

LOCAL

# Online classes are beautiful music for rural Minnesota students

The MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis created a partnership program that allows districts to supplement their music offerings.

By John Reinan (<http://www.startribune.com/john-reinan/273043871/>) Star Tribune |

MARCH 24, 2018 — 4:30PM

In rural Minnesota schools, it's not uncommon to have one music teacher instructing hundreds of students.

To help ease the pressure on those teachers, the MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis created a partnership program that allows districts to supplement their music offerings with online lessons and classes taught by MacPhail artists.

Since the program began in 2011, it has grown from just one school to schools in 32 districts and preschool programs serving more than 1,200 students a year.

A map of the districts taking part in the Online School Partnership (OSP) covers the entire state, from Karlstad in the northwest to Silver Bay in the northeast, and from Pipestone in the southwest to St. Charles in the southeast.

The program isn't meant to replace music teachers. Rather, it's meant to complement them, offering classes and individual attention instructors might not otherwise be able to give. For example, some districts use OSP for specialized instruction to help their most talented students prepare for all-state band auditions.

"We help tailor programming that reinforces the goals that the classroom teacher has in mind," said Sarah Drebelbis, the MacPhail program manager. "We are here to enhance what already exists and to provide additional opportunities should the educator want to include them."

Thanks to support from the Otto Bremer Trust and the Minnesota State Arts Board, the cost to districts is low. Schools pay \$20 an hour for lessons or classes, while the program costs MacPhail \$160 an hour.

Mary Schaeffe, executive director of the Minnesota Music Educators Association, said the program helps level the playing field for rural students who often don't have access to private music teachers and performance clinicians.

The rural teachers benefit, too.

"The MacPhail OSP has been a real game-changer for our school," said Pam Diem, the sole instructor overseeing music for more than 230 students in grades 5 through 12 at KMS Schools, serving the west-central communities of Kerkhoven, Murdock and Sunburg.

"I feel like I am now part of a department, rather than just me alone here," Diem wrote in a letter to MacPhail. "I have colleagues and peer support that I would not otherwise have. These peer relationships have made me a better teacher."



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MACPHAIL CENTER FOR MUSIC

Teaching artist Cheryl Henningsgaard of the MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis led a remote class of preschoolers in Sunburg, Minn.

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