

Music Curriculum as Advocacy: Developing Curriculum for Music Education Using Atlas Rubicon

By Thomas E. Reynolds, Harvard Public Schools, MMEJ Advocacy Editor

Renowned music educator the late Dr. Edwin Gordon says that one of the most important things that music educators can do to advocate for music education is to provide students with quality music programs and quality teaching. He emphasizes that this is the best defense against those who would seek to diminish the role of music in any school.

The curriculum is the heart of the music program and needs to provide for well-organized, sequential learning in music across all grades facilitated by professionally certified music educators. Until fairly recently, written curriculum documents were only available in cumbersome three-ring binders that would sit on some bookshelf somewhere collecting dust. We all agree that a well-structured, quality curriculum matters, but we also recognize that it must be actively used and updated so that it remains relevant to what it is being taught.

There are now many reputable software programs and online applications that make curriculum become live, vibrant resources for teachers of all disciplines. One such electronic application being used in the public school system in Harvard, Massachusetts is known as **Rubicon Atlas Curriculum Mapping**. It is a curriculum design tool to help organize not only music education courses in the Harvard Public Schools but also virtually all academic courses offered within the school district.

Atlas is an online repository for everything related to the teaching of all classes, pulling together curricular content, standards, and supporting documents such as lesson plans, assignments, reviews, assessments, video and audio media files, Internet links, and electronic files in a wide variety of word processing, spreadsheet, presentation,



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and pdf formats. Atlas also provides for collaboration with other school districts around the world by making available online curriculum materials as exemplars of various disciplines, professional learning communities, links to online public curriculum sites, and service learning. Atlas also has a feature that allows schools to develop all kinds of related data and charts, such as graphic representation of how often certain standards and expectations are taught through the entire curriculum, or various levels of the school system (e.g., elementary, middle, and secondary). In this way, it is both a local curriculum resource and a world curriculum resource.

Atlas really does make the curriculum come alive so that it can be accessed online

whenever it is needed 24/7, storing important class-related documents, multimedia files, and links, assisting with the development of a timeline for what instruction is taking place when, enabling the sharing of information among colleagues for vertical and horizontal alignments, and providing resource materials for teachers of various disciplines to develop possible interdisciplinary studies based upon what is already being taught.

When all of the educators in a school can look to see what is being taught in all of the courses and disciplines within that school system, as well as compare their programs with those of other schools around the world, it creates exciting opportunities for the improvement and strengthening of an overall school curriculum.

In the area of music, the application allows for the vertical alignment of how music is presented in grades K–12 as well as the horizontal alignment of how music is presented in the relation to other disciplines. This instant access to the curriculum allows for the development of another area of music education advocacy by informing all of the teachers in a school system about what is being taught in music and how it relates to the total whole education picture in the school. In this way, the music curriculum acts as music education advocacy on its own.

The Atlas Curriculum Map asks all the same questions that any well-crafted written curriculum has done for years, but the answers to those questions are stored electronically in an online repository. Those questions include the following:

- **Enduring Understandings:** What are the big ideas and understandings students will keep with them for life?

- **Essential Questions:** What do we want students to think about?
- **Standards:** What standards will the students be assessed on?
- **Content:** What do we want our students to know and understand?
- **Skills:** What do we want students to be able to do?
- **Assessments:** How do we know if the students learned these content and skills?
- **Learning Activities:** What instructional strategies and learning activities can help our students acquire the content and skills?
- **Resources:** What resources are available to support instruction?

Certain areas, such as the selection of standards, don't need to be retyped into the application, as they can be selected by check boxes that are tied back to the wide choice of standards for all academic disciplines that have been preloaded onto the application. In the discipline of music, for example, the state standards/music strands for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the national standards of the National Association for Music Education are readily available to the Atlas user.

As each unit is being entered into the curriculum map, information is completed on all of the component elements of that unit, including enduring understandings, essential questions, standards, content, skills, assessments, learning activities, and resources. As the units are created, they are mapped into a timeline for presentation and further developed into a composite curriculum map of all units being taught in a specific course.

The concept of “standards-based education” has become the norm for 2016, and the Rubicon Atlas curriculum mapping software can play a key role in organizing curriculum so that appropriate state and national standards are addressed. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education look to schools throughout the state to design curriculum maps for all of the academic disciplines that are aligned to their corresponding state frameworks in order to help schools:

- gain knowledge of learning and teaching through unpacking the standards
- make student-centered decisions
- create a bridge from the standards to the classroom
- perceive revision as an ongoing process
- align a curriculum horizontally and vertically
- pace units appropriately
- ensure that all students have access to grade level curriculum

How the music curriculum is interwoven with the total curriculum of a school helps to emphasize the importance of music to the total school program of studies. A well-crafted, thoughtful music curriculum comprised of quality content demonstrates that a serious commitment has been made by a school to provide quality instruction in music and that music is being treated as equal to other academic disciplines offered in the school. In this way, we advocate for quality music instruction by showing exactly what, why, how, and when the subject content, skills, and concepts of our discipline are being taught and that we hold our music students to standards just

as high and rigorous as those in any other academic discipline.

By virtue of your attendance at this year's Massachusetts Music Educators Association All-State Conference, you are participating in music education advocacy through collaboration with other professionals in your field. •

Massachusetts Music Educators Journal Advocacy Editor Thomas E. Reynolds is the Director of Unified Arts at The Bromfield School in Harvard, Massachusetts, and is the Co-Conductor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Concert Band in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the John Philip Sousa Foundation and of the Executive Board of the New England Music Festival Association.

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Developing Curriculum for Music Education Using Atlas Rubicon		
LECTURE	FRI	8:00-9:00