Written by Carol Pomeday
Wednesday, 02 December 2009 18:59

School Board committee hears requests to add strings, jazz and choir offerings to strong program

Students in the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District may soon be able to learn to play a string instrument, join a jazz band or sing in a show choir.

“I have gotten e-mails from parents asking for different music opportunities — an orchestra, jazz band or jazz choir,” Board member Jim Lautenschlaeger recently told members of the Curriculum and Policy Committee.

The committee gave the music department high grades for what it does, but said some students and parents want more.

“Some students came to me last year wanting to start an advanced choir that would do an array of music,” vocal music teacher Linda Ruona said.

As students are exposed to different music genres, they become interested in learning more, band director Tom Paulson said.

“I was amazed at how many students were interested in taking music theory or arranging,” said Paulson, who offers music theory for independent study.

However, to expand the music curriculum will require additional teachers and money, the teachers said.

Ruona teaches six periods five days a week at the middle school and is at the high school for two periods. Paulson teaches sixth-grade band and two high-school bands in addition to giving lessons.

Ginni Schmidt, who has an 85% contract, teaches elementary music and Lori MacRae is a half-time middle-school band director.

“Everybody’s cup is very full,” Ruona said. “If we started a strings program, it would probably draw some kids out of the band program, but it wouldn’t hurt the band program. Our current string students all started with band instruments.”

“This is very exciting, but there is no way to expand the program without hiring staff,” Paulson said.

“My instrument music program is 50% less over the last 10 years. We have some aging instruments. I don’t want to see us getting involved with other things if there is no money available.”

Supt. Steve Shaw said the district should approach businesses and foundations that support the arts for grants for instruments and money to start new programs.

“This is what I wanted to see happen,” he said of the discussion. “The administration will work with the staff and figure out how we can solve this great problem.”

MacRae, who teaches part-time at Port Catholic School in Port Washington, said it is possible.

“When I’m not here, I’m at a small Catholic school in Port Washington, and we have a jazz band there,” MacRae said. “My budget is practically nonexistent. You have to be creative.”

Paulson said the music program has strong parent support.