

**Sara Taetle Schwindt**  
**Philosophy of Education**

I believe that every student can learn regardless of his or her background and experience, and should be afforded opportunities to learn through musical experiences. I further believe that the ideal learning environment is built on mutual respect and equal responsibility between teacher and students. The teacher is responsible to engage the students while doing his or her best to accommodate the individual needs of each student or class; each student must take responsibility for his or her education by taking ownership of the learning process. It is my belief that an environment based in mutually high expectations and responsibility will foster the full potential of the music-learning classroom.

I believe that the fine arts hold a crucial place in the secondary education curriculum. The music class offers many important lessons, including the value of community through collaborative work for a cause larger than themselves. Students in the music classroom also receive many opportunities for creativity and self-expression, which are so important for fostering the mental well-being of youth who are forming their identity and making choices which will shape their lives for years to come. And by giving students the opportunity to participate responsibly in the decision-making process, the teacher can foster capability for independent, critical thought.

I believe that the music curriculum must include a wide variety of music from diverse cultural traditions, time periods and linguistic traditions as well as works by both male and female composers, as shown by my performance vita. By incorporating lessons in music history with skill-building exercises the director infuses relevance and context, making connections between the music classroom and other subjects. For this reason, my secondary choral curriculum includes daily lessons in sight-reading and music theory as well as an ongoing effort to educate students in the historical background and relevance of the music being covered and how it relates to events they have studied in other classes. The preparation of madrigals by composers such as John Dowland, for example, enable discussions of 16<sup>th</sup> century English poetry and its connection to the writings of William Shakespeare, while a setting of the minstrel-style folk songs such as *Ching-A-Ring Chaw* foster discussion of race relations in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. All of these experiences engage students in the music-learning process while adding a new level of relevance to history and English lessons being covered in other school subjects.

I believe that an effective choral-music curriculum will empower students to act as independent, responsible musicians to take ownership over the process of learning and preparing music for performance. Rather than simply learning by rote and being dependent upon the director for diagnosis of and solutions to challenges in the rehearsal process, students who are musically empowered are able to expedite the process of learning music and take a leadership role in preparing music at the highest possible level. Through this approach, students in my classroom learn to take a teaching role, leading sight-reading exercises and participating in the assessment process to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the ensemble's music-reading abilities.

Through a diversified teaching approach that is tailored to the needs of each individual class, and by teaching music from the perspectives of music theory and history as well as performance, I hope to fulfill my highest educational goal: a classroom environment in which students can become independent, well-rounded musicians prepared for lifelong participation in the arts.