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# CTE, OccEd, Cross Credit—Oh, My!

*We believe that a student who dreams of a career in a music-related field should be able to satisfy the OccEd requirement through experiences in the school curriculum related to music.*

by Mark Lane and  
Kevin Paustian

Many of our colleagues who teach high school are interested in their students receiving Career and Technical Education (CTE) credit for their upper-division music performance classes. Think about it; these students have been in music classes since fifth or sixth grade and have focused part of their school plan on one subject that is designed with a well-defined scope and sequence, and definitely has career implications and technical demands.

## **There is not a CTE requirement for graduation.**

There is an Occupational Education (OccEd) requirement that can be met through CTE courses, but it does not appear that this is the only way to fulfill the OccEd graduation requirement. The problem is that many think that CTE is the only way to fulfill the graduation requirement. A few districts seem to have both, but are “fuzzy” on which is required. While music teachers would like our upper division courses to cross-credit for the OccEd requirement, we are very protective of our Fine Arts credit for graduation, not easily allowing our schools to grant Arts credit for aerobics classes, woodworking or floral design. Some music supervisors around the state think this will be better defined *IF* Core24 is passed; others think it may get harder to define. One thing is clear—it is, and will be, up to each school district to decide how it interprets CTE and/or OccEd, so, once again, it will be up to local music teachers to educate and advocate for these changes.

## **What do you need to know and what does the state say?**

Following is the graduation requirement as stated by the Washington State Board of Education:

*(g) One credit in occupational education. “Occupational education” means credits*

*resulting from a series of learning experiences designed to assist the student to acquire and demonstrate competency of skills under student learning goal four and which skills are required for success in current and emerging occupations. At a minimum, these competencies shall align with the definition of an exploratory course as proposed or adopted in the career and technical education program standards of the office of the superintendent of public instruction. The assessment of achieved competence in this subject area is determined at the local district level.*

This next statement is also a direct quote from the Washington State Board of Education website. Remember, school districts must follow the law and the guidelines and policies set by the state board.

## **12. Can an arts course count as an occupational education credit?**

*Yes. As stated by WAC 180-51-061 and the State Board of Education, a course considered equivalent to Occupational Education must, at a minimum, be aligned with competencies specified within the definition of an exploratory course as proposed or adopted in the career and technical education program standards of the superintendent of public instruction.*

## **So, what are career and technical education (CTE) program standards for exploratory classes?**

# CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM STANDARDS

## EXPLORATORY CLASSES

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| <p><b>All students enrolled in Career and Technical Education exploratory courses will:</b></p> <p>1. Demonstrate the application of Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Expectations in the context of preparing for living, learning and working.</p> | <p><b>Characteristics of all Career and Technical Education Exploratory courses include:</b></p> <p>1.1 Application and contextualization of the related Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) including skills needed to meet state assessments.</p>  |
| <p>2. Demonstrate foundational and occupational specific skills required to meet current industry defined standards.</p>   | <p>2.1 Current industry defined standards, as evidenced in the curriculum frameworks, endorsed by local program specific advisory committees, and approved by the CTE program supervisors at OSPI.</p> <p>2.2 Curriculum related to balancing family, career, and community roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>2.3 Extended learning into the community. Extended learning is managed and supervised by certified CTE teachers.</p> <p>2.4 Certified CTE teachers with appropriate certification, knowledge, skills and occupational experience.</p> <p>2.4a After initial certification and five years of teaching, certified CTE teachers should gain additional experience in one or more of the jobs or careers in their teaching area. This experience should take place every five years.</p> <p>2.5 Safe and appropriate environments that support CTE program standards.</p> <p>2.5a Laboratories and equipment are appropriate to and support the OSPI approved curriculum framework and industry training procedures.</p> <p>2.5b Facilities and equipment meet or exceed the related federal, state and county safety standards.</p> <p>2.5c Learning and training stations are of sufficient quality to assure safe and appropriate supervision, delivery of instruction and student skill development.</p> <p>2.6 Curriculum is based on identified needs and is developed and maintained in consultation with program specific advisory committees.</p> |
| <p>3. Demonstrate knowledge of career options within the related pathway.</p>  | <p>3.1 Curriculum related to foundational knowledge and skills of a broad range of career options in a related pathway.</p> <p>3.1a These learning experiences include exploration of traditional and nontraditional careers in the pathway ranging from entry to professional level positions.</p>   |
| <p>4. Demonstrate leadership skills and employability skills.</p>  | <p>4.1 Leadership skill development for all students as a required and integral component.</p> <p>4.1a These leadership skills are identified in the Washington State CTE Core Leadership Skills document.</p> <p>4.1b These leadership skills are integrated in the approved curriculum framework and applied in real-world family, community, and business and industry applications.</p> <p>4.1c These skills are practiced at the highest professional level through aligned Washington State recognized Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) programs and activities.</p> <p>4.2 State defined core employability skills as identified in the Washington State CTE Core Employability Skills document.</p>  |

### What do you wish to achieve with this information?

This is the information you need to make your case, but the real question might be, what is it you wish to achieve with this information? We don't think we should seek to have every student who takes a music class receive OccEd credit. Most of our students will not go into a music related career, and we probably

all agree that career exploration is an important part of a student's education. We should attempt to do what is in the best interest of the individual student. We want students to be able to stay in our music classes all through high school because we believe a music education is good for all students, and music education supports all learning. We also believe that a student who dreams of a career in a

music-related field should be able to satisfy the OccEd requirement through experiences in the school curriculum related to music.

What we know is that career exploration comes through many experiences at home, in the community and through school. We also know that many students already have career ideas for their future and will go to college to pursue these ideas. Most important, we believe that students who wish to explore and pursue careers in the humanities should have the right to do that. It is the equitable thing to do.

Unfortunately, most CTE courses do not address humanities-related career paths. Yes, there are many CTE courses that can be beneficial for a student wishing to pursue a career in the humanities. A computer course is a good example, but if a student takes the computer-CTE class just to satisfy the OccEd requirement, is the student really fulfilling the *spirit* of the requirement? No. The student's wish and right is to study and explore a career in the humanities—**music**. Could a computer or technology class be beneficial for the student? Absolutely. But what about students who want to take multiple arts classes, pursue and study a career in music, take a rigorous college-prep curriculum and, as a result, cannot fit that computer-CTE class into their schedules without dropping one of their music classes? And what about the college-bound students who aren't going to major in music, have some general career goals, are taking very rigorous college-prep courses—and the students and their parents believe that music education is an important part of the students' education and college preparation? These are the students we are talking about.

### What can you do?

1. Make sure your music class meets the requirements for an exploratory class. You might consider the following music class extensions:
  - Add directed projects that students can complete outside of class that explores many different career pathways related to music.
  - Document leadership opportunities for students in the music classroom.
  - Document, in a short and concise manner, how your course meets the other required areas. Be complete and don't leave any requirements unaddressed.
  - If you feel some items are difficult for you to address in the regular class setting, don't be afraid to create extra classroom extensions that can be completed by the student.

### Then...make your case

2. Know the law and print off copies from the original source. When you need to make a case on behalf of a student, use the information wisely, logically and calmly, and keep the student at the center of the conversation.
3. If you meet resistance, ask for a detailed explanation because you will need to be able to clearly state the reasons to the student and his/her parents. You might suggest that the principal explain his/her reasons to the parents. Make sure you have educated the parents. Knowledge is power, and with knowledge, parents have **all** the power.
4. If the principal still will not sign the equivalency/waiver document, the district office is the next step for the parents. It is now out of your hands and in the hands of the parents.
5. Make sure your music support coalition (a group you should all activate in your district and communities) understands all

of this information, as well as their rights and their students' rights. This is the group that can support those parents and students seeking the exception.

6. The last resort—Online High School! Check out the Digital Learning Department on the OSPI website. There are 20 CTE online courses, which provide many options to explore. Check with your district and OSPI. In some cases, districts might not be helpful because some options don't provide a financial incentive for the districts. Be thorough with your research.

Many districts, such as Mercer Island, offer online options for their students. Check out Mercer Island's course catalog. Not only do they offer online options, they have a much more extensive and creative list of CTE offerings. They even pair a CTE offering with Honors English and, as a result, 50% of the ninth graders satisfy the OccEd requirement via this pathway.

### In conclusion

Remember to keep the student's interest at the center of every conversation. The OccEd requirement is as important as other graduation requirements, and we will not be able to meet our students' needs if we don't keep this in mind. But we also must act in support of our students. They must be able to explore their career dreams through their education. It is their right, and it is the purpose and spirit of the OccEd requirement.

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