

Case Study: Music Program of Distinction North Hills High School

the program

The vision of the North Hills School District Music Department is simple: “To serve our students and community by creating one of the nation’s finest school music programs.”

By the time students reach high school, they will have had formal music instruction and several opportunities to participate in band and orchestral ensembles, choir and other performance groups throughout middle and elementary school.

North Hills High School offers a variety of courses in music theory and technology. Within the NHHS Academy for Arts and Communication, students who are interested in a career in the arts gain relevant experience and connect with professionals in the field.

The North Hills Music Department follows a written curriculum and review process. Students are assessed against local and state standards and placed into ensembles that meet their needs and skill set.

In the state-of-the-art music-learning lab, students take Music Theory and Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory in addition to Advanced Music Technology. They have access to computers and an instrumental keyboard, and relevant software, such as PG Music Band-in-a-Box 2017 Accompaniment & Composition Software, MakeMusic Finale v25 Notation Software, Focusrite 2i2 - 2.0 USB Audio Interface and AVID ProTools 12 Digital Audio Workstation Software.

Additionally, the school’s newly renovated library is home to a recording studio where students learn by doing.

Four concert bands, a jazz band, an orchestra, two choirs and a guitar ensemble rehearse daily. Students may also participate in a number of extracurricular ensembles that include:

- Marching Band
- Jazz II
- Symphonic Orchestra
- Chamber Strings
- Rock Orchestra
- Pit Orchestra
- Madrigal Choir
- Women’s Singers
- Men’s Vocal Ensemble
- Musical Theater

The North Hills Marching Band is modeled after the bands of college football’s Big Ten Conference. Trademark features of this group are its high march step, precision drill, and commitment to quality. The band has performed in the Presidential Inaugural Parade, St. Patrick’s Day parades in Chicago and New York City, the Washington D.C. Cherry Blossom Parade, NFL, MLB and NCAA games and at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fl.

The North Hills Wind Ensemble has been featured at more than two-dozen conventions throughout the country, and the North Hills choirs have performed with the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale, the River City Brass Band and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Cast members of the school’s spring musical have received several awards in recent years including the Gene Kelly Award for Excellence in High School Musical Theater, presented by the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera and University of Pittsburgh.

The National Association of Music Merchants continues to recognize the North Hills School District as one of the country’s Best Communities for Music Education.



the process

Rooted in the National Standards for Music Education, published by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), and aligned with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Arts and Humanities, North Hills High School (NHHS) offers students a rigorous and engaging curriculum.

The program has undergone changes in recent years with the addition of non-traditional ensembles, courses built

Music Program of Distinction | North Hills High School, Pennsylvania

around music education as opposed to solely performance, and new technology.

To complement its curriculum, NHHS hosts artists in residency on an ongoing basis and collaborates with guest soloists and college and professional ensembles, so that students can learn from and be exposed to professional musicians firsthand.

The music department receives support from two booster organizations: the North Hills Instrumental Parents Association and the North Hills Choral Parents Association. These dedicated volunteer groups raise funds through a marching band festival, a jazz festival, choral performances and other activities throughout the year. They earn revenue by selling performance tickets, food and drink and raffle tickets.

In addition to supporting equipment and travel for students, donations have enabled the school to provide five college scholarships annually to NHHS Music Department graduates. The booster organization has also supported an annual commissioning series since 1965, making it the longest running series of its kind in the nation. Each year students give the world premiere of works that go on to be recorded by professional ensembles, D.C. service bands, and college ensembles throughout the country.

lessons learned

- Integrate music into students' elementary and middle school curriculum, when possible. Music education should be coordinated district-wide so that students are prepared for more challenging classes and ensembles once they reach high school. Students in North Hills School District's elementary and middle schools receive general music instruction once every six days. Older elementary students may elect to participate in band or orchestra and middle school students can join a band, choir or other ensembles.
- For students interested in a career in music, being versed in modern technology is critical. Even if a school can't afford to open a dedicated music lab, providing music technology in the school's library, such as a keyboard or music mixing software, and an enclosed space for students to work supports learning outside of the classroom.

- Offer students opportunities for traditional classroom learning with courses like music theory and technology, in addition to performance, so that they are prepared to study music in college if they choose.
- Appeal to a wide range of interests by offering traditional music ensembles, such as wind ensemble or choir, and non-traditional music ensembles such as world drumming or rock orchestra.



program of distinction benefits

- Earning the Music Program of Distinction complemented the school's Excellence by Design accreditation from Middle States, further elevating the school's profile and raising awareness of the music program.
- The process to secure the Program of Distinction requires collaboration, goal setting and planning, all of which further unified teachers and students.
- Staff and faculty are proud to have been the 6th school in the world to earn the Program of Distinction award, and highlight it when speaking with people outside of the school community, particularly with prospective students.

for more information

For more information about the Music Program of Distinction at North Hills High School contact:

Len Lavelle
Music Department Curriculum Leader
412.318.1400 x2235
lavelle@nhsd.net
55 Rochester Road | Pittsburgh, Pa. 15229

To learn more about Middle States Programs of Distinction, visit www.msa-cess.org.



Middle States Association Commissions
on Elementary and Secondary Schools

3624 Market Street, 2 West
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

267.284.5000
610.617.1106
info@msa-cess.org
www.msa-cess.org

