

ARTS EALRs, REQUIREMENTS AND CBAs

–by Dave Weatherred, WMEA President

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After almost two years of traveling around the state facilitating workshops on the graduation requirements and classroom based assessments (CBAs), it seemed like it was time to make all of this as simple as possible and answer some of the questions that are repeated at each in-service. For this article, I will just concentrate on a “What this means to you” discussion.

First - EALRs

The **Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and frameworks state what every child should know and be able to do in the arts at each grade level.** The majority of the EALRs are exactly the same for each of the four arts strands – music, art, theatre and dance. They only vary when the concepts and skills for each specific art form are listed (EALRs 1.1 and 1.2)

What this means to you:

1. The EALRs were designed to be taught in “performance-based” classes in art, music, theatre and dance. This means that the present music ensemble classes offered in the majority of the secondary schools are a great way to share the EALRs with students. It should also be noted that it is very difficult to achieve the academic rigor required in these documents by trying to present these concepts in an arts “smorgasbord” exploratory offering.
2. If we personally haven’t studied the EALRs, we will not be able to assure that students learn all of what the state requires and not just what we are most comfortable teaching. The goal is to empower students to be independent artists (musicians) by their graduation from high school.
3. Working in our school districts in teams of arts educators to assure that every student is receiving arts instruction through at least one of the four art strands should be a priority for each of us. As a team, we represent a **mandate** by the state of Washington required for each grade level – as individual music teachers, we teach a subject often looked at as a frill for the “elite” students or as a prep time provider.

Second - Graduation Requirement

Washington state has a one-credit (two semesters) requirement in the arts linked specifically to the third benchmark level of the EALRs. This

requirement starts with the graduation class of 2008 (the 2004-05 ninth graders) and is not substitutable.

What this means to you:

1. All high schools in the state must augment their offerings so that the capacity exists for every student to take a third benchmark level, full year class in at least one of the four art strands. The educators who are arts experts in each school district must work closely with the administration to identify the needs created by this requirement. This change can and will happen over the next four years, but is not realistically possible if the changes do not begin now!
2. If students are to be successful in a third benchmark level class when they reach high school, they must receive first benchmark level instruction at their elementary school and second benchmark level instruction at their middle or junior high school. The high school arts requirement and the “all students should know and be able to” statement for each grade level in the arts EALRs tell us that each school district should offer a comprehensive, sequential education in the arts for all students.
3. Once again - working in our school districts in teams of arts teachers to assure that every student can successfully complete a high school, third benchmark level class in the arts should be a priority. As a team, we represent a requirement by the state of Washington – as individual music teachers; we teach a subject often looked at as a frill for the “elite” students or as a prep time provider.

Third - Classroom Based Assessments in the Arts

Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) in the arts are presently being developed and piloted at the first benchmark (fifth grade), second benchmark (eighth grade) and third benchmark (high school) levels. These CBAs will be voluntary for each school district in the first years, but will eventually be required. As the name implies, these assessments will be given in actual classroom settings and, like the majority of our arts offerings, are also performance-based. Unlike our music ensemble classes however, the CBAs will individually assess students in a “performance” environment.

What this means to you:

1. The most important aspects related to requiring students to be knowledgeable in the arts are already in place (arts EALRs and requirements). The assessments just give us a way to measure our effectiveness in delivering this instruction. If EALRs-based instruction is in place and the requirements are being honored in each district in the state, the assessments just become the icing on the cake.

2. Many questions still exist as to the details of these assessments: how they will be scored, what data from these assessments will be reported to the state, who will make sure that school districts comply and a host of other questions have not been answered as of this date. I have many educated guesses on the answers to these questions, but it would not be helpful to put them in print at this time. The most important thing we can do at this point as music educators is to embrace the CBAs; try them out and go to scoring in-services. The more prepared we are when they are finally required, the more successful we will be in implementing all of the pieces of a comprehensive arts program and assessments.

3. And one last time (you might think that I consider this step important!) - working in our school districts in teams of arts teachers to assure that every student can successfully pass each of the benchmark level CBAs in the arts should be a priority. This can only be accomplished through a sequential, comprehensive arts program. As a team, we represent a **requirement** that is assessed state-wide in Washington – as individual music teachers, we teach a subject often looked at as a frill for the “elite” students or as a prep time provider.

In closing

Many music educators are waiting for someone else with more power to educate their school district on the arts requirements and CBAs. If this happens in your district at all, it will probably happen too late! As stated earlier, changes must happen now, because waiting until 2008 will just cause administrators to panic and/or complain about state regulations that cannot be implemented. By starting now, a district can solve these issues and offer an arts program that meets the requirements and is seen as a vital part of the overall standards-based, state assessed school experience. **It will probably take an individual music, art, theatre and/or dance teacher to move a district toward this goal!**