

Support for New Arts Supervisors

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Mentors/Support Network

Arts supervisors who are new to positions of kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) Arts supervision require support and mentoring on a consistent basis. New supervisors typically come directly from the classroom and are often teaching and supervising a K-12 program at the same time. The position of a K-12 Arts supervisor requires a different skill set from department supervisors due to the breadth of supervision required to oversee district-wide K-12 music and art programs. It is critical for mentorship and support for supervisors to meet regularly with either a central office administrator or fellow veteran Arts colleagues on a consistent basis.

Organizations such as the [*Connecticut Arts Administrators Association*](#) (CAAA) provide support in terms of professional learning, collaboration and sharing of Arts curriculum, instruction, and assessment. New supervisors will find it difficult to navigate new Arts initiatives such as the recent adoption of the [*Connecticut Arts Standards*](#) without direct access to immediate information and feedback from those who are disseminating similar information in their districts. New Arts supervisors benefit from meeting collaboratively with district mentors individually as well as meeting with state organizations.

Arts supervisor positions are unique in each district and new supervisors must develop skills in real time pertaining to the history of the district, administrative protocol, and expectations respective to their districts. It is important for new Arts supervisors to develop a network of trusted arts professionals from similar districts in order to compare approaches to arts programming and supervision.

Communication

Arts supervisors must communicate with multiple constituents inside and outside of the district. Arts supervisors are expected to respond to and coordinate events with students, parents, faculty and staff members, administrators and community members on a consistent basis. The majority of this communication will occur electronically during peak activity times for the department. It is important that supervisors respond to each constituent (even a brief initial response indicating that a follow up response will occur) in order to keep the lines of communication open and for all constituents to feel heard. Arts educators are typically strong in this area but communication becomes much more challenging when it extends across the district and to the surrounding communities. Face-to-face communication is best in order to address challenging situations or to provide additional support as needed. This can be extremely challenging for new supervisors due to the amount of responsibilities that must be adhered to for the district.

Supervisors should prioritize the most critical communication that needs to occur on a weekly basis but also be flexible in terms of responding to unexpected challenges that will arise. Communication in a crisis is critical, especially to the central office administration and building administration. Be sure to eliminate conjecture and speculation by proactively communicating immediately in any emergency situation.

Organization/Time/Planning

This is one of the most challenging areas for new Arts supervisors and for veteran Arts supervisors. Time, organization, and planning for the department must be continually revisited and prioritized on a daily basis. Due to the unique nature of each department and each district, each supervisor's plan will vary. Strong models for time, organization and planning should align with department responsibilities and a visible presence at district Arts events such as concerts and arts shows. Presence at these events will require time, especially evening time. Supervisors should not be expected to be present at every event but they should make a concerted effort to be present when possible in order to provide support and feedback to teachers.

Concerts and art shows are publically visible reflections of cumulative instruction occurring in the classroom and it is important to teachers that supervisors are present if at all possible to speak to the quality of the event or product. Planning for large scale projects (district-wide festivals, concert calendars, outlines of annual professional learning) should occur far in advance, but realize that building needs or requests and responses to district-wide needs or changes may take priority. This will be challenging in terms of balancing time desired to be spent with staff members and time required to respond to administrative requests.

Annual, monthly, weekly and daily planning must take place and plans must be revisited and revised repeatedly. Meeting weekly with the department administrative assistant is highly recommended in order to align department priorities.

Teacher Evaluation and Supervision

The role of teacher evaluation and supervision for K-12 Arts supervisors varies from district to district. Some Arts supervisors will be responsible for all supervision and evaluation of Arts teachers in their respective departments, some will be required to share those responsibilities with building administrators and others will not be responsible for any evaluation of Arts educators in their departments. Due to the unique structure of each department and the need to be present for evening events this can be challenging. If at all possible, music and visual art teachers should be evaluated by Arts supervisors. Arts supervisors should also be K-12 certified Arts educators who are well versed in quality instruction in Arts classrooms and they are experts in recommending appropriate programs and lesson designs based on state guidelines, recommendations, and the [Connecticut Arts Standards](#).

A solid understanding of the Connecticut Arts Standards and the Four Artistic Processes (Creating, Performing, Responding and Connecting) are crucial for a complete and thorough evaluation of Arts teachers. A district supervisor will look for evidence of the Connecticut Arts Standards and the Artistic Processes taking place in the classroom. Evaluators who do not have a background in these areas should become familiar with the Connecticut Art Standards and the Four Artistic Processes in order to understand key lesson design and lesson components.

For districts where teachers are evaluated according to district standards and where shared evaluation occurs, it is important for music or art supervisors to explain what is essential in any lesson plan as this impacts evaluation of instruction and assessment. A joint observation with a building administrator and the K-12 Arts supervisor is highly recommended at some point in time in order for the building administrator to understand which music or art lesson components should be present according to curriculum requirements in addition to the required district standards of evaluation.

Professional Learning Planning

The annual K-12 professional learning should be planned six months to one year in advance. An outline of the available professional learning dates should be obtained from the district Board of Education office or Central Office administration in order to plan effectively. Teacher groups should be divided by department, by professional learning communities, by performance or discipline strands or by vertical articulation amongst elementary middle and high school teachers. The annual professional learning plan should include session dates and topics which should be presented to Arts teachers on the opening day of professional learning sessions at the beginning of the school year.

Arts teachers are appreciative of time to collaborate with their colleagues. A consistent process and time for collaboration that is focused and guided by the goal of the department curriculum and instruction plan will strengthen Arts teams in terms of developing quality curriculum documents and assessments. Common assessments and successful instructional strategies can also be shared during professional learning sessions along with team reviews of gaps and trends in student achievement.

Professional learning sessions should also be aligned with any school or district goals and required initiatives. Prior to creating the professional learning calendar for the year, be sure to check with central office administration regarding any guidelines or district protocol regarding submission of a professional learning plan. Department goals should align with district and building goals.

What is the ultimate outcome desired from annual professional learning? What are the desired and products for the session? Be sure to include these in the development of session agendas and start with the end in mind. Professional learning can also be combined collaboratively with similar departments in other districts if time and scheduling allow for the opportunity. Mini-conference days

allow opportunities to pool funding and to maximize the opportunity to bring in high quality presenters as needed.

Budgeting and Resources

It is important to immediately assess available resources for your department in terms of time, programming, staffing, finances, equipment, and professional learning. It is critical to analyze available resources prior to implementing new initiatives. It can be challenging to plan effectively without the necessary resources. Arts administrators and Arts educators are masterful at finding alternative strategic solutions to problems. It is advisable to cull the strength of staff collaborative efforts in finding solutions for challenges. Shared leadership models are extremely effective and they promote professional growth in teacher leaders.

Budgeting for resources during the annual budgeting season should definitely involve input from Arts teachers. Prioritize budget requests in the event that budget cuts are required later in the budgeting process (in some districts this occurs during summer months when teachers are away). Prioritizing requests will ensure that a clear plan has been articulated for any budget cuts. For example: If multiple instruments are being requested in the annual budget, ask teachers to prioritize their requests in the event that the program is required to cut equipment from the budget during summer months.

Advocacy

Advocacy for Arts programs is at the heart of what Arts supervisors must do on a consistent basis. Advocacy can be a formal or an informal experience. It is best to carefully consider the intended audience when planning formal presentations to the Board of Education or community members. A detailed Power Point, outline or overview of the presentation is advised.

Informal advocacy can take on a variety of forms and can be most effective when making active connections to the community. Invitations for senior citizens to attend concerts, performances, or art shows are prime opportunities for advocacy. The local media is also a viable source of advocating for Arts programs by highlighting all department awards and honors. Press releases and announcements in local newspapers and television are an informal means of advocacy for the department and the school district. Periodic newsletters and websites are means of communicating department recognitions, accomplishments, and achievements both internally and externally to staff members, parents, and the school district.

The opening of concert performances or art events is also a prime opportunity to address and inform parents about the benefits of a comprehensive Arts education. The Arts supervisor is the voice of advocacy for the district.

Programs and Scheduling

Programs and scheduling are often challenging for Arts administrators. It is imperative to work with the department and the administration in terms of working towards viable solutions to solving scheduling problems and in order to build strong programs. It will ensure that as an Arts administrator, any decisions concerning programming and staffing are made on an informed basis. The National Association for Music Administration ([NAfME](#)), and other arts organizations, assist Arts administrators in terms of programs and scheduling.

Arts staff members must be willing to be flexible and be willing to modify as appropriate. However, it is the Arts administrator's responsibility to relay information to the administration when inappropriate decisions are being made. Staffing and schedules significantly impact the quality of the program both short term and long term. The quality of the programming also impacts student achievement. Standard K-12 music and art programs should be standards based programs with sufficient equipment, supplies, and resources.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are at the core of the responsibility of the Arts supervisor. It is the most important factor in the delivery of quality Arts programs and in aligning K-12 vertical strands in music and art. However, due to the nature of Arts programs and the district-wide responsibilities of supervisors it can be the most challenging to uphold and monitor effectively and consistently.

Managerial responsibilities are not an option for Arts supervisors and they must be constantly revisited and re-prioritized. Due to the administrative aspect of the position, there are multiple unplanned events or circumstances that must be monitored and addressed immediately. Nevertheless, there are ways to continue to maintain and revise curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Consistent professional learning sessions and professional learning communities provide opportunities to delve deeply into curriculum reviewing gaps, trends, and patterns in identified areas of student achievement. These can then be used to align each strand of the vertical articulation and delivery of instruction.

Common assessments should be present for district or department benchmarks. Some excellent models for these in music can be found at: <https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/mcas-information-on-taking-part-in-the-field-testing/>. These benchmarks should be determined collaboratively by the administrator and the teachers. Assessments should also be developed collaboratively by teachers who teach in those content areas and grade levels. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to guide this process and to facilitate any professional learning with this process but also building the professional capacity of the teaching team at the same time.

Protocol

It is important to adhere to protocol in school districts. In transferring into any new district be sure to research the standard protocol in terms of communication to school administration, the community, and central office. In the first year of taking on a new position it is advisable to first find out what the standard protocol is for most procedures and in communication. This varies widely from district to district but it is extremely important in order to successfully complete projects and in order to build positive relationships with co-workers. It is normal to make mistakes or errors but make protocol a consistent focus in the early stages of taking on a new position.

The music or art secretary can often be a valuable resource of community history and department protocol for interacting with others. Teachers and other professionals within the system may be aware of the protocol but you will have to become familiar with the protocol in order to successfully develop strong professional relationships. Protocol is an important building block in establishing positive district and community relationships.

Building Relationships

All new supervisors must focus and take time to build relationships with staff members, parents, and community members. This takes time. Professional relationships with previous supervisors and staff members will be different from relationships developed with you as a new supervisor. Relationships with colleagues and friends can change based on the structure of the new relationship and your new role as you transition from teacher to supervisor within your own district. All new relationships must be developed if you transition into a district as a new leader. Relationships with staff members should be collegial, friendly, and professional. It is important to develop and nurture those relationships based on trust and authentically caring about staff members and co-workers.

Always attempt to do the right thing and to treat others as respectfully as possible. If there is an authentic attempt to respect and support staff members it will strengthen relationships within the department. Also take time to develop positive relationships with parents. Commit to building strong positive relationships with parents and community members. Due to the nature of public presentation of music and visual art programs, Arts department are highly visible and the concerts and arts shows allow contact with community members who otherwise might not enter the school doors. Those relationships are very important.

Religious Choral Text and Concert Repertoire

It is common to receive inquiry about religious musical texts or repertoire selections during the holiday season. It is important to understand that according to Connecticut School Law, it is permissible to perform repertoire with some religious text or subject matter, but the selection of the repertoire should be based solely on the appropriateness of the repertoire for the grade level and musical abilities of the students. It should also be aligned with the district music curriculum. NAFME also has a [comprehensive explanation of using sacred or religious music](#) in public schools.

A safe approach to programming music with any religious texts or themes is to design a musically diverse concert program with a variety of historical and cultural backgrounds. During the winter season if concert planning involves performance of standard holiday concert selections, be sure to select music from a variety of cultures. It is often the interpretation of the choral text within the context of the entire program that can determine whether a repertoire selection is appropriate or if a concert program is balanced. When in doubt, refer to [The Practical Guide to Connecticut School Law](#) by Thomas Mooney. It is advisable to keep a copy of the law in the music department office. It is also best to keep building principals informed after receiving any inquiries about religious music on concerts.

It is the music supervisor's responsibility to review and explain the interpretation of the law as necessary. In any serious legal challenge, the situation should be referred to central office and handled at the district level by district attorneys.

Administrative Assistants

Administrative assistants for art and music departments are vital to your success as a supervisor. Administrative assistants who are veterans in their positions hold the history and past protocol of practice within the department. They are also masterful in terms of organizing and ordering vital equipment for the department. They often manage the inventory or handle large scale orders for the department and are often the first point of contact for the department.

An arts department cannot run effectively without a strong administrative assistant. It is critical that the administrative assistant for you or for the department is reliable, can keep a confidence, and can be counted on to respond in the best interest of the department in your absence. They answer and respond to multiple constituents in addition to you as the supervisor. Teachers reach out to them and parents and community members interact with them. It is best to select someone who can remain calm in crisis and who will assist in deflecting conflict rather than creating it. It is difficult to find the right assistant but it is vital to do so. Conduct thorough interviews and continue to search until the right assistant is found.

Collaboration and Professional Learning for Staff

Collaboration with other Arts professionals is important for you and for your staff members. Consistent collaboration in professional learning communities (PLCs) is critical for consistent deep analysis of teaching and learning in the department. Because Arts teachers are often the only area specialist in their school they may become isolated and disconnected for long periods of time. Advocate for time for them to collaborate in professional learning communities. Professional learning communities can occur in vertical strands (ex: All band teachers K-12), or by grade levels (ex: All elementary art teachers), or by school departments (ex. all middle school music teachers). A variety of groupings are available depending on the time allotted and the schedule provided.

Any amount of time can be used for teacher collaboration. The consistency is the most important factor. Work with teachers to agree on mutually agreeable times when PLCs can meet in order to collaborate. As a supervisor, it is important to participate and attend professional learning sessions and to collaborate with other supervisors about best practice. In addition to the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations ([CAAA](#)), supervisors should attend conference professional learning sessions such as the [Connecticut Music Educator's Conference](#) or the [National Association for Music Education Conference](#). In addition to strong professional learning, these conferences also provide valuable opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and feedback.

State and National organizations provide a network of like professionals with similar goals and challenges. Due to the nature of the position it is also advisable for music and art supervisors in the same district to partner as strong allies. **Arts organizations are stronger together and they should be complimentary and supportive of the work of both departments.** We are a strong force of educators and our strength is multiplied when music and art support each other.

Community Connections

Community connections must be strong. Music and art programs bring life to any community and they are often a source of pride for the district. Reach out to the community. Offer teachers support in transporting students to perform or present in a variety of community venues. Communities will also reach out to you as the supervisor. It is impossible to accommodate every request, but it is important to accommodate as much as it is possible and it is a strong and positive experience for students. Connect with senior citizens in the community as the supervisor. Offer to share information about the school music and art programs and offer them free admission to ticketed events. This is perceived as a gesture of good will by the community.

Closing Thoughts

Remember above all else that you represent the district everywhere you go. Always put forth your best effort, attempt to get along positively with others, and remember that everything you do impacts the department positively or negatively. Always take the high road and present your department with professionalism and dignity. Apologize when necessary and continue to advance with the mission and vision of your program. You have been selected because you have a great deal to offer.