

# Developing a music program that “Resonates”

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## Austin’s Story

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Kendra Worman is a “roving” music teacher within the Prairie Spirit School Division. She believes all students should have an opportunity to learn music, no matter where they live or go to school. She travels throughout the division helping music teachers and their students meet curriculum goals. In 2015, she created the Resonate music program to provide students with access to music opportunities not available in their schools and communities. Resonate encourages students to experiment with different musical genres and styles. The program brings students together periodically to learn from one another and to connect with professional musicians throughout North America. Resonate began as a single music conference for high school students and has expanded to include student conferences, road shows, galas, tours and performance opportunities. Resonate has programming available for kindergarten to Grade 12. Budding artists get to participate in activities they never thought possible. When Kendra learned about a student who wanted to join a bluegrass band, she created one. Austin, a talented banjo player, is the only student in The Mountain Ridge Band; the rest are teachers and musicians who volunteer their time to support his love of music.

[View Austin’s #theteacherproject video.](#)

Read more about Kendra’s dream is to see Resonate spread throughout the province. She invites music teachers with a passion for music and art education to connect to share ideas.

### 1. How did Resonate come about?

The idea to create Resonate had been rolling around in my head for several years. I had taught band for many years and was very passionate about that. I was seeing students with multiple interests and was trying to think of ways to expand their learning, and how to reach students not attached to any music program. While at a teacher conference a few years ago, I went to a session on jazz guitar for beginners because I wanted to learn how to help a student of mine back home. As I was sitting in that session, I remember thinking, “this student is relying on me to get this right. Wouldn’t it make more sense if the student was sitting here himself? Why don’t students get to go to conferences?” That’s how the idea

for the Resonate Student Music Conference came about. It grew from there, but took about four years from the initial idea until the first conference.

Sometimes, I hear about Resonate being used as a reward for students who are demonstrating good behaviour, but we really encourage schools to send students who are struggling in school, but show an interest. It's difficult to be at a Resonate event and not engage. We want to bring all students together, so we accept all students.

### **2. What do you do as a music support facilitator within Prairie Spirit?**

I work out of central office and can end up working anywhere in the school division. My work largely involves three areas: teaching students, supporting teachers and organizing Resonate programming. My teaching assignment includes a music class at Martensville High School, as well as brass and jazz classes in Asquith and Allan. The support I provide to teachers involves bringing ideas, resources and strategies they can use and develop in their music classes, which is a big part of my job. In Saskatchewan, the arts education curriculum is one of the core subject areas for Kindergarten to Grade 9. Within arts education, there are four strands to be taught: dance, visual art, drama and music, but not all teachers feel equipped to teach each of these. My job is to alleviate barriers and challenges for teachers in the music strand of the arts education curriculum. Accessing my support is completely voluntary for teachers. I'm not here to tell teachers how to teach; I'm here to help them access the tools they need to teach. My support is specific to each teacher, their interests and skill level. All a teacher has to do is phone or email me.

### **3. Tell me about Resonate and your role?**

The Resonate conference in April 2018 is a three-day event with about 300 students attending. My role is to lead the work involved in making it happen. Resonate involves a year-long planning process. During May and June, I lock in dates and venues for the following year and start booking clinicians we hope to work with. I do all the communication with schools, teachers and our staff team. Resonate is not something that can be carried out by one person. I have a team of several teachers from different schools around the school division who help. They are all teachers with various music backgrounds. When we host an event, such as the three-day conference, our staff team is there after school setting things up and they are onsite to help carry out the event. Throughout the year, the team provides input and feedback as decisions are made and take on tasks in preparation for Resonate events. I put the pieces together. I do the scheduling

and finalize clinician planning and equipment logistics. I set up the registration system and provide social media updates. When a Resonate event is over, I write all the financial and program reports. The Resonate staff team communicates a lot by email, but we do try to meet occasionally after work to finalize things.

#### **4. What are some challenges in running a program like this?**

Finances are the biggest challenge because I'm really committed to eliminating cost as a barrier for students to attend. You often hear that opportunities in music education are only available to the kids who can afford it, but I think every student should have the opportunity to be at Resonate. When building Resonate I took the field of dreams approach: "if you build it, they will come." I dreamed big. Prairie Spirit School Division provides some funding, but Resonate isn't something our school division can pay for on its own; the rest comes from grants, sponsorship, and performance-based fundraising. You have to be strategic, and really know your budget and the areas you can reduce if you need to. Within Resonate, we have built performance opportunities for students, which also helps with fundraising. We teach students they have marketable skills as musicians and encourage them to get involved in things, such as the Resonate Gala, for both the performance experience and to help generate revenue for the program in a musical way, which gets us out of selling chocolates. The students also think it's pretty cool when people pay to hear them play.

Another challenge is time. Even though this is a part of my job, I still end up spending a lot of late nights, weekends and holidays preparing for Resonate. And the communication piece is huge. Once I've got clinicians booked, there's a lot of back and forth communication about what sessions they'll prepare and topics to cover, plus lots of communication back and forth with parents and teachers. I've gotten better at taking frequently asked questions and incorporating these into the information packages.

Equipment is also a significant logistical challenge. I make a huge equipment list. We talk to our clinicians and find out what they need, everything from projectors to drums. We load up a trailer with equipment from three different schools. It takes a day to pick up all the equipment we need and to set up onsite in the six different buildings at the camp. I make a master equipment list that itemizes things down to which equipment belongs in each room. That's a big tedious piece that takes a lot of time.

Originally I thought transportation would be an issue. We don't charge a fee for students to attend Resonate events, but students have to find a way to get there on their own. It hasn't been a significant barrier because we've seen teachers and schools take that on themselves.

### 5. Why is music and arts education important for students?

There's a movement happening. People are realizing that arts education is about more than becoming a well-rounded person. The thinking strategies and parts of the brain you use when you're studying arts education are significant pieces that contribute to all other areas in life. Author Daniel Pink used to be a lawyer, but now he's an arts advocate. He does presentations about how in today's world when people are looking to hire, they're looking for people who have creative and problem-solving skills. He has one presentation I really like entitled [Abundance, Asia and Automation](#). If we reduce job skills down to things computers can do, we're in trouble. We used to talk about how the arts help students do better in math and science. That's a fact, there's lots of research and evidence that shows that, but students should have an opportunity to learn music simply for the joy of it. It shouldn't be done solely for the sake of something else. What's the first thing we do when we get in the car? We turn on the radio to listen to music. You can't go to a movie without hearing music. It's everywhere in society. All of that will disappear if we stop teaching music in our schools.

### 6. What do you love about what you do, and how do you know you're making a difference?

I love the variety. I have learned so much. If someone told me three or four years ago I'd be playing in a country bluegrass band at work, I wouldn't even have thought I would have the skills and ability to do that. This job continually puts me in scenarios where I have to learn something new. That's really exciting and challenging. I can grow professionally, and then I can draw on that when going out to schools to support teachers. But the real passion comes from seeing students get opportunities they would not have had if we didn't do this work. It bothers me to see students interested in learning music, who want to learn an instrument or to play with other people, but they can't. That seems so unfair. With Resonate, we're seeing a lot of returning students. If we look back three years ago, we can definitely say there's more music education happening in our classrooms since we started this work. And there's nothing greater than to see a student light up over something they've never experienced before. This work has made me appreciate the opportunities I had growing up. When you see what other students and schools don't have, you can't un-see that. How can I look at myself and say I'm doing a good job when I see so many students who don't have the tools and resources they need? Of course, I can't solve every problem, but I can try to balance the barriers with more opportunities.

### **7. How can other teachers learn more and get involved?**

We have the conference for high school students in April, and we've got 50 spaces for students outside of our school division. In the future, we'd love to see Resonate pods pop up throughout the province. I'd love to see other school divisions pick it up in their regions. Our team would be more than happy to work alongside another school divisions to support them in getting started. We can share our resources, documentation and planning process. Someone, such as myself, could even come onsite to help them carry it out the first time. Teachers can email me at [kendra.worman@spiritsd.ca](mailto:kendra.worman@spiritsd.ca). I'd also suggest teachers connect with the Saskatchewan Music Education Association (SMEA). The SMEA has been one of our financial partners and a great resource; I know they'd be interested in helping other regions get started. Don't let barriers stand in the way. If we had let budget limitations stop us, Resonate would not be what it is today. Dream big!

