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Preface to the 2021 Edition

ASTA released its first national curriculum in 2011, with the idea that the document would help guide discussions and research in string pedagogy, provide a curriculum framework for K–12 and studio teachers, help administrators and educators in evaluating instruction, and serve as an advocacy tool for strengthening string programs around the country.

That first edition sold out very quickly and, as expected, we found that teachers used the curriculum in a wide variety of ways. This curriculum is a living document—one that should continue to evolve based on information learned from research and best practice in teacher-training programs, schools, and studios. Feedback on the curriculum has been helpful in affirming that it is easily adaptable to many non-music models and that the sequence of pedagogical information is generally accurate and can be adopted by teachers of a variety of educational and philosophical backgrounds, such as Suzuki, Rolland, and so on.

One of the greatest challenges we continually hear from teachers is that expectations and ideas about curricular design can change quickly, as one curricular model is suddenly determined to be obsolete while another design promises to solve all the problems faced in schools today. Of course, these generalized curricula are typically written for the classroom and offer little to no help for the unique nature of instruction in the string and orchestra classroom. At the same time, teachers have affirmed that the model in this curriculum has been useful, practical, and implementable in ways that help them become more efficient and effective at instruction.

In this current edition, we outline several of the ways in which teachers have effectively used the curriculum since its release in 2011. We have removed the section on assessment, as that information is now covered in a separate publication, the *ASTA String Assessment Guide*. We also have updated some of the terminology in the scope-and-sequence and standards, as well as the resource list, glossary, and standards for string teachers.

We hope you enjoy the 2021 version of the *ASTA String Curriculum*!

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ASTA Past-President

Special Note to Teachers

We are extremely pleased to share this curriculum with you and hope you will find it to be a useful and practical document. Our writing team includes teachers who have substantial experience teaching in public schools, private institutions, and the studio, from pre-K through the university level. During each phase in the development of this curriculum, we continuously evaluated how teachers would use the curriculum on a daily basis to meet the needs of their individual classrooms and students. We recognize the many challenges in the life of the string teacher, including traveling between multiple buildings, simultaneously teaching several instruments to students with a wide range of skill levels, scheduling concerts, repairing instruments, managing inventory, and planning lessons and rehearsals for multiple grade levels. We also have seen the increasing focus on curriculum and assessment from district, state, and even federal agencies and know that there are substantial pressures on string programs even in locations where there is strong community support.

In addition, we recognize that string teachers are a diverse group, with greatly varying levels of preparation and experience in the field of string pedagogy and teaching. Teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities vary widely in the amount of emphasis that is placed on the unique needs of string educators in the area of sequential pedagogy, lesson planning, knowledge of secondary instruments, and teaching in heterogeneous group and ensemble settings.

With that in mind, our desire is to provide a curriculum that is both easy to use (with a clear and concise scope-and-sequence) and comprehensive (with more than 200 specific learning targets). This curriculum is not just the work of our team of authors but is based on the outstanding teaching traditions in our field and the contributions of many earlier authors, educators, and researchers. We hope that you find this curriculum to be a useful tool to you at multiple levels, from designing the overall K–12 string program in your school system to creating daily lesson plans.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to excellence!

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Special Note to Administrators

First, thank you! If you are reading this letter, we recognize that you have taken the time to familiarize yourself with this comprehensive curriculum for string education in K–12 school systems. We appreciate your commitment to providing support for the teachers and students involved in your string program.

Primary responsibilities for administrators generally include the evaluation of teacher performance and the oversight of curriculum. This particular document is designed to be a model for the local school district to write its own curriculum. Though the curriculum may be adopted as-is for a specific school district, the local school will need to determine the specific grade levels for each of the benchmarks and also discern the appropriate amount of time required to achieve the performance targets and benchmarks.

We encourage the regular and ongoing evaluation of string teachers but believe that evaluation should be done within the context of a program that has adequate time for instruction and appropriate administrative support (policy, finances, and scheduling). The activities that take place during a string class or rehearsal may look very different from those activities that take place during another type of academic class (such as math or science). The music-making process is highly interactive but also should have a clear structure and high expectations. Rehearsals and classes should have clearly stated and measurable performance outcomes that are regularly assessed by the teacher. In other words, teacher evaluation should also reflect the performance of the students within the individual class.

In the absence of a written curriculum, it is difficult to assess teacher performance (or to adequately understand if students are meeting any specific goals at all). We hope this curriculum will serve as an impetus for the development of a local curriculum and also encourage districts to provide additional professional development for teachers if it becomes apparent that teachers or students are not meeting performance standards because curricular outcomes are not being met. We also encourage administrators to consider that other reasons may exist for lower-than-expected performance in the string classroom, including lack of instructional time, scheduling conflicts, inferior instruments or equipment, or inadequate rehearsal space.

This document is designed to be a model for the local school district to write its own curriculum.

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As you likely already know, teaching string instruments requires a unique specialized skill set, which includes knowledge of sequential pedagogy for multiple instruments, an understanding of instructional design for a wide range of classes (from small group lessons to large ensemble rehearsals), the ability to manage and coordinate a program at multiple grade levels, an understanding of how to assess the wide range of skills and knowledge students must have to perform at a high level, an understanding of strategies for effective student recruitment and retention, and the ability to deliver instruction in a way that engages student attention and provides for consistent growth and high achievement. We encourage you to see the curriculum and assessment section of our resource list for materials related to the assessment of music teachers and music performance.

This curriculum also underscores the need for trained specialists in the area of string education. It isn't possible or realistic to expect students to pay for private lessons outside of the school day to replace the training they should be receiving in their school program. Successful student education in the performance of orchestral stringed instruments requires specialized knowledge about each of the instruments and substantial training in the area of pedagogy and teaching strategies.

We also want to solicit your feedback or advice regarding the use of this curriculum. If you have any questions or would like additional information, we encourage you to contact the ASTA national office.

Thank you for your ongoing support of string students and their teachers in your district!

The ASTA String Curriculum: A Brief History and Ongoing Developments

In fall 2007, the ASTA Board of Directors started an ad hoc committee, the Curriculum Committee, for the express purpose of writing this document. Mary Wagner, then ASTA President, was charged with the process of appointing a committee chair. Additional committee members were selected based on recommendations by leaders in the ASTA community, with emphasis placed on past experience with curriculum writing efforts, a record of successful public school and/or studio teaching experience, substantial prior leadership, and the willingness to commit to a lengthy writing process.

Stephen Benham was appointed chair of the committee in fall 2007. Additional committee members were appointed by spring 2008 and subsequently approved by the ASTA Executive Board. Committee members included Stephen Benham (chair), Jane Linn Aten, Judith Petersen Evans, Julie Lyonn Lieberman, Denese Odegaard, and Mary Wagner.

An initial organizational meeting was held at the ASTA National Conference in March 2008. At that meeting, the committee discussed the parameters and goals for the project, the specific needs of the ASTA community, the rationale for the development of the project, and what the limits and expectations of this project would be. We recognized the need for a broad-based curriculum that reflected the diverse nature of string education as it exists in the United States today. At that meeting, as part of our due diligence process, the committee determined to search for and review existing curriculum documents, including state arts standards, model curricula from school districts, and any other related documents that would guide us in the development of this curriculum. This work was completed by July 2008.

We recognized the need for a broad-based curriculum that reflected the diverse nature of string education.

Following the review of state and district documents, the committee held a working session at Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) in July 2008. During our meetings, we discussed the extremely wide range of practices between states and districts found in our review of curriculum documents. We also recognized that each state has its own set of standards. In some cases, states adopted the National Core Arts Standards in their entirety. In other cases, the national standards were used as a guiding document for the development of state or district standards. These practices fell into three general categories:

1. The majority of states had very broad arts standards, of which music performance was just one small part, if it was mentioned at all.

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2. A smaller portion of states had specific music standards, with some level of measurable outcome.
3. A limited number of states had no specific standards for music and/or the arts.

During the July 2008 meeting, our committee determined a structure for the curriculum that seemed to be logical and based on the best practices of previously published curricula; it also reflected the language found in many state and district standards documents. We divided writing assignments between committee members (at least two committee members were responsible for each area) and determined a timeline for the writing process.

From September 2008 to January 2009, the committee continued to review curriculum models and began the writing process. This initial process proved to be more tedious than expected. First, it was clear that there is a wide range of word usage in our profession as it relates to pedagogy. Next, it was evident that we had to more distinctly limit the scope of this project. Finally, the challenges of writing curriculum with only limited face-to-face meetings added to the time-intensive nature of the project.

In March 2009, the committee presented a draft of general curriculum organization to the ASTA membership with sample level 1 benchmark documents. Based on the feedback received from those who reviewed the document, we made several changes, including the development of a scope-and-sequence, addressing eclectic string styles, and expanding the learning targets.

In July 2009, the writing committee met again, developed the initial scope-and-sequence, and began the process of writing the learning targets that are part of this document—a process that continued through the summer of 2010.

An updated draft of the curriculum was presented at the ASTA National Conference in February 2010 and feedback from that conference (plus other state conferences where the curriculum was presented) was incorporated into the curriculum document.

The final draft was completed in August 2010 and sent out for advance review to our curricular advisory committee. Final revisions were made in late 2010 and early 2011, and the curriculum was first released at the ASTA National Conference in March 2011.

The ASTA Board of Directors maintains responsibility for oversight of the curriculum, including ongoing review and revisions of the curriculum and the publication of associated materials (such as the *ASTA String Assessment Guide* written by Margaret Berg and Denese Odegaard). In 2019, the board determined that it was time to publish a new edition of the curriculum to reflect ongoing developments in string research, update resources and other curriculum materials, and present the curriculum in a manner that is a bit more user friendly.

Additional resources may be found on the ASTA website (astastrings.org), in the two ASTA journals (*American String Teacher* and the *String Research Journal*), and in multiple books and other published materials. ASTA also promotes ongoing dialogue about string teaching through professional development workshops, the ASTA Connect online community, and the annual ASTA National Conference.

Part I: Curricular Design

HOW TO USE THE ASTA STRING CURRICULUM

One of the tremendous challenges in designing a curriculum for national use is that there is great variety across the nation in the composition of string programs, starting age, state and district requirements and standards, community traditions and expectations, and cultural context for strings. While a district could adopt this curriculum as a model as written, we believe that the curriculum is best used when the teacher is able to adapt lesson plans and sequencing based on local needs. Because of this diversity, our curriculum is designed with the following characteristics:

1. **Comprehensive:** Covers all areas of string performance.
2. **Sequential:** Demonstrates the appropriate sequence and hierarchy of skills and knowledge related to performing on a string instrument.
3. **Flexible:** Levels can be adjusted and targets may be adapted for local needs.
4. **Open-ended:** Provides for extensions in technique, repertoire, skills, and understandings beyond what is written.

Our goal was not to write all possible learning targets and lesson plans for teachers, nor to provide a master list of all possible resources. Instead, we want this curriculum to outline the most essential concepts, serving as a launch-pad for the expert teacher's own ideas and creativity.

In the years since the first edition of the *ASTA String Curriculum* was released, one of the most common questions is, "How should the ASTA Curriculum be used?" There are multiple answers to that question. When the authors wrote the curriculum, their goals were to ensure that the document was:

- comprehensive, relevant, and practical.
- based upon excellent sequential string pedagogy.
- flexible and can be used or adapted to a wide range of curricular standards (at national, state, or local levels).

We believe that the curriculum is best used when the teacher is able to adapt lesson plans and sequencing based on local needs.

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- **Learning Sequences and Processes**

These are detailed descriptions for the teacher and/or student about how to perform or teach the given learning targets. We provided a parallel column for assessment points or indicators of success. For example, a description of how to initiate the basic beginning bow hold is included, with specific indicators of success that are understandable by the teacher and the student.

In summary, the curriculum is both sequential and developmental, moving from larger categories of skills and knowledge to specific learning targets within each category. Figure 2 demonstrates how this works for the area of body format.

Figure 2. Specific Example for Category 1—Executive Skills and Knowledge, Content Area 1A—Body Format

<i>Category</i>	<i>Executive Skills and Knowledge</i>
<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Body Format</i>
Standard	Students perform with a lengthened and balanced posture; supporting the instrument without tension; demonstrating ease of motion; adjusting, with the assistance of a teacher, their format for physiological changes due to growth; and controlling weight distribution, unilateral movement and bilateral movements in both sitting and standing positions.
Example Learning Targets	Rest Position
	Attention Position
	Playing Position
	Weight Distribution
	Posture
	Unilateral movement
	Bilateral movement
	Sequential movement