

## Music in the Middle

by Holly Fox

In 2007 Christopher Johnson, a professor of music education and music therapy at the University of Kansas, published a study that compared performance outcomes of students on standardized tests. His findings discovered that students who had access to high quality music education curriculums scored approximately 22 percent higher in English and 20 percent higher in Math in contrast to students who had lower quality music programs. These findings were consistent in spite of any socioeconomic differences between the schools and school districts.

At GASD, music education is both valued and recognized as an integral part of student learning from elementary through high school. Recently, I took some time to chat with some of our staff to see what types of opportunities were available for our “middle” children (our 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students). Experiences abound at Gettysburg Area Middle School (GAMS) for the aspiring Mozart aficionado and the contemporary music enthusiast alike.

Mrs. Stacey Burwick, our general music teacher, builds on the basic music education our students received in elementary school. Her 6<sup>th</sup> graders study rhythm and learn to read musical notes on paper. They even have an opportunity to write and record their own musical compositions. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students acquire some basic skills of playing an instrument by learning to play acoustical and classical guitars. Additionally, they do a project on a famous player. Next school year she plans to teach 8<sup>th</sup> graders about American music history. Students will learn about the origins and artists of folk, country, jazz, rock, disco and pop music genres.

Middle school students who want additional opportunities to expand their musical performance horizons have numerous opportunities if they elect to participate in 7/8 grade band, chorus, or orchestra.

Band director Mr. David Conklin, challenges our students so they may increase their abilities and prepares them for high school level band experiences. They have performance opportunities with marching band, concert band, Jazz Band, and even occasionally play in smaller ensemble groups.

Mrs. Jaimie Bowman, chorus director, prepares students for upcoming vocal performances and helps vocalists learn how to read music and sight sing. The weekend of April 11<sup>th</sup> our 7/8 grade chorus will have an experience that will be more exciting than a yellow brick road as they travel to Baltimore to attend a performance of WICKED.

Director Mrs. Krista Kriel conducts our 7/8 grade orchestra that currently has over 90 students. Additionally, the top 9 string players participate in a small ensemble playing music spanning pop to classical forms. These students will have an upcoming opportunity to perform at 6<sup>th</sup> grade camp. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the 7/8 grade orchestra hosted a middle school adjudication. Two professional musicians observed seven middle school orchestras while they played and then provided feedback and grades for their performances. GAMS orchestra scores averaged 97%.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the 7/8 grade band and orchestra will be participating in a competition hosted by MUSIC IN THE PARKS. Both groups will perform in Harrisburg that morning and then will be able to explore Hershey Park before attending the awards ceremony that evening.

For more information on upcoming musical performances of our district performances please check out our district website: [www.gettysburg.k12.pa.us](http://www.gettysburg.k12.pa.us) , and hear for yourself why GASD continues to be “A great place to learn.”