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Contact: Kim Brown
Phone: 616.263.2390
Email: kim@kingmedianow.com
Website: KingMediaNow.com

1555 Watertower Place, Suite 200
East Lansing, MI 48823
517.333.2048

kingmedianow.com

Grand Haven Emphasizes Importance of the Arts, Keeps Students Making Music

GRAND HAVEN, MI – Nearly a year has gone by since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly impacted music education. However, Grand Haven Area Public Schools (GHAPS) continues to focus on the importance of the arts by keeping students connected through music.

“As educators, encouraging students through times of adversity will often be when we make the largest impact,” said Andrew Ingall, GHAPS Superintendent. “Being involved in an arts program, such as band, orchestra or vocal music, keeps students engaged and provides social and emotional support by empowering them to find their voice.”

Last spring, GHAPS music education programs introduced learning methods and technology to the curriculum that continue to be successful when a class, school or the district needs to shift to remote learning. And although band, orchestra and vocal programs have continued to face challenges due to coronavirus restrictions, 1:1 technology has helped keep students connected and making music together.

“Most students join a music program for a sense of community and belonging, and we were still able to do that even though we may not be together physically,” said Parks Payton, GHAPS Middle School Vocal Teacher. “In addition to gaining more vocal technique and music literacy skills, students gain self-confidence. We must continue to be flexible and creative to keep music education alive and well, especially for the social emotional wellbeing of our students.”

The vocal program’s weekly projects incorporate FlipGrid technology to share performances. While the band utilizes SmartMusic, a music learning software, both the band and orchestra programs introduced UpBeat, an app where students rehearse and record in real time.

Vocal music implemented a student-choice model allowing 6th through 8th graders to choose to record a performance, create music using digital audio workspaces or analyze musical structures. To date, Payton has received more than 1,000 videos of student performances. Students are then able to record affirmations for fellow middle schooler performances, including for classmates they have never met before.

During remote learning, Grand Haven High School (GHHS) band had weekly sectionals and fostered creative section-based recording using UpBeat. Band members record collaboratively in smaller groups through UpBeat and then teachers use Adobe Premiere to create virtual concerts. In addition to UpBeat, GHAPS’ middle school orchestra program introduced students to Noteflight and MuseScore. This not only allowed students to be able to have concerts, but they sent performances to friends, family and the elderly as part of their Holiday Cheer Project during the holidays. To keep spirits high and have fun in times of remote learning, high school orchestra members participate in “Good Things,” where they share something positive taking place or have a topic of the day to discuss.

“With anything new, there is always some hesitancy as this was a technology journey into the unknown of digital performance,” said Iain Novoselich, GHHS Director of Bands. “However, students and teachers alike have gained a greater appreciation for in-person rehearsals and performances that we may have all taken for granted previously.”

Grand Haven Area Public Schools is a district of distinction for students in preschool through 12th grade. With a goal of providing exceptional educational experiences, GHAPS is committed to success for all students and strives to provide exemplary programs and opportunities to meet the diverse needs of students.

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