**School Wide Band-A-Thon: Actionable Project That Addresses Inclusion**

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**Introduction: State of Affairs, Problem, & Purpose**

Recently, Minister Lecce brought forward a plan that he hopes will address one of the salient issues regarding underrepresentation in our school system. This plan is to end streaming in grade 9 by 2021. This would allow, as the minister predicts, students to ‘try out’ their first year of high school and see which stream they believe best suits them. While this is definitely an important issue to raise, one result we have not explicitly addressed in this conversation is how culture is portrayed or dismissed in this divide. The conversation has been about race, but the implication here is a cultural divide between the post-colonial system of institutionalized education and how this system has devalued other cultures, their practices, and ways of thinking.

One area of education where this is extremely prevalent is in our music classes. The music class, as it currently stands, primarily focuses on the practices of Westernized arts and music. I say primarily because if the teacher wants to incorporate cultural musics into their program, they most definitely can. However, the way music programs display their students’ accomplishments at points throughout the year boils down to two methods: competitions and concerts. First, the competition circuit which thrives on prescribed pieces, many of which are considered ‘standards’. Any pieces that portray songs from another culture that are approved by this concert circuit have to fit within the Westernized parameters of what the adjudicators think is valuable for the ensemble. Concerts, on the other hand, allow for some more variety in choice of repertoire for ensembles. This is an opportunity for the music teacher to actively program pieces from different cultures for students to perform. Both of these methods ignore one issue. The students who are represented in the music program.

Historically, Westernized music has been primarily an ableist, white, middle class practice, which we see reflected in the makeup of our music classes. Even when it is practiced outside of a middle/upper class environment, it is seen as a higher music; look at the history of El Sistema being the savior of Venezuela for example. We see a consistent stereotype with classically trained musicians at the top, and other cultural representations below. This is just another way schools and society find ways to differentiate between race and culture. We take pride when popular musicians have classical training, but we fail to ask ourselves if they embraced their classical training in their popular style, or simply ran from it. As Wright (2018) notes, existing models of music education “cause harm to young people who are innately musical and who are excluded from a music education that is culturally and personally relevant and speaks to their individual musicality.” If we accept that the current system of classical music is primarily white, ableist, and elitist, and we also accept that that is reflected in our music classrooms, then we understand that our system we have currently represents music programs as ableist, white, and elitist. When we have concerts, we are celebrating these practices, no matter how unintentional they are.

Similarly to cultural music and representations of those students in our music programs, students with physical or mental disabilities’ options for musical engagement are the exception, rather than the norm. There need to be several items in place before students with high needs are able to engage with music. These needs include, but are not limited to space, instruments, and a teacher willing to teach them during a prep/their own time, because they would not have a regularly credited music course scheduled. If we are arguing that music is a fundamental aspect of humanity, expression, community, mental wellness, and culture, why are we then excluding students who, arguably, could use more of that type of integration based on their exceptionalities and how they are treated in society?

The way I see us moving forward as a school is by initiating a concert through a community music model. I want to address the problem of cultural, physical, gendered, LGBTQ+, and religious representation in our school. The purpose of this plan is to celebrate and inspire students to share their music, their abilities, and their cultures as a way to bring community, inclusion, and acceptance to this school in an action-oriented, big picture way. The HWDSB consistently states that inclusion and acceptance of all students is one of their pillars, but we need to continue to see action behind these words.

**The Plan:**

The plan is that the music department, using their music counsel for planning and promotion, will put on a wholly inclusive concert or Band-A-Thon (name subject to change). By implementing this plan, students represent themselves, their experiences, their abilities, and their beliefs through their own culturally and/or personally relevant (school appropriate) music.

**Step 1: Preparation**

The music counsel, along with the music head, will decide on a preferable date for this concert. Some elements that will need to be confirmed for this date are:

* Are there any school functions that evening that will interfere
* Are there any religious holidays and/or celebratory practices that fall in the span of the day chosen
* Is the theatre available for the evening
* What is the preferred time for this concert

After the above has been determined, the counsel with their teacher advisor will put together a basic script for the concert. The gist of the script is as follows:

* We are hosting a concert where the intent is to show off the music, culture, and abilities of the students who attend this school
* The concert is a way for students to share things in a musical/performance way that shows off who they are/what they are proud of about themselves
* Pick a song(s), dance, or other expressive medium for your group (or a small selection of that group) to perform in this concert. This piece should tell us about yourselves, be meaningful to you, or speaks to you.
* The concert meeting schedule (more to follow on this) and the date of the concert
* How the funds will be raised and distributed (more to follow on this)

The music counsel will then take their notes and, within a week, attend the group meeting of every group in the school. \*The music counsel will find the dates/times of the meetings and decide which two representatives from the counsel to take. They will take time during these meetings to explain the plan for the concert and encourage each of the groups to have a performance to show community and identity as a school in celebration. These groups may include, but are not limited to:

* The special education classes
* Positive Space/GSA
* Students of Colour Support Group
* Me to We
* Dance team
* Poetry club
* Student Counsel
* ESL/ELL department

Within the same week, the public relations officer for the music counsel will also ensure this announcement is made to the whole school (several times), is posted on the school’s announcement board outside, and is advertised on the school website.

**\*\*Funding:**

There are two main strategies for raising/collecting the funds:

1. Entry fee. The first, and probably most easily implemented step is to collect an entry fee for the concert. This money will then be allocated to the groups at the end of the concert (most explicit instruction on this below).
2. Fundraiser. This strategy requires a little more preparation.
   1. The fundraising and treasure positions from the music counsel will create a notice, to be approved by the teacher facilitator, regarding the fundraiser and distribute it to the local businesses. For their donations, the business will receive an advertisement in our concert program. There is also an option of creating a raffle with donated prizes from the businesses to raise funds.
   2. The music counsel creates a Band-A-Thon pledge sheet and schoolcashonline account for the members of the concert. By using schoolcashonline, which most schools utilize now, you eliminate the issue of money being lost while changing hands. The students promote the concert and ask for donations for their performances.

The intent of the money raised is that it will go back to the groups who performed that evening. Assuming each group performs one time, we would divide the profits of the evening by the number of groups. However, if students wish to perform more than one number, they will be counted for the additional number as well as a monetary incentive for their group to show more inclusion and community representation. All numbers need to be approved by the concert facilitator/head of music. The money will then be returned to the classroom, club, or community affiliation of which they represent.

\*Note, the allocated funds not go to the students, but rather to the teacher advisor on behalf of the group where they all then can decide how the group wishes to treat the funds.

**Part 2: Pre-Concert**

The social conveyor/student communication, public relations, and media liason positions of the music counsel will come up with a poster (with approval by the teacher advisor) to post around the school about the concert. At this time, the public relations officer has been making announcements over the loud speaker at school announcing the concert and the first concert meeting.

At the concert meeting, all interested parties (or someone who represents the party in the case of students who bus and cannot stay afterschool if that’s the time of the meeting) must attend to learn about the concert, what is expected of them in regards to commitment and preparation, hear how the funding is allocated, and figure out any additional logistics or items needed. The groups must attend the two concert meetings (for preparation) and the two dress rehearsals. Exceptions to attendance will be made on a case by case basis. The concert advisor/head of music will be in charge of booking the auditorium for the concert and the dress rehearsal times.

The teacher advisor/head of music will contact the other teacher advisors for the groups in the concert to check and see if there are any mobility or technological needs for the students to perform. They will also ask the other teacher advisors about the students’ media release forms. If a student is performing who does not have a media release, check to see if it just has not been signed or if it is marked as ‘no release’. If it has not been signed, ask the advisor to approach the student to complete the form before the concert. If it is ‘no release’, ensure that no photos are taken for the performances (explanation for this below).

**\*\*Running the Tech**

The concert advisor/head of music will be in charge of finding tech volunteers to run the lights and soundboard for the concert and dress rehearsals. Tech volunteers will be students with express permission from the drama teacher/theatre head to run the technology (soundboard, lights, etc.). Volunteer hours will be given to those students for their time.

**\*\*Concert Allocations**

The public relations music council member (or another volunteer) will create the program for the evening outlining the order of the performances. The expectation is that the program will also include some description of how the performance represents the group (community, religion, etc.) or why it is meaningful.

During the dress rehearsals, the concert advisor/head of music will be in charge of directing movements on and offstage. Two members of the music counsel will volunteer/be elected to be the MCs of the evening and prepare some materials for the evening (to be approved by the teacher advisor). Two members of the music counsel or two individuals from the parent counsel will be selected to run the door and collect the admissions for the evening. Admissions pricing can be determined to what is appropriate for your school.

Teacher advisor/head of music sets up the recording device used at all concerts. The way we have worked this in the past is that we record every single concert/performance and post it on the website so the parents, friends, and family in the audience don’t have to worry about taking pictures, missing a performance, or getting in the way of someone else’s view. If a student has a ‘no release’ the part of the concert that is recorded with that student in it will be edited out of the video and will not be posted on the website.

**Step 3: Post-Concert**

The music counsel secretary along with the teacher advisor/head of music will count and confirm the money from the concert/fundraising. The total will be divided up and distributed (as explained under funding) by the teacher advisor/head of music within the next three school days.

For any additional clarifications, questions, or concerns, I can be reached at my board email at ablackma@hwdsb.on.ca.

**Resources/References**

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