

Cobb district ranked among top 100 nationally for music education

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By Jon Gillooly

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MARIETTA - A nationwide survey by leading music and education groups names the Cobb School District among the "Best 100 Communities for Music Education in America" for its commitment to school-based music programs.

The NAMM Foundation and its American Music Conference division that promotes music education sponsored the survey.

"There is no better place for music education than the Cobb County School District, and it's with the unconditional support of the parents and communities and vision of the school system that made the award possible," said Gary Markham, supervisor of Instrumental Music for Cobb Schools.



Cobb has 232 music teachers. Of those, 63 are in high school, with 31 band directors, 16 orchestra directors and 16 chorus teachers; 99 are in middle school, with 50 band directors, 25 orchestra directors and 24 chorus teachers; and 70 are in elementary school teaching general music and chorus.

Cobb boasts 177 middle bands, 162 orchestras and 145 choruses at middle and high school that offer beginning, intermediate and advanced levels. Other courses include Music Theory, AP Music Theory, General Music, Jazz Band, Chamber Ensembles, Guitar and Music Appreciation.

There are about 25,000 students in Band, Orchestra and Chorus in middle and high school, which is a little more than 40 percent of the student population in secondary school. That breaks down into 11,500 in band, 6,400 in orchestra and 7,100 in chorus, Markham said.

All elementary school students have music and most elementary schools offer chorus.

Of the districts' \$950,000 operating budget for music, about a third goes to instruments, a third to music literature and instructional supplies and a third to repair.

"The significance of this award really centers on the quality, dedication and creativity in our music teachers," Markham said, noting how he tries to recruit the best teachers from across the nation.

"There is a great willingness to be creative in their program approach and go beyond the 'status quo' to improve their personal professionalism and the quality of their teaching," he said.

Cobb's music teachers, Markham believes, have discovered that system-wide support for each other has elevated all of the district's music programs beyond what any one of them could do in isolation.

In turn, the community has seen the value of great music education through the efforts of the

young Cobb County school musicians.

"Certainly many individual programs have received state, national, and international recognition as a direct result of this dedication," Markham said.

Thousands of teachers, school and district administrators, school board members, parents and community leaders, representing communities in all 50 states, participated in the Web-based survey.

The 2007 roster includes school districts from 31 states. Because the criteria in the survey are measured proportionally, large communities and small ones were able to participate on an equal footing.

"The results of this year's survey found that music programs receive support from many parts of a community - teachers, administrators, boards of education and community members, including local business owners. Parents, however, are the strongest force in assuring that young people have access to music as part of a complete education," said Mary Luehrsen, director of Public Affairs and Government Relations for NAMM.

In leading the annual survey, AMC is joined in a partnership with such groups as The Metropolitan Opera Guild; Music Teachers National Association; National School Boards Association; and VH1 Save The Music Foundation.

David Starnes, Kennesaw Mountain High School's band director, said the school district has a reputation for being synonymous with fine music education programs at all levels.

"Our bands and orchestras are known nationally and internationally and for good reason," Starnes said. "The musical math is quite simple: Great students plus supportive parents plus great teachers equals a symphony of success."

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