Marion band program enrollment soars

BY TYLER JURANOVICh

Marion Community Schools has doubled down on the arts and because of that its band program has seen tremendous growth.

Less than five years ago just 19 students were in the band program at Justice Intermediate, but after a focus on recruitment and building student interest in music, that number has skyrocketed to 150 band students at Justice.

Any type of growth, let alone that much significant growth, runs opposite to what is happening in a lot of public schools, especially school corporations like Marion Community Schools, that are facing declining enrollment and state funding. Federal laws, such as the No Child Left Behind, stressed reading and math and ended up sidelining the arts in many cases, but the schools’ band directors say they’re extremely optimistic about the future of the music programs in Marion even if the growth has created challenges.

“It’s a great thing that we’re having growth, and a lot other schools are cutting programs, but our administration

and our community is very supportive of the arts,” Ron Ways, band director at McCulloch Junior High, said.

With the growth of band students at Justice, the other schools, such as McCulloch and Marion High School, have also seen significant growth.

The middle school band program currently has more than 200 total students, while the high school currently has 75 students, up 20 students from last school year, but Joshua Huff, high school band director, expects the high school program to double next school year.

“In the next three or four years, we’re looking at a high school band of 300 to 400, which is really possible,” Ways said.

The directors have had to get creative in their fundraisers to make sure every student has an instrument because of the level of growth in such a short timespan, but it’s a challenge they’ve accepted and say has been proven worth it when they see how much the music program means to students.

“It’s the most fun thing I do at school,” Sarah Berma, an eighth-grader at McCulloch, said about being a part of band. “When I transferred here, a lot of the first friends I made and friends I have now come from band.”

The fruit of a strong music program has already shown itself.

Last school year, McCulloch Junior High was the only school in the state to receive all gold medals in the annual ISSMA competition, but in the future, the band directors are looking towards entering more contests and offering more opportunities to students, such as taking a trip to Walt Disney World in Florida to play.

Winning contests or not, Justice Band Director Kelly Bare said music can change a child’s life and that’s she happy Marion Community Schools can offer a full and successful music program.

“No matter where the students come from or how hard things are for them, we just give them an opportunity to belong and be successful when life beats them down, and so that gives them the drive to come back and celebrate the small successes,” Bare said. “That’s unique. They truly don’t get that anywhere else.”

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