

Case Study: Music Program of Distinction Saint Francis Preparatory School, New York

the program

St. Francis Preparatory School holds the distinction of being the first school ever to be recognized for a Music Program of Distinction by the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools. The program affords students life-changing experiences that have included performing for two different Popes televised performances, domestic and international travel, and participation in New York State School Music Association festivals.

This has all been within a strongly established and fully articulated academic program with multiple entry points that allows for the talents and enthusiasm of each and every student to be cultivated in the Franciscan tradition of every student having value as a member of the school community.

The Music department is clearly woven into the fabric the school's life. Our 11 ensembles, as well as our beginner classes, have presented nearly 300 performances in the last four years.

the process

To further elevate its Music program, St. Francis Preparatory School set the following goals:

1. Improve publicity and public relations geared towards recruitment and audience development.
2. Redesign and improve the Introduction to Music Curriculum (which ultimately came to include the school's 1:1 iPad program).
3. Enhance interdisciplinary study and recruit guest teaching artists.
4. Reinstated a department moderator.
5. Encourage private study outside of the school, as well as adopt SmartMusic as regular and reliable tool that is easily utilized via the student's iPad.

The first goal has been fully achieved through efforts such as direct mailings that include department

brochures and concert passes, inviting guest ensembles of partner schools to perform at our concerts, developing outreach programs at local grammar schools, and producing a short department **video**. As such, the school has seen a significant increase in enrollment in Music courses from the start of the 2011 school year. Further, ensembles often perform to capacity, if not standing room audiences at their concerts.

The school's 1:1 iPad program provided a clear path to move to a project-based curriculum (less lecture, more doing and creating). It now has a complete codified series of lesson plans for the Introduction to Music Curriculum.

The school has yet to develop regular interdisciplinary partnerships, but has done its best to engage numerous teaching artists, such as Peter Loel Boonshaft (Hofstra University) and the Hofstra University String Quartet, who have helped offset costs of their visit by researching and securing their own grants. The school has also welcomed the Triton Brass, Dr. David Noon (Dean Emeritus of the Manhattan School of Music), Daniel Klein, SFP '94 (Executive Director, North Shore Music Festival), and renowned jazz artists Tony Kadleck and Tony Tedesco.

Rather than reinstate its department moderator, the Music department invited parents to form an association that has helped us in producing and executing concerts, fundraising, and developing parent relationships and involvement.

1510 enrollees in Music courses
62%

of student body takes at least one Music class

24 courses **11** ensembles **300** performances
in four years

Lessons learned

- Develop a clearly articulated program with multiple entry points. This is done by teaching beginner classes in all four orchestral families that then feed into our multi-tiered ensemble structure. For example, our beginner string classes feed into our String Orchestra, which feeds into our Honors Orchestra, and finally our Chamber Orchestra.
- Create as many performance opportunities as possible, and make sure music is irrevocably woven into the fabric of the school. This is achieved by having various ensembles perform at and enhance as many events as possible, such as, our Open House, National Honor Society Installation Ceremony, President's Dinner for donors, and Party for our Friends with Special Needs. This creates great relationships throughout the school.
- Include classes such as Theory, History, and Technology to broaden the student's musical knowledge.
- Build a great library of performance music, texts, and audio/visual resources. We've had guests from colleges who tell us our library is more impressive than theirs.
- Provide one or two very special events every year, such as a tour, a recording session, or a "prime time" performance. For example, we've played for two Popes.
- Bring in friends from the professional ranks to work with your students. We'll never be the "end-all be-all," and it's great for musicians on that level to model for the students.
- Encourage parent involvement. Our parents help at concerts by overseeing the front of house, help fundraise, and are our best advocates. This was accomplished by engaging two parent leaders who could recruit other parents, and brainstorm possible activities and benefits.
- Evaluate what and how you're teaching every day. At Prep, we've had profoundly changing demographics in the last few years. This is done best by simply listening to your students. In our case, what schools did they

come from (public or Catholic)? What neighborhoods do they come from? Every student has a story. Get to know theirs! Then, teach the students from where they are, not where you want the end standard to be. Go from the known to the unknown within the Mission of your school.

Program of distinction benefits

- Prior to earning the Music Program of Distinction, we often felt more inferior externally, compared to other high school programs. Earning this distinction eliminated that feeling, and gave us a much better perspective of who we are and what we have accomplished.
- Administrators and faculty came to respect the music department more. Previously, we felt that some perceived us as "fluff."
- The Program of Distinction award has helped us with retention and recruitment, leading to exceptional numbers, quality, and enthusiasm.



for more information

To learn more about the Music Program of Distinction at St. Francis Preparatory School contact:

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



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