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## MENC Mariachi: April 2007 newsletter

### Mariachi Education as a District Initiative: Development of the Clark County School District Program

*Javier Trujillo has been a member of the world-renowned Mariachi Cobre, playing the guitarra de golpe and other instruments. He now oversees the mariachi programs in Clark County, Las Vegas. Clark County has one of America's largest music education programs, and its mariachi program is a model for others around the country.*

*Marcia Neel is a veteran of 36 years in public-school music education, and has directed successful secondary choral programs in Connecticut, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Nevada. She is currently supervisor of the secondary music education program of the Clark County School District.*

As the Clark County School District (CCSD) of Las Vegas, Nevada, approached the millennium, its student population continued to rise at a staggering rate from 121,918 in 1990 to 231,125 in 2000—nearly 110,000 students in ten years (these and all figures are from the CCSD Student Data Services). The music program had continued to grow side by side with the increase in student population, so to broaden the course offerings, the CCSD implemented a guitar curriculum in the late 1990s. By the year 2000, the district had become the 6th largest in the country. The increase in the Latino population exceeded all others proportionately, and because the CCSD Music Program is always looking to serve its students, the mariachi program was the natural next step in the evolution of a comprehensive curriculum. The CCSD subsequently established the Secondary Mariachi Education program in the summer of 2002 with the aim of providing:

- Increased student enrollment in music education courses
- Opportunities to represent the CCSD and the Las Vegas community as music ambassadors through high-level performances
- Increased academic achievement by requiring a passing GPA to participate

- Increased student attendance
- Increased parent participation
- Increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- Positive social citizenry through performances
- A strengthened and globally diversified fine-arts-department focus
- Opportunities for students to serve as positive peer role models.

The program began with five full-time mariachi educators in the 2002–2003 school year. Within five years, that number grew to 15, and the program had an expanded list of goals, objectives, and activities.

Since the philosophy was to provide the CCSD student population with additional opportunities for music-making, the development of a comprehensive mariachi program was an obvious way to serve our community. At that time, the biggest challenge seemed to be how to get started. How could we sell the program, recruit and license the appropriate educators, write standards-based curriculum, organize new kinds of performance experiences, and provide appropriate professional development for this new program?

Below, Javier Trujillo, the Project Facilitator for the CCSD Secondary Mariachi Program, and Marcia Neel, Supervisor of the CCSD Secondary Music Education Program, have explained how the Clark County School District attended to each of these challenges.

## **I. Selling the Program**

One would think that selling a mariachi program in a community that reflected an increasingly larger Latino population would be easy; however, it did present a number of challenges. The superintendent, board members, upper-level administrators, and principals were anxious to develop mariachi programs, as were members of the Latino community. The orchestra and band directors, however, were more cautious for all of the obvious reasons: the nontraditional style of music that would be taught, the concern that students would not be approaching music academically through music literacy, and the primary fear that the mariachi program would detract from the programs already in place. It was thus determined that of the 45 middle schools and 34 high schools in the district, the mariachi program would be piloted in only six secondary schools. This decision alleviated much of the concern on the part of the instrumental educators, allowing the program to develop in a methodical manner based on the recommendation of the professional mariachi musicians who would oversee its implementation.

## **II. Recruiting Mariachi Educators**

Once the Clark County School District decided to implement a mariachi program, the next task was to find the educators who could ensure its success. One of the members of the CCSD Board of School Trustees knew of a program at Pueblo High School in Tucson, Arizona, which was one of the better-known, curriculum-based programs. Rather than visiting Pueblo High School, the CCSD invited the Pueblo High School Mariachi Aztlán ensemble to Las Vegas for a week of performing assemblies in the recommended pilot schools to see how the genre would be received. In addition, the school's assistant principal, Richard Carranza—a former mariachi educator himself—came to Las Vegas to present a workshop for CCSD music educators who already had an interest in this genre. The feedback from the assemblies and workshops was extremely positive, leaving the district administration confident that a mariachi program would indeed be successful and supported by students.

As is the case with all fields in music education, finding the best teachers is the surest way to guarantee the success of a program. With that in mind, the CCSD hired Javier Trujillo, who had been serving as the director of Mariachi Aztlán at Pueblo High School in Tucson. Four other mariachi musicians were hired to serve as teachers in the first year. Javier's schedule allowed him to split his time between teaching and serving as a program facilitator. In this way, he could visit with the four other mariachi educators on a regular basis to ensure consistency in delivering the curriculum.

### **III. Licensing Mariachi Educators**

Early in the process of developing the program's philosophy, the district realized that, because mariachi education is not a teacher preparation major offered at the university level, the best mariachi educators would have to come from the performance industry. Since all music educators in Nevada are required to possess a music education license, this presented a real challenge.

In a meeting with the assistant superintendent, the CCSD decided to request that the State Department of Education endorse mariachi within the Business and Industry (B&I) category of Teacher Licensing. The B&I category is used when licensing professionals from the business world to work within the school district. Thus, the prospective mariachi educators were leaving their professional mariachi performance careers to introduce the program into the schools. To qualify for this license, these teachers would need at least three years' successful performance experience in a professional mariachi ensemble.

### **IV. Establishing a Sequential Curriculum Based on the Content Standards**

The Clark County School District (CCSD) implemented the Secondary Mariachi Education Program with the objective of providing students of various ethnicities with an exceptional educational experience that would expand their cultural awareness and promote a lifelong appreciation for music. The program would offer students, many of them from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, a high-quality musical experience of a multigenerational tradition rooted in a sound, sequential, standards-based curriculum. Additionally, students would develop sensitivity, understanding, and respect for peoples from a broad spectrum of ethnic-cultural backgrounds. The following are the goals, objectives, activities, and materials and equipment standards of the CCSD Secondary Mariachi Education Program.

#### **Goals**

- Students will gain an understanding of the historical development of mariachi music.
- Students will explore and experiment with different musical styles and techniques to further their understanding of improvisation and musical interpretation.
- Students will gain confidence in their abilities as individual musicians and as members of a group.
- Students will participate in high-quality musical experiences from an established musical tradition.
- Students will gain an understanding of musical form.
- Students will gain and develop a lifelong appreciation of and interest in music.

- Students will develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, and a sense of personal responsibility as they increase their performance skills.

## Objectives

- To develop an appreciation for musical form and its development
- To understand regional and historical variations of mariachi music
- To develop the ability to successfully demonstrate a variety of mariachi skills and techniques using appropriate instruments
- To incorporate traditional rhythms used in mariachi music into musical performances
- To increase awareness of the literal and emotional content of music

## Activities

The implementation of a comprehensive mariachi education curriculum includes the following steps:

- The development of appropriate course syllabi
- The enhancement of equipment standards (instruments) at each school site
- Professional development for the mariachi faculty

In order to meet these goals and objectives, the CCSD formed the Mariachi Curriculum-Writing Task Force, comprised of a number of mariachi educators. The primary objective of this task force is to design a sequential, standards-based curriculum outlining recommended activities for instructional purposes.

Examples of mariachi curriculum documents currently available are:

- [Beginning Mariachi Guitar/Vihuela](#)
- [Beginning Mariachi Violin](#)
- Mariachi Ensemble I
- Mariachi Ensemble II
- Mariachi Ensemble III
- Beginning Ballet Folklorico
- Latin American Musical Theater

## Materials and Equipment Standards

According to the [“Opportunity-To-Learn Standards for Music Instruction.”](#) published by MENC, the equipment standards in music

“... are intended to specify the physical and educational conditions necessary in the schools to enable every student, with sufficient effort, to meet the content standards in music. [While these equipment standards] focus on the learning environment necessary to teach music, it is important to note that the ultimate objective of all standards, all school curricula, and all school personnel is to help students to gain the broad skills and knowledge that will enable them to function effectively as adults and to contribute to society in today’s world and tomorrow’s.”

The following instruments should be provided in sufficient quantity:

- Violin
- Guitar
- Trumpet
- Guitarrón
- Vihuela

Additional instruments are provided for each additional large ensemble and in situations where students have financial hardship.

At least 15 new titles for each type of ensemble are added each year. Sufficient repertoire should be available to provide a three-year cycle of instructional materials. The library of music for performing groups is sufficient to provide a folder of music for each student per stand. The library contains no materials produced in violation of copyright laws. Every room in which mariachi is taught is equipped with a high-quality sound reproduction system capable of using current recording technology. Each school should contain a library that provides audio and video mariachi materials.

## **V. Organizing a Mariachi Festival**

The CCSD Secondary Mariachi Education Program provides an annual three-day Mariachi Conference and Festival where students from across the district participate in two days of master classes (music-making workshops) taught by renowned, professional clinicians/performers of the mariachi art form. In this setting, students learn and perform a variety of music that demonstrates the highest level of musicianship possible for their specific school size and level of experience. Clinicians who are renowned for their professional musical accomplishments provide students with two days of intensive music workshops and one day of dress rehearsals where they further develop their skills as musicians and performers. The Mariachi Conference and Festival culminates in a professional concert production in which all student participants display their musical talents and newly-acquired musical skills to an audience of proud parents, school district personnel, and at-large community members.

## **VI. Professional Development for Mariachi Educators**

While it can be assumed that students in instrumental music classes are already instructed according to Nevada’s Music Content Standard Two (performing on instruments), and that choral students are taught according to Nevada’s Music Content Standard One (singing), it can be difficult to “teach to the standards”

on a daily basis. The CCSD is dedicated to continually improving the quality of our schools, and the Professional Development Division operates to train our staff through professional development workshops and classes.

The Professional Development Program assists mariachi educators in implementing specific teaching techniques and strategies to make Nevada's Music Content Standards a regular part of their teaching. The following content standards are addressed through the Professional Development Program:

- Singing and playing of a variety of mariachi repertoire (NCS 1 and 2)
- Reading and notating music (NCS 5)
- Listening to, analyzing, and describing music (NCS 6)
- Evaluating music and music performances (NCS 7)
- Understanding music in relation to history and culture (NCS 9)

## **VII. Development of Other Relevant Performance Experiences**

Providing students with performance opportunities plays a key role in their development as musicians. More important, it reinforces the concepts and skills learned in the classroom and increases self-confidence and self-esteem in each individual performer.

The Secondary Mariachi Education Program offers the following:

- Summer Mariachi Institute for Students
- Districtwide Holiday Concert
- Mariachi Festival (adjudicated) in the Spring.

Eventually, students form their own mariachi ensembles and perform in the community at all sorts of parties including *quinceañera*, which is the custom celebration of the young girl (*la Quinceañera*), and a recognition of her journey from childhood to maturity.

Within the next decade, mariachi programs are expected to explode across the country. It is hoped that the positive experiences and results that we have had in the Clark County School District will help music educators and districts alike as they move to implement a comprehensive mariachi curriculum into their schools.

## **MENC Resources**

The next step after establishing a music program is to ensure lasting success through effective evaluation. MENC offers several publications that detail ways to assess academic achievement in your music program.

*\*MENC members receive 25% off.*

### **[Performance Standards for Music](#)**

Sample assessment strategies and benchmarks for assessing every grade level of student learning under the National Standards for Music Education

### **[Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Instruction](#)**

Recommends conditions schools should provide to help students achieve the National Standards for Music Education

### **[Guidelines for Performances of School Music Groups](#)**

Advice on developing music program guidelines for balancing education and social needs

### **[Evaluating Teachers of Music Performance Groups](#)**

Criteria for helping educators assess their own teaching and tools to help administrators conduct meaningful reviews

### **[Handbook for Music Supervision](#)**

Best practices for leaders involved in curriculum and assessment, management, communication, budgets, scheduling, legal issues, and problem solving

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