

To Whom It May Concern:

Accompaniment and the collaboration with an accompanist is an integral part of choir and solo vocal performances. An accompanist is a professional and deserves a competitive rate as they are hard to come by. These fees should be covered through the District, just as assistant coaches and other personnel are paid accordingly. Within this proposal you will find:

- ❖ Duties of an accompanist and the proposed stipends - *page 1*
- ❖ Rationale on why an accompanist is a very important part of the choir course - *page 2*
- ❖ Explanation of why the choir teacher cannot be both the director AND the accompanist - *page 3*
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**Memorandum of understanding -

There are two options that the music department has come up with as possible ways to accurately compensate an accompanist's work:

OPTION 1: The following is a proposal for an addition of a stipend to pay an accompanist by *semester*:

Title	Number of Stipends	Amount	Duties required
Accompanist	2	1.5% (\$580.5)	3-5 performances within a semester. Duties for each performance are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparing the music independently for the concert 2. Rehearsing with the choir classes 2-3 times before the concert 3. Rehearsing with the choir at a dress rehearsal 4. Performing at the concert

OPTION 2: The following is a proposal for a stipend by *performance*:

Title	Number of Stipends	Amount	Duties required
Accompanist	9	.5% (\$193.50)	Performance with rehearsal preparation for one performance. The specific duties for one performance are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparing the music independently for the concert 2. Rehearsing with the choir classes 2-3 times before the concert 3. Rehearsing with the choir at a dress rehearsal 4. Performing at the concert

RATIONALE

Here are several reasons for why an accompanist is crucial to the choir classroom for both rehearsals and performances:

1. **Musical Support**: The accompanist provides harmonic and rhythmic support, helping singers stay in tune and keep time. This is especially important during rehearsals when the choir is learning new music or refining their performance.
2. **Learning and Rehearsal Efficiency**: With an accompanist, rehearsals are more efficient. They can play parts individually or in combination, making it easier for singers to learn their specific parts and hear how they fit into the overall piece.
3. **Foundational Support with Pitch and Rhythm**: Developing choirs often consist of singers who are still building their skills. An accompanist provides a solid musical foundation, helping them develop a better sense of pitch, rhythm, and musicality. Accompanists offer a reliable pitch reference and help maintain consistent tempo. This is essential for choirs, as it ensures that all members are synchronized and on pitch, reducing the risk of errors.
4. **Improved Learning Process**: Beginners benefit greatly from having their parts played out accurately. An accompanist can isolate and emphasize specific sections, making it easier for singers to learn and understand their individual parts and how they fit into the whole.
5. **Dynamic and Expressive Guidance**: An experienced accompanist can enhance the choir's performance by suggesting and demonstrating dynamic changes, articulation, and expression, contributing to a more polished and emotionally impactful performance.
6. **Flexibility and Adaptability**: In live performances, an accompanist can adapt to unforeseen changes or errors, helping the choir stay on track. They can adjust their playing to accommodate the needs of the choir, whether it's slowing down for a difficult passage or providing stronger support during a complex section.
7. **Exposure to Professionalism and Confidence**: For developing choirs, having a professional accompanist sets a standard of musical excellence. This exposure helps singers understand the level of professionalism expected in performances and encourages them to strive for higher standards. It also gives the choir more reassurance since there is a skilled musician providing a foundation, allowing them to focus more on their vocal performance rather than worrying about timing or pitch.
8. **Motivation and Inspiration**: The presence of a skilled accompanist can be inspiring for a developing choir. It shows the possibilities of musical collaboration and can motivate singers to improve and take their commitment more seriously.
9. **Confidence Boost**: Knowing there is a skilled musician providing a foundation can significantly boost the confidence of the choir members. This allows them to focus more on their vocal performance rather than worrying about timing or pitch.
10. **Enhanced Repertoire**: With an accompanist, choirs can tackle a wider range of repertoire, including pieces that require piano accompaniment or more complex harmonic support. This expands the choir's musical possibilities and allows for a more diverse program.

EXPLANATION

A common conversation with school administration is why can't the choir teacher be the accompanist and the director. While some choir teachers are skilled pianists and capable of accompanying their choirs, it is not ideal for the choir teacher to also serve as the accompanist.

Conducting and accompanying simultaneously can split the teacher's focus, as conducting requires full attention to the choir, monitoring dynamics, timing, articulation, and overall sound, while playing the piano simultaneously makes it challenging to give the choir the full attention it needs, potentially compromising the quality of both the accompaniment and the direction. Conducting also requires the use of both hands and a clear line of sight to the entire choir, which makes it physically impossible to conduct effectively while playing.

The choir teacher also needs to communicate with the choir students through gestures, facial expressions, and verbal instructions while conducting, which is impossible to do while playing the piano. This limits the teacher's ability to guide and respond to the choir dynamically. Having a separate accompanist allows the choir teacher to focus solely on teaching, correcting, and guiding the choir, making rehearsals more efficient as the teacher can stop and start the choir without interrupting their playing, address specific issues, and provide immediate feedback. Additionally, conducting involves leading the choir musically and emotionally through the piece, requiring the teacher's full presence and engagement with the choir. Some choral pieces require intricate accompaniment that demands full attention and skill from the pianist, making it impractical to manage such pieces while conducting.

The teacher's primary role is to educate and develop the choir, which involves listening critically, identifying areas that need improvement, and providing instructional guidance, tasks that are compromised when playing the piano. In professional and advanced educational settings, having a separate accompanist sets a higher standard of musical practice and professionalism, benefiting the choir members' educational experience. With an accompanist handling the piano duties, the choir director can focus entirely on vocal technique, diction, and blending. This dual focus accelerates the learning process and helps develop a more cohesive and polished sound.

STUDENT VOICE:

Dixon High School students had the opportunity to work with an accompanist in choir this year. Here is what they had to say about their experience:

“It is important because it allows Mrs. Rogers to be more involved with us and not focused on the notes, we get to have such a better environment because everyone is not as stressed and our accompanist [Ms. DiGrazia] made the choir family so much tighter”

“Because we were able to connect with [the accompanist] through music and create something beautiful together. **She put in tons of hard work and made us sound even more beautiful with the piano.** Class runs so much more smoothly when she is there to hop on the piano and practice with us.”

“In class we get feedback that the director doesn't always notice and during concert it is nice to have a person playing that could adjust with you instead of a recording that is final. Also you get to **experience singing with a live musician.**”

“It helped make us be more prepared, while also bringing in another voice who knew music and could help us in the long run. Our last accompanist was an amazing person who truly loved the choral program just as much as we did. We would be very lucky to have someone like her or even her again next year.”

“I believe having an accompanist is important because they are a more practiced individual that have honed their skills for this task.”

“I think it's important to have an accompanist because it **allows the music to be performed as it's intended** and it creates a more immersive experience for not only the students but the audience as well. It would help assist the teacher in the classroom and show the students another aspect of the music world that they haven't received yet.”

“Having an accompanist in the classroom was important because it helped escalate the pieces we performed since they were not acappella and because of that **it helped challenge us in the classroom with harder pieces** it also helps to have an accompanist because it helps during dress rehearsals to have another set of ears to help tune and make sure our sound is perfect and also simply because the previous accompanist was supportive and became a lot of people's favorite person and she brought a new light to the class”

“Having an accompanist in the choir classroom is important because we don't always stick with what's written in our music. **If we change the way we sing something, we're left with less freedom when using a track.** Also so much more can go wrong with the technical aspect of using a prerecorded track, such as it skipping or not being loud enough during a concert. Having an accompanist also gives a chance to not just let the choir as a whole shine but the talent of the person accompanying us. It's been a joy to have an accompanist in the classroom all year, and it makes things like warm ups or running through a certain part of a song so much easier.”

“Having an accompanist instead of a track playing makes a world of difference. **Hearing live music compared to something pre-recorded enhances the performance.** The students also form a bond with the accompanist. The accompanist can change the tempo and accommodate to the creative vision of the director, improving the piece overall.”

“Having an accompanist in our choir classroom and during performances is incredibly beneficial. **With an accompanist, we can better understand how our parts blend with the piano, enhancing our overall musicality.** During performances, the accompaniment adds a rich, full sound that elevates our singing, ensuring a polished and professional presentation. **Their presence not only aids in our musical development but also significantly contributes to the success and enjoyment of our choir experience.**”

“It helps us imagine and understand the pieces better and it helps us emotionally connect with the music”

“Having an accompanist is such an amazing experience in choir. It makes the pieces so much more meaningful and beautiful than having a recording. **With an accompanist we can change little things that make our pieces feel more connected with students and make everything come together better.** Students also get to learn more about music not just vocally but also through instruments teaching choir members more skills that can be used in and out of the classroom. Students are much more eager to expand their skills, it encourages them to be a leader, and learn new things. **Having an accompanist also gives students another adult to make a connection with and look up to as a role model in many ways. It's so much more than just having someone play piano.** A recording can never compare to an accompanist.”