

Music is a team sport for Fairview teacher

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Three years ago, Devan Moore set out on a mission. She was newly hired at Fairview Middle School as the director of band and orchestra, two separate programs, but she had a vision that combined them into one unique opportunity. "Band kids are always with band kids and orchestra kids are always with orchestra kids," she said. "I told the principal, we're going to have a full orchestra at some point, I don't know how it's going to happen but we're going to make it work, and here we are."

Thanks to Moore's persistence, the enthusiasm of her students, and an Arts Education grant from the Council on Culture & Arts, her vision has become a reality. The combined program boasts 25 student musicians and full instrumentation, including strings, brass, woodwinds and percussion.

Eighth-grader Matthew Felix is especially excited about the new program. "I think it's cool because usually we're separated and I've always wondered how it would sound if they were put together." Matthew's role in the ensemble is as a timpanist or percussionist, and he outlined some of the challenges the group works to overcome. "For band, the keys are lot different," he said. "Our keys would typically show flats whereas orchestra would typically show sharps in the key signature."

Lindsay Liu is an eighth-grader and has been playing the violin for the past five years. As first chair, or concertmaster, of Fairview's full orchestra, she is responsible for leading her peers. She recognizes that the program offers an opportunity for students to explore, even without a substantial level of mastery. "For kids, there's only the Tallahassee Youth Orchestras and that's for the really good people so it's cool because none of us are way up there but we can still experience the full orchestra with the band."

Since his sixth-grade year, Chris Williams has been hoping for a full orchestra at Fairview. Now an eighth-grader, he's delighted that the program came to fruition while he could take advantage of it. He has studied the viola for the past six years and he hopes to continue in college and beyond. "I prefer the arts over sports," Chris said, "and I thought I should get into music because I can always play it even when I get older. You can't really do that with sports."

Moore shares a similar mindset. A basketball player in her youth, she made an apt analogy. "On a basketball team, you've got 15 people but you can only play five at a time and more times than not, the coach is only going to play about eight of you. Where does that leave the other seven? Warming the



Devan Moore leads students in the Fairview Middle School full orchestra program.

PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON



Fairview orchestra students concentrate on the music.

bench. Every single time you come to my classroom, I'm going to ask you to play, and your classmates are going to ask you to play. This is the only place where you're guaranteed to start every single time and your involvement on our team matters to every single person."

In many ways, teaching music has been a team sport for Moore. In order to instruct both band and orchestra students, Moore has to be extremely flexible and knowledgeable about numerous instruments. She joked that the instrument she's made a study of hasn't been terribly helpful. "Ironically, I play saxophone, which has no place whatsoever in an orchestra." Because of this, she often seeks out guidance from other musicians and music educators. She also looks to her father for inspiration.

"My dad actually taught at Fairview. He was the band director here." When considering a college major, Moore admitted that music education was not on her list. "I tried to fight it with every bone in my body. I graduated from high school and I said 'I will not go through the same things my dad went through.'"

She elaborated, "being in education, you have to deal with so much. You deal with everything the kids come in with and you can't help but take that home with you. Then being in a music classroom, they open up to you a whole lot more because it's an intimate art, it has to be. The conductor and the musicians have to be in accord and in order to do that, I have to give them a little bit of myself and they have to give me a little bit. We bond and when they have a bad

day, it genuinely bothers me."

Of course, Moore did follow in her father's footsteps, earning a bachelor's degree from FAMU and a master's degree from FSU, both in music education. They share another striking similarity. While enrolled at FAMU, Moore was a member of the Marching 100. Her father had done the same, exactly 30 years earlier.

Reflecting on what music education has meant to her, Moore surmised "if I hadn't picked up an instrument in sixth grade, I wouldn't have gone to Obama's inauguration as a member of the Marching 100. Music affords everyone the opportunity to be great at something because everybody can be a musician if they work at it. It opens students' minds up to a whole new world of what they can do and it provides a lot of opportunity. If you're willing to work at it, these instruments can take you places."

Fairview's new full orchestra will be performing along with the beginning band on March 7 Tuesday at 6 p.m. in the school's cafeteria (3415 Zillah St). The concert is free and open to the general public.

Amanda Kariooth Thompson is the education and exhibitions director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).