

# Needham Public Schools



## Fine & Performing Arts Program Review 2008-2009



**November 17, 2009**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Special thanks to Corinne MacDonald and Felicia Fraser for their clerical help and Susan Bonaiuto for her assistance with the parent focus groups.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fine & Performing Arts program review committee is happy to report that the overall state of this visual and performing arts programs in the Needham Public Schools remains highly favorable in the eyes of students, parents, teachers and the community beyond the schools. The committee did, however, identify a number of areas in which steps could be taken to improve the quality of both programs. Recommendations are outlined in detail throughout the full report.

Of particular interest is the fact that the data consistently noted the lack of any substantial curricular programs in Theater or Dance. Formal theater education exists only in one grade at the middle school. The two extra-curricular musicals offer little opportunity for students who desire a traditional theater experience. Formal dance education programs are currently non-existent.

The committee also found that there is a strong desire by students, parents, and administrators to maintain and improve current programs, while increasing opportunities in all of the Arts. However, they expressed concerns that any further reductions in resources for the Arts will result in reduced quality of current programs and make it impossible to address student needs.

The presence of a vibrant community arts program in Needham provides a wealth of opportunities that could serve as a resource to extend and enhance teaching and learning beyond the classroom for both traditional and non-traditional fine and performing arts students.

Realizing that some of the recommendations put forth in this document will require either financial resources or a degree of lead-time to implement, we have chosen to include in this executive summary a number of high priority recommendations that can be implemented in a reasonably short period of time, without the need for any substantial increase of financial resources. They include the following:

### PROGRAMS

- Reallocate existing Fine & Performing Arts resources to provide for at least one Theater Arts course at the high school.
- In conjunction with the Health and Wellness Program, explore the possibility of developing a semester course in Dance that would address both Physical Education and Dance Education requirements.
- Develop a district-wide Fine & Performing Arts Support Group to foster increased communication and dialogue between the community and the department.
- Create structures that enable Needham community arts groups to provide mentoring opportunities in the Arts for Needham students.
- In partnership with the METCO Director, develop strategies to increase METCO student participation in performing arts activities and program.
- Explore other scheduling options to increase student access to Arts programming, especially for students receiving special services.

### INSTRUCTION

- Examine practices in music ensemble classes to ensure traditional curricula requirements are met while increasing the use of contemporary genres to maximize student engagement.
- Closely monitor the skill level of students entering high school art classes to determine the effect of the restructured middle school visual arts program.

### PRACTICES

- In conjunction with the Athletic Director and high school principal, clearly articulate procedures regarding student participation in after school music classes and in athletics. Develop a process to ensure adherence by all constituencies.
- Explore how music, theater, or visual art teachers can receive advance notice of scheduled arts assemblies so that they can integrate these programs into their classes to make these experiences more meaningful for students.
- Ensure that the Fine & Performing Arts leadership evaluates grant proposals that are written to provide arts experiences to students in the schools.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Provide professional development that enables kindergarten teachers to incorporate developmentally appropriate music skills into their classroom instruction.
- Provide professional development that enables all teachers to more effectively integrate the Arts into classroom practice

# INTRODUCTION

This analysis of the K-12 Fine & Performing Arts program is part of the Needham school district's comprehensive K-12 curriculum review process. The intent of the review is to assess current programs in the Arts as measured against local, state, national standards, and community needs and expectations. The results of this Program Review will help to establish areas of focus for continuous program improvement.

A unique aspect of this program review, as compared to other academic areas, was the examination of the relationship between the community arts groups and the school program. With the vibrancy of the Needham community arts programs, the committee felt that the review afforded an opportunity to better understand what opportunities might be available for collaboration, enhancement, and integration into the school programs. This is particularly important in light of the current realities surrounding limited operational budget resources.

The numerous extra-curricular components of the program, especially in the performing arts, made this examination far more extensive than many other program reviews.

## METHODOLOGY

The program review began in fall of 2008 with the appointment of a steering committee. Over the course of the review, the full committee met nine times, with numerous additional meetings by a variety of sub-committees and/or sub-committee chairs. Data collection included the following methods:

<p><b>Materials Reviewed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine &amp; Performing Arts Department meeting agendas, minutes, and records</li> <li>• Curricula, both online and paper</li> <li>• Teacher schedules</li> <li>• Concert programs</li> <li>• AP test results</li> <li>• Music festival adjudication results</li> <li>• Scholastic Art Competition results</li> <li>• Class assignments, rubrics, and other assessment forms and results</li> <li>• Student work in all arts areas and grade levels</li> </ul>	<p><b>Surveys</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Fine &amp; Performing Arts certified staff</li> <li>• All other Needham Public Schools certified staff</li> <li>• Students in grades 8, 10, and 12 (random sample, n=287)</li> <li>• Parents of students in grades K-12 (online survey, n=562)</li> <li>• Community Arts Group Leaders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Individual Interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All building Principals</li> <li>• 50% of the certified FPA Staff</li> <li>• Six individual parents (self-selected) including a PTC officer.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focus Groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents of middle and high school Performing Arts Students (random and self-selected)</li> <li>• Parents of middle and high school Visual Arts Students (random and self-selected)</li> </ul>

A unique aspect of this program review methodology was the invitation to four experts in the fields of music education, visual art education and commercial art to visit Needham, examine relevant materials, see students and teachers in action, and examine and comment on student work. The purpose of this was to provide a fresh unbiased review of what was seen in relation to accepted national standards and expectations in arts education. These "snapshot" visits included opportunities to meet with the Program Review Committee to report out verbally, as well as providing written feedback. The reviewers included:

- Rosemary Burns..... Arts Education Coordinator/Consultant for the RI Dept. of Education
- Dr. William McManus... Retired Director of Fine & Performing Arts, Belmont Public Schools & Music Education faculty member at Boston University
- Dr. Paul Sproll..... Dept. Head for Art & Design Education at RI School of Design
- Rob Bolster..... Professional Graphic Designer

# PROGRAM CONTEXT

## CURRENT STATUS

The arts, by definition, include dance, music, visual arts, and theater. Current instructional resources are focused primarily on music and visual arts. Staffing in each discipline includes the following full time equivalent licensed teachers:

Grade Level	Dance	Music	Theater/Drama	Visual Art
K-5	0	5.5	0	4.0
6-8	0	3.2	0.6	3.7
9-12	0	2.0	0	7.0

*Music* staff provides curricular programs in music education for all students in grades 1 through 8. Instruction includes general music, vocal music, instrumental music (both band and strings), and some music technology. At the high school, music electives are available in band, chorus, strings, music theory and computer music. Music performance, listening, analyzing, creating, and interpreting are embedded in all classes.

*Visual Arts* staff provides curricular programs in skill-based hands-on visual art for all students in grades 1 through 8. Additional courses in a variety of areas are provided beginning in grades 7 through 12. Art electives at the high school include specialty programs in ceramics, photography (digital and traditional), crafts, sculpture, and graphic design, as well as continued focus on traditional art media. In addition to the electives, an “art major” sequence of four year-long courses that includes AP Art, is available for students who wish to pursue a more intense art experience. All visual art classes are “studio” based in that students focus daily on creating art. References to art history and art analysis are embedded in most classes.

The *Theater Arts* staff consists of one part-time licensed theater arts teacher who provides instruction for some students in grades 7 and 8. There is no formal dance educator in the school system.

The predominance of music and visual arts, as compared to dance and theater, is not unusual in most public schools in the United States. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics*, only 20% of elementary schools offered instruction in theater or dance, as compared to 94% offering music and 87% offering visual art. At the secondary level, 90% offer music and 93% visual art. Only 48% of secondary schools offer theater and 14% offer dance. However, as this report will indicate, the lack of more substantive theater, especially at the secondary level, is a source of concern for the Needham community.

## CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

In addition to the curricular program provided by licensed arts educators, the Fine & Performing Arts program actively coordinates numerous co-curricular activities. These include the high school marching band, high school musical, theater arts society, visual arts society, elementary honors band, chorus, and string orchestra, middle school town orchestra, treble choir, jazz ensemble and wind ensemble. The department supervises the district-wide private lesson program, along with annual participation in district, all-state (grades 7-12), and national music honors groups and festivals. The department also provides for annual participation in art all-state and the state and national scholastic art competition.

## OTHER SCHOOL RELATED ARTS ACTIVITIES

There are a number of school related arts groups and activities that have operated outside of the formal Fine & Performing Arts program over the past years. They provide valuable additional arts opportunities for our students. Groups include the middle school musical, some a-cappella high school groups, and a high school student theater group. Arts activities include events, workshops and performances provided for through school creative arts councils, NEF grants, and PTCs.

## PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

Over the past four years, the following challenges to maintaining quality instruction and programming in the arts for all students in Needham have had to be addressed:

- The 2006 failed budget override resulted in the elimination of kindergarten music, a reduction in music, theater, and visual art electives in the middle school, and the elimination of high school theater art electives, which at the time, were part of the English department.
- 2008 operating budget constraints resulted in a 25% reduction of music instruction in grades 1, 2 and 3. These students went from 60 minutes per week of instruction to 45 minutes per week.
- The 2009 middle school grade reconfiguration resulted in the elimination of grade 6 ceramics and reallocation of theater 6 staff to grades 7 and 8.
- Although the 2009 middle school electives reconfiguration provided for smaller class sizes in all arts classes, increased vertical curricula coordination in all elective areas, and increased instruction in music and theater for some students in grades 7 and 8, it also resulted in less visual art instruction in those same grades.
- Staff reductions (10% in music) and staff turnover from 2006 through 2009 resulted in students having multiple years of different ensemble instructors in middle school band, elementary chorus, and grade 4 and 5 strings. Often, some staff is required to teach outside the area of expertise for which they were originally hired.
- Lack of appropriate instructional space for art and music programs at some elementary schools constrains a full range of instructional practices.

## RECENT PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

Over the past four years, the following program improvements have been implemented:

- Development of a district-wide Fine & Performing Arts Vision & Mission to guide all instruction.
- Addition of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade district wide string class (NESO) to provide focused instruction for this grade level.
- Reconfiguration of the private lesson program to be a formal part of the school program.
- Expansion of the elementary honors band concept to include honors chorus.
- Ongoing revision of curriculum documents, instructional practices, and assessments to reflect a standards-based approach to teaching and learning.
- Addition of the middle school Wind Ensemble and expansion of the Middle School Jazz Ensemble to a full year co-curricular activity to meet the needs of students.
- Expanded participation of middle and high school music ensembles in standards-based state adjudication festivals (MICCA).
- Completion and installation of the public art sculpture at the high school that included an artist in residence and the development of a new Public Art course.
- Redesigned visual art semester courses at the high school as a result of curricular revisions, program changes, or new facility capabilities.
- Addition of accelerated courses in Art 3, Band, Chorus, and String Orchestra to better meet student needs.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ARTS

“I think dance/drama/theater would be a great addition but I do not support cutting any existing art and music programs in order to achieve this. There have been many unfortunate cuts as it stands now... it would break my heart to see any more reductions.”

--Parent

The schools and community have a long tradition of support for the Fine and Performing Arts. The provision for a full time district-wide Fine & Performing Arts Director and the two-year arts graduation

requirement are but two of many indicators of this support. Surveys and interviews with stakeholders indicate a strong desire to not only maintain the current programs in the arts, but to expand them in terms of quality and types of arts education offerings and experiences. When asked specifically about the reinstatement of kindergarten music or the inclusion of programs in theater or dance, surveys indicated an especially strong desire for theater. However, there was much less support if it meant doing so at the expense of other portions of the current programs. The following data serves to indicate the nature of the support for the Fine & Performing Arts program.

“Formal classes in the...Arts should be a part of all students’ education” - % who Agree:

Group	Arts Education for all Students	Theater should be included	Dance should be included
Parents	96%	88%	72%
HS Students	64%	45% interested	46% interested
Non-FPA Teachers	95%	NA	NA

“I would support reinstating kindergarten music/art even if it meant reducing some other aspects of the FPA program.”

Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Parents	24%	28%	32%	16%
K-5 Principals				All

I would support adding dance/drama even if it meant reducing some other aspect of the FPA program.

Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Parents	23%	29%	34%	12%
K-5 Principals		An item for discussion		

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE ARTS IN THE NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“Needham arts programs are terrific and the staff are not only competent artistically, but creative and supportive of their students. I can’t say enough about the opportunities they have provided to my children...”

--Parent

Parents, administrators, students, and staff have a favorable perception of Fine & Performing Arts programming. 80% of high school students felt current programs are appropriate and meet their needs. 89% of staff reported that developing skills in the arts had a positive impact on their own discipline. The *Visual Arts* program consistently received the most highly favorable ratings (87%) from almost all survey participants.

The *Music* program, for the most part, also received highly favorable ratings (79%). There were, however, a number of specific concerns about the quality of some music performance classes expressed via parent surveys, focus groups, and supported by administrator interviews. It was noted that the lack of kindergarten music, more than likely, resulted in only 39% of parents indicating the K-2 program met their children’s needs. Interestingly, though there is no formal instruction in visual arts in kindergarten, 75% of the parents still indicated it met the needs of their child. The committee expects that this is probably due to the inclusion of art activities by kindergarten teachers on a regular basis that result in student work going home, as compared to music activities that might be taking place in kindergarten classrooms, but with little visible evidence going home.

*Theater* experiences received generally favorable ratings in terms of musical-theater at the secondary level, but the lowest overall parent satisfaction, quality and “meeting student needs” levels, especially at the secondary level.

“I think the lack of drama education is an enormous void in the arts department. I do think the visual arts and music are quite strong, but having grown up in a public high school with a strong theater department I think it is lacking at the middle and high school level.”

--Parent

The following data provides a summary of parents’ overall parent perception of the Fine & Performing Arts program:

“I am **satisfied** with my child’s....”:

	<b>K-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Visual Art classes	88%	87%	90%	86%	87%
Music classes	71%	79%	80%	81%	79%
Theater classes	NA	NA	74%	<b>38%</b>	<b>58%</b>

“The.... offered at our school appears to be of **high quality.**”

	<b>K-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Visual Art classes	94%	86%	88%	94%	89%
Music classes	71%	78%	82%	82%	80%
Theater classes	NA	NA	73%	70%	71%

“The.... **meets the needs** of my child.”

	<b>K-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Visual Arts Program	75%	85%	87%	83%	84%
Music Program	<b>39%</b>	71%	71%	64%	67%
Theater Program	NA	NA	62%	<b>45%</b>	<b>54%</b>

# TEACHING AND LEARNING

## VISUAL ARTS

This area of the program review focuses on the current teaching and learning that occurs in our visual art classrooms and the quality of work that students produce. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices were examined.

29 Needham High School students submitted AP Art Portfolios in 2009. The overall average score was 4.4, with 17 students achieving ratings of 5, and no student scoring lower than a 3. These are the highest overall scores in Needham's recent history.

In 2009, 26 high school students and 14 middle school students received awards in the national Scholastic Art Competition. This included 13 Gold keys, the highest award given.

### STRENGTHS

- The visual arts curriculum provides the means to address the content standards outlined by national and state standards in Visual Arts Education in grades 1 through 12.
- The visual arts staff consistently enables students to achieve high standards in the areas of artistic skill and development, as evidenced by AP Art scores, Scholastic Art results, and consistent high quality of student art portfolios used for college admissions.
- The wide variety of visual art courses at the high school serves students' needs in meeting the requirements of visual art standards at both the introductory and advanced levels.
- All visual art instruction throughout the district is studio based with an emphasis on the consistent creating of quality individual student work.
- Visual arts student work is consistently and prominently displayed throughout most school buildings, various areas of the community, and in formal art exhibits.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- In light of the high quality of high school student art work, the outside evaluators and visual art staff expressed concern that the restructured middle school schedule may lead to decreased skill development by the students as they prepare to enter the high school program.
- The art history and critical response components of the state and national standards are not consistently addressed or included in all curricula.
- 43% of high school visual art students surveyed indicated that they were not clear about criteria used to determine grades in art classes.
- Assessment of individual student creativity and personal style is not consistent in current practice or evidenced in documents examined.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Closely monitor the skill level of students entering high school art classes to determine the effect of the restructured middle school curriculum.
- As curriculum is revised and updated, include formal integration of art history and critical response in visual art classes to ensure all students have instruction in these areas on a regular basis.
- Continue the development of rubrics, common assessments and other assessment strategies. Implement on a regular basis to bring increased clarity to the grading process.
- Ensure that the development and assessment of individual student creativity and style remains a focus, as appropriate, in all course curricula and instruction.

## PERFORMING ARTS

This area of the Program Review focuses on the current teaching and learning taking place in our music classrooms and the quality of student work that results. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices were examined.

In 2009, Needham High School Symphonic Band, Jazz Ensemble and Choruses all received Silver ratings at the MICCA adjudication festivals. The Orchestra received a Gold rating and performed in concert at Symphony Hall.

During the fall of 2009, 386 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in before school beginning string and band classes throughout the district, representing 44% of that student population.

### STRENGTHS

- The Music curriculum provides the means to address all of the content standards and benchmarks required by national and state standards in music education in grades 1 through 12.
- The extraordinary commitment to enhance the music experiences for all students, as evidenced by the amount of uncompensated time staff spends during evenings and weekends with our students.
- High school and middle school ensembles perform at high levels as evidenced by consistent Excellent and Superior ratings at state standardized music adjudications (MICCA).
- Individual student musicians from Needham's programs perform at high levels based on acceptances to District, All-State, and national honors groups.
- Ensemble repertoire selected for student study and performance is of high quality and enables students to meet the standards that require the use of appropriate music literature.
- Students at the middle and elementary levels have additional opportunities to be challenged and grow through select ensembles. (Treble Choir, Honors Band, etc.)
- The recent addition of accelerated options for High School Band, Chorus, and Strings to challenge the most music oriented students and foster higher individual achievement in performance.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- The lack of formal music instruction in kindergarten, combined with the recent reduction of music time in grade 1, 2 and 3, is likely to delay the development of the skills students need to meet the music assessment standards in the upper grades.
- Current high school music offerings have limited inclusion of music history, non-western cultures, or contemporary music making genres or techniques.
- Data indicate instructional quality concerns in some music classes.
- 35% of high school music students surveyed express uncertainty regarding the criteria used to determine their grades in music.
- Instructional practices in secondary ensemble classes do not include consistent opportunities for assessment of individual student creativity or performance skills.
- The inclusion of music history and non-western music is inconsistent throughout the curriculum.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide professional development that enables kindergarten teachers to incorporate developmentally appropriate music activities into their classroom instruction.
- As resources become available, reinstate kindergarten music instruction by music specialists, particularly for any full day kindergarten classes that may be implemented in the future.

- Continue to provide focused professional development and support for teachers in addressing instructional quality concerns and monitor closely to maintain continuous improvement.
- Examine repertoire and instructional practices in ensemble classes to ensure traditional curricula requirements are met while maximizing appropriate student engagement and interest through increased use of contemporary genres.
- Continue the development of rubrics, common assessments and other assessment strategies and use on a regular basis as part of the instructional process to bring increased clarity to the grading process.
- As curricula are updated and revised, include integration and assessment of individual creativity and performance, music history, and non-western music, as elements of instruction in all middle school and high school ensemble classes.

“Please know that the effort that goes into preserving and developing the fine arts program is much appreciated by those of us who do not have the means to provide multiple, private music experiences for our children. We rely on the public school system for the entire music education that our children can receive. As a parent, I feel that my financial sacrifice to stay in Needham over the years has been rewarded by my children’s enriching music experience.”

--Parent

# INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

This area of the Program Review focuses on the current support systems in place, such as administrative structure, schedules, facilities, staff, and resources that enable instruction in the Fine & Performing Arts to take place in a coordinated, cohesive, comprehensive and equitable manner throughout the school district.

## ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL, STATE & DISTRICT GOALS

### STRENGTHS

- The department's Vision and Mission, developed by the FPA staff in 2005-06, aligns with the district's Social Emotional Learning and Standards-Based Learning goals.
- Department curricula documents and most assessment practices align with state, and national standards.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- All curricula documents are not yet updated, online, or easily accessible to teachers.
- Standards based instructional practices remain a work in progress at some levels of instruction.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Complete the updating and transferring of all Fine & Performing Arts curricular documents to the district's new Atlas online curriculum system.
- Increase focused professional development surrounding standards-based instructional practices as needed.

## SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTION – STAFFING & OTHER RESOURCES

### STRENGTHS

- Current (2009-10) district-wide staffing is adequate to provide a program that addresses all curricular areas of visual arts and music for all students.
- Though supply accounts have been reduced over the past years, funding is currently sufficient to provide a basic visual arts education for all students.
- The department utilizes grants and other funding sources to supplement the program on a regular basis.
- New facilities at the high school and High Rock are state of the art and provide excellent learning environments in music and visual art.
- The district provides for a program director and clerical support to supervise and coordinate the program district-wide.
- Over the past two years, when classroom space needs have caused the loss of a dedicated music room, elementary administrators have done exemplary work to convert building wide common areas into space that can be used for music instruction.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- The lack of formal course offerings and co-curricular activities in traditional theater or dance limits the ability of interested students to develop skills in these areas.
- All current school theatrical productions are not coordinated through the Fine & Performing Arts office.
- Recent reductions in music staff have required teachers to have to teach outside of their areas of strength or to change assignments yearly. This disrupts consistent program improvement and affects the quality of instruction.
- Analysis of schedules indicate that current elementary art staff is sufficient to provide a basic program for the existing elementary population. However, it does not provide time for additional classes as the population increases or for supporting Arts integration activities.
- The loss of dedicated music or art rooms in elementary schools results in inadequate space to deliver the program in its entirety efficiently and equitably.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Explore reallocation of current Fine & Performing Arts resources to provide for at least one curricular Theater Arts course at the high school.
- Expand the current high school Theater Arts Society activity to include at least two non-musical drama performances each year.
- Expand the current middle school theatrical program to include the production of a traditional play (non-musical) each year.
- Develop organizational and financial structures to ensure that all co-curricular theatrical productions are coordinated and share resources under the direction of the Fine & Performing Arts office.
- Explore the development, in conjunction with Health & Wellness, of a semester course in Dance that would address both Physical Education and Dance Education standards.
- Avoid additional reductions in Fine & Performing Arts staff that would lead to reduced student instructional time or further disruption to program consistency and quality.
- As school facilities are designed, renovated, or planned for, or current space reallocated, the provision of appropriate space for Fine & Performing Arts instruction should continue to receive the same priority as all other core academic areas.

## **PRACTICES AND POLICIES**

### **STRENGTHS**

- The Director's office provides an organizational structure that supports a district-wide professional learning community in the Fine & Performing Arts, vertical and horizontal curricula articulation, and equality of art education opportunity for students.
- The consistent use of a district-wide school arts calendar to coordinate events throughout the school system enables effective long term planning from year to year.
- Regular monthly meetings of discipline and grade level specific groups within the department are scheduled by the director in an attempt to meet varied needs of a diverse group of teachers.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- The Fine & Performing Arts staff, at some levels, feels a need for more input regarding budgetary and program decisions.
- Student and parent surveys indicate that current high school and middle school schedules limit the ability of some students to fully pursue their interests in the arts during the school day. (51% HS students; 28% parents)
- The current high school and middle school schedules do not allow for sharing of specialized staff, such as strings, during the instructional day.
- The use of before school and after school time to provide segments of the performing arts program limits program access by METCO students. In 2007-08, only 11% of METCO students participated in beginning instrumental classes as compared to 45% of Needham resident students.
- Students on IEPs and in other support services have difficulty experiencing the full breadth of Arts offerings due to current program and scheduling structures.
- After school music classes conflict with athletic schedules causing student stress and participation difficulty.
- School related arts groups that operate independently of the of the Fine & Performing Arts department create coordination difficulties and inefficient use of resources.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Increase opportunities for staff participation in programmatic decision-making.
- Explore other scheduling options (such as semester participation in music ensembles, or extended school day visual art offerings) as strategies to increase student access to arts programming at the high school, especially for students receiving special services.
- Explore options to current after school music class placement to reduce conflicts with athletics.

- In conjunction with the Athletic Director and high school Principal, clearly articulate procedures regarding student participation in after school music classes and in athletics. Develop a process to ensure adherence by all constituencies.
- In partnership with the METCO director, explore avenues, such as aligning programs with METCO bus schedules, and reinvigorating METCO friends, to increase METCO student participation in performing arts activities.
- In partnership with advisors of student arts activities, develop procedures to coordinate and plan their activities with the Fine & Performing Arts Director's office.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **STRENGTHS**

- 71% of the Fine & Performing Arts staff attends discipline specific workshops and conferences outside of Needham every year, usually at their own expense.
- 80% of the Fine & Performing Arts staff maintains membership in their discipline specific professional education association at their own expense.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- 62% of Fine & Performing Arts teachers report that current professional development opportunities in Needham do not meet their discipline specific needs.
- Current Fine & Performing Arts staff reports spending more time on organizational and program needs during staff meetings as compared to time devoted to discussions of teaching and learning in the Arts.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Reapportion monthly staff meeting time to provide professional development for Arts teaching and learning.
- Coordinate with the TEC communities to provide more discipline specific professional development opportunities.

## **INTEGRATION**

### **STRENGTHS**

- There is a strong desire by the majority of teachers and administrators to integrate the arts with and through other academic disciplines at all grade levels. 71% of non-arts teachers are interested in professional development in the arts.
- 82% of non-arts teachers report being personally engaged in various art forms that could be utilized for arts integration in the classroom.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- There is no formal opportunity or structure that enables arts integration to support instruction in other disciplines in a consistent manner throughout the district.
- Though 96% of music and art staff believes that integration is important, 67% are not aware of other teachers' arts related activities in their classrooms.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- As resources become available, create structures and opportunities to enable ongoing authentic arts integration throughout school programs.
- Provide professional development opportunities in effective use of the arts for learning in non-arts academic areas.
- Provide displays of exemplary student art work in other academic areas of the middle and high schools to improve non-arts teachers' knowledge of student capabilities when including visual art elements in other academic projects.
- Create an internal Internet library or webpage of K-12 student Fine & Performing Arts work that can be cross-referenced with other academic disciplines

## **COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITY**

### **STRENGTHS**

- The Fine & Performing Arts Department maintains and updates a web page and calendar providing relevant information, notices, and celebrations of achievements.
- Press releases and notices regarding Fine & Performing Arts student accomplishments are sent to local media on a regular basis.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- Current communication efforts to explain and promote the arts within and outside the school system are not reaching all audiences consistently.

53% of high school students do not think the Needham community, other than their parents, knows about their arts performances/exhibits.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Increase the use of teacher web pages and student/parent email lists by staff to share instructional policies, procedures, expectations and other pertinent information.
- Develop a district-wide Fine & Performing Arts Support Group to foster increased communication and dialogue between the community and the department.
- Increase the use of current communication tools (HS News, School bulletins, etc) to share Arts news with the school and community, and explore new methods of outreach to the local media to provide increased exposure of student activities in the Arts in our schools.

# COMMUNITY ARTS

This aspect of the program review focuses on the degree to which the Fine & Performing Arts program avails itself of and integrates with the resources available through numerous Needham Community Arts groups. For the purposes of this review, “community arts” refers to groups, such as PTCs, and NEF, as well as community arts groups based in Needham, but not formally or informally connected to the schools (e.g. Needham Community Theater, Needham Art Association, and Needham Plugged-In).

From 2000 to 2009 the teachers in the Fine & Performing Arts Department applied for and received over \$191,000 in grants or donations to support Arts programs and projects in our schools.

## COMMUNITY ARTS RESOURCES

### STRENGTHS

- PTCs and NEF provide regular financial support for quality arts events and activities within the schools through assemblies, grants, and organizational support.
- Fine & Performing Arts teachers apply for and receive grants from PTCs and NEF on a regular basis to provide for expanded and enhanced opportunities to enrich their curriculum.
- Fine & Performing Arts teachers feel that an experience with community arts should be part of a student’s education.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- Planning by community and parent groups for school-wide arts presentations in the schools does not consistently include the relevant music, theater, or visual arts staff. As a result, 54% of these teachers report that they are not aware of arts related assemblies in their buildings in a timely manner so as to be able to integrate the presentation with their instruction.
- The majority of Fine & Performing Arts staff report that they do not regularly explore the use of local Needham community arts organizations as an instructional or enrichment resource for their students or classes.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a process that includes input from the Fine & Performing Arts Director’s office when submitting grant proposals that provide arts experiences or assemblies for students in the schools.
- Establish a process so that plans for school arts assemblies are shared in advance with the relevant music, theater, and visual arts teachers in the building in order to provide for possible integration, preparation, and support for the students.

## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ARTS

### STRENGTHS

- 87% of high school students are actively engaged in a wide variety of community arts experiences.
- Students have taken the lead in creating community arts experiences for themselves in the areas of musical-theater and A Cappella singing.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

- There are no existing structures in the Fine & Performing Arts Department to promote consistent communication to students of the arts opportunities in the Needham community.
- Some current student led community arts groups do not feel fully supported by the Fine & Performing Arts Department.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assemble a comprehensive list of current community arts opportunities within Needham that is easily accessible by interested students.

- Provide space on the Fine & Performing Arts web page to post non-school related Needham community arts activities, with a special section for student led groups.
- Encourage student led high school groups who desire more formalized support to become part of the official high school Student Activity Program.

## **STUDENT/STAFF AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAMS**

### **STRENGTHS**

- Nearly all music and art teachers actively promote student participation in arts activities, such as regional/statewide music groups, festivals, Scholastic Art, etc. in the greater community outside of Needham.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- Active promotion of student participation in Needham's own community arts groups by Fine & Performing Arts teachers is inconsistent.
- There is limited participation by current Fine & Performing Arts staff in Needham community arts groups.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create ways that enable Needham community arts groups to invite school arts staff to attend and participate in their events and activities.

## **COMMUNITY ARTS INTEGRATION WITH SCHOOL PROGRAM**

### **STRENGTHS**

- PTC, NEF and other school support organizations provide a wide variety of quality community arts presentations to our students that draw upon the arts resources beyond the immediate Needham community.

### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

- The integration or coordination of community arts programs with the school arts instructional program is inconsistent.
- Many local Needham community arts groups are not involved as resources for our schools on any consistent basis.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Include community arts organizations on the mailing and email lists when disseminating information regarding Fine & Performing Arts activities.
- Include the use of local community arts groups as an instructional resource, as appropriate, when revising or designing course curricula in the arts.
- Actively encourage and provide assistance to the Needham community arts groups in partnering with the Fine & Performing Arts Department to create mentoring opportunities in the Arts for Needham students.

## CONCLUSION

The Needham Public Schools Fine & Performing Arts Program has many strong points. This review clearly indicates that the overall community is proud of its music and visual arts program, along with the limited, yet high quality musical-theater activities currently taking place. Hundreds of students each year, thanks to the dedicated and talented teachers, supportive administrators, and actively engaged parents and students, receive quality appropriate curricula and extra-curricular experiences in the arts. There is a great deal in place for which Needham should be proud. At the same time, there are a number of areas in need of improvement, especially concerning the lack of formal theater or dance opportunities, existing programmatic modifications, and an increased use of Needham's own community arts resources. The staff looks forward to beginning the work needed to address this report's recommendations. It is hoped that, when a similar review takes place five years from now, overall levels of satisfaction and measures of quality in regards to our arts programs will be even higher than they are now.