-year schedule at the beginning of the year. But we'll do it by marking period this year, which gives us the flexibility to act on expected changes. The first check point for beginners is five weeks in. If get the thumbs-up to keep going, we'll start then. If we need to wait longer, we'll do so. If we have to, we'll start two groups of beginners next year – maybe start one group in the spring, one in the fall. Concerts will have to be live, but we'll have a virtual option for them to demonstrate what they've learned. The beginning will mostly be about getting back into the school and getting our bearings.

Craig Knapp, Rocky Point, Grades 3-5:

I teach approximately 700 students total across three grades. About 75 total have opted for virtual at-home learning. School is five days a week and kids will be there all day. They're required to wear masks all day, they'll get masks breaks facilitated by a classroom teacher (plus at lunch). They'll also have the tri-fold Plexiglas shields around their desks. I will not be able to teach in a classroom in order to prevent more traffic and volume in other areas of the building. Students will not be able to sing indoors or to play instruments. They will not be able to move or to dance. I can take the children outside and space them 12 feet apart. I will be wearing a mask and face shield. I will have them one day a week, so at least I'll see the kids more often than I usually lose to holidays. I am not allowed not have chorus groups. The district will revisit these things in mid-October. But my chorus groups take place before and after school so they're viewed as extracurricular. So I'm one of the only district members who don't have a live ensemble. I don't have a virtual option for concerts. Google Meets is not an option for me, since I'm not tech savvy. I don't know what I'm going to do yet. There are lots of challenges. I will be utilizing technology more than ever before. There is Music Play Online and lots of other options online, like Quaver Music, although I'm not a fan of it. We have a new principal at our building and I'm concerned about the first impression he'll get of me under these circumstances. I suspect everyone's plans will change the very next day. I'm going to do the best I can within these restrictions and confines. I want to keep the kids smiling and keep them as excited about music-making as I can, despite the circumstances.

Lori Orestano-James, Monticello CSD, BOE President NYSSBA Gov Rel:

I'm echoing Craig: It's about making sure kids are coming out on the other end of this, making sure kids are loving music, no matter what. Hold onto your programs. A program that is gone is harder to rebuild. Keep your positive energy. Always walk in with a positive attitude. Go to administrators saying, "I know it's tough times. Here's what I think we can do." The more we can offer in solutions, the better off it can be. Be ready for anything, just make them love music.

Craig Knapp:

Your administrators are juggling all of that. So the more solutions you can have the better. So when you discuss something with them, especially if it's negative – converse.

Do not confront. That way you'll get solutions, or at least get listened to. Otherwise, they won't even listen to the second half of what you have to say.

Kimberly Levan – Chautauqua County:

Found out they're going to use the auditorium as a baby-sitting service. So kids learning at home will come sit in the auditorium. Then the suspension room is very small, so that we'll also have to be in the auditorium (it sits almost 1,000). So now I don't know how I'm going to have chorus. I split my group of 70 in half. I'll be having a class of about 35 before lunch and the same after lunch. I've been discussing options with my fellow band director. I don't have enough knowledge of what's going on to formulate a potential solution to even present to the administrator.

Lori Orestano-James:

Now's the time to talk about starting a marching band. But the same thing with choruses, if you can go outside with those students. Even on a rainy day, there are plenty of things you can do that don't involve singing. I recommended it to someone, who mentioned it to their principal. The principal asked how much it would cost and said to come back with a number. We need to think outside the box. We'll be hitting flu season soon. It'll close us down. Same with General Music class: if you can get it outside, get it outside.

Kathy Perconti – General Music, Singing:

We were going to be masked and have the bell covers. Then on Friday, he changed his mind. We went into school having it be 12 feet apart, masked. But there's no room for everybody. I found the principal. Consider using the cafeteria for some of your ensembles. The band director will only be seeing half of his kids once a week, instead of all of them twice a week, as usual. Go to PE and ask the gym teacher if they'll move outside, so you can use the gym. Think outside the box. Look for those solutions and collaborate with your colleagues.

Jonathan Hunkins – Messina High School, Upstate NY, Band, Grades 9-12:

Studies all say 6 feet. Nine for trombones, because of the spit valve on the side. I talked to my doctor about it – they just doubled it for safety. The kids need music. They need to play music, they need the social, emotional connection. But we also need to make sure they stay safe. I have an auditorium that seats just under 1,000. If I go 12 feet, I can get 40 students in there. But what happens if the contact tracing gets back to the school and somebody gets sick and your school had chosen 6 feet? Or if your school had chosen 12 feet and you didn't honor that? It's 12 feet for wind instruments and singing. It's not orchestra, or percussion. A 12-week course on rhythm is fine. Kids can always use that. The biggest downfall of every sight-reader is always rhythm. We can do rhythm studies for 10-12 weeks. I have about 70 kids. Upper kids will do chamber ensemble music, probably. How cool would it be for kids to find out they're going to do mass percussion ensemble music for 10-12 weeks? It can be 6 feet for percussion, 12 feet for spit valves.

Krista Easton:

I'm one of the unfortunate ones who lost my job right away. Where I'm working now, we're not allowed to sing, have pencils or writing instruments of any kind. So I'm coming up with other ways. So many performers are out of work, you'd be surprised how many would say yes, if you reach out to them and ask if they like to come perform for students – for free or reduced rate – on Zoom, or Instagram. Find out what type of music kids love. You know they already love music. Find another way. I've already applied for grants. My students will be seeing new music being written. That's part of the grant funding.

David – Albany area, string teacher:

There have been a lot of studies on 6-12 feet. They use to say it was mandated 12 feet. Then they changed it to “recommended.” That happened in a 24-hour period.

I'm a string teacher in the Albany area. My band and choral colleagues are all 12 feet. So we're all co-teaching. We're meeting half of the kids one day, half the other day. So I'll be Teacher B for my colleague when he's teaching and vice versa.

Michelle Fritta – PK-12 bldg, Ostego County:

My school is permitting parents to let kids drop band and choir. So I'm planning on making individual plans for all of my students, so it can work no matter what they need, or don't need. I'm seeing an exodus here.

Jonathan Hunkins:

I'm concerned that fear may overtake the general populace. Make sure that you're communicating as much as possible. Have good details and have a plan of what you're doing to keep their children safe. And also make sure to communicate to parents how important music is for their child. If they didn't know your plan and you didn't share it with them, that may be why you're seeing exodus. If they're coming in to 10 weeks of theory class every other day, that may be why you're seeing an exodus.

M. Mastrangelo – Smithtown:

I recommended to an admin at the high school level to put a freeze on adds and drops. We cannot then begin to just move kids all over the place, after we have all these adds and drops, because we might not have other places to put them.

-Recommendation of bucket drumming (in the Chat)

Helen Ihasz – Chautauqua County:

Recommended wrist bands that say, “Just Play – Westfield Band”, plus similar T-shirts

Jennifer Davis:

This is a reminder of more ways to think outside the box and for kids to start a movement for themselves and find a way to play no matter what. “We can still make music, but it will be different.”

Kate Jarrad:

Our district will be giving kids two cloth masks as they enter school. We'll be taking one and putting an iron-on music note on one of them to show ally-ship. Kids are there to play, but also to socialize. How are you getting the kids to work together and make music together? (I'm not accepting the answer of virtual videos because that's not collaboration.)

Michael Brownell:

Somebody mentioned something about surveying students. I'll have many remote and many in-person. But I need to get them all in my classroom. I want to know what worked for them last spring, when we were all remote, and what didn't work? I have hundreds of students who love to make and learn about music, and we'll learn about this all together. I think it's a good idea to model my interest levels on the kids by surveying them. I think mid-late September is a good time to check in again, after everyone has gotten their feet wet.

Lori Orestano-James:

I think the pods are important – the Safe Pods, so kids can have their own. So kids can feel very safe. It won't be every student who gets to do it, because not every parent will allow that to occur. But as many as possible.

Kate Jarrad:

Also, our school and teacher center actually has drones. They can record the concert, as kids sit 12 feet apart.

Adjournment at 8:07 p.m.