

Distance learning classes allowing students to receive topnotch instruction

By JOSH MOODY Hub Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 19, 2013 12:15 pm

KEARNEY — With 25 students selected to the all-state band, jazz band, chorus and orchestra, it has been a banner year so far for the Kearney High School music program.

“This is the highest number I can remember, and I’ve been here 25 years,” said KHS orchestra director Dave Klein.

“It’s a great culmination of a lot of work,” said Nathan LeFeber, band director at KHS. “I think it’s an indication of a healthy music program.”

Both directors stressed the competitive nature of auditions and the months of preparation needed by students.

“It’s a pretty selective group,” LeFeber said and described the Nebraska Music Educators Association All-State Band, Chorus, Jazz Band and Orchestra as “the crème de la crème.”

“It’s not a fluke. It’s not a half-court shot at the buzzer, there is no luck to it,” Klein said of being selected as an all-stater. “It is determination and sheer hard work.”

Klein said the audition process for the honor has changed. Previously, students would record and submit an audio clip for the audition, but this year the audition was made by video submission.

“Appearance and techniques that the judge could view are now a part of the evaluation,” Klein said.

“All the technical things are now evaluated by the visual component.”

Klein and LeFeber pointed out the growing role of technology in music. One such example is a distance-learning class at KHS, which offers students the chance to take one-on-one or group music lessons with instructors from the Manhattan School of Music in New York.

The class, which began at KHS this semester, is offered remotely and allows students and instructors to interact as if they are in the same classroom. A student stands in front of a television and a camera, while an instructor in Manhattan does the same. The instructor is able to see and hear the student’s performance and to control the camera, zooming in or out as needed, to observe the student’s playing techniques.

“It’s quite remarkable that the technology works as well as it does,” LeFeber said.

Presently, KHS students are taking the lessons at no cost to the school or the students. Because of a state law approved in 2006, schools receive funds to send or receive distance-learning classes.

LB1208 provides funding for schools from the state lottery fund.

“What the teachers really like is that they get really high-quality instruction, but they also get help with really hard-to-find lessons,” said Gordon Roethemeyer, a distance-education director with the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council. Roethemeyer added that often in rural communities, there are few options for students who study certain instruments.

“They love to get instruction for the oboe, the French horn, the bassoon, some of those really hard-to-find lessons,” Roethemeyer said.

Eleven other Nebraska schools are participating in the distance-learning program with the Manhattan School of Music, and almost 80 students receive instruction. Roethemeyer said the program, which features one 50-minute lesson a week for 10 weeks, allows students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

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