

Booster Mission: Support Access for All

The Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG) was formed, in part, due to equity issues. There were not enough musical instruments to go around. The image of band teacher Mr. Allen holding up a squashed tuba, part of Fall Creek's music "supply", brought the need into clear focus. Back in 2001, parents, community members and the district responded. A booster group was formed. Fundraising events held. Instruments were purchased and rented. A happy ending? Well, it's really just the beginning of the story.

Supporting access to adequate supplies, instruments and experiences for all students is a complex and challenging task. The booster group made increasing equitable access to district curriculum one of its ideals. The Fine Arts Booster Group has held discussions, hosted speakers and gathered information over the years to identify issues, successes and roadblocks to access issues in the arts. Now, ten years later, there has been much progress, more understanding and increased resources.

One district success is often taken for granted: visual art and music instruction are included as part of the school day. Our K-12 students benefit from trained teachers instructing them in art and music. Band and orchestra lessons are offered for free. Vocal music and visual art are taught weekly in grades K-5. Art and music requirements continue in middle school and a fine arts credit is needed to graduate from high school. Every fourth grader experiences drama with the Hangar Theater's Project 4. Students in the secondary schools can participate in a musical and a drama. In addition, various clubs offer everything from urban art to Celtic band. Michael Allen, district music liaison, says "no student is turned away for any reason" and "outreach is done to reach students of all backgrounds". Carol Spence, district visual art liaison, notes "we are constantly looking at ways to make our curriculum relevant and accessible".

However, work on access is a constant goal. Communication, supplies, coordination, transportation and time are ongoing needs. Sometimes, testing pressures push the arts into "second class" status. Creative scheduling is needed to accommodate student interests and make way for new areas. A connecting vision for grades K-12 is essential. Pre-school questions need to be systematically considered. Field trips and enrichment activities should be available to all schools (as is possible through IPEI's Kids Discover the Trail), not just schools with fundraising abilities. The desire to improve access is constant.

The community commitment to a vision of "all the arts for all the kids" is strong. The arts offer all students opportunities, because by their nature, arts are accessible. Students can engage in drama, dance, music, art and literary arts, bringing their own cultural perspectives and traditions to the experience. The arts can also strengthen teaching in other subjects. Research shows the arts are an important part of a balanced education and can help close the achievement gap. The arts can pave the way to reach all students and build our school communities, connecting all. Join the boosters in the next ten years of supporting this vision.

www.fabgithaca.org or email president@fabgithaca.org