



**DJ Mosby** works on a new composition in his digital music class at Wauwatosa East High School.

# MUSIC *for All*



**Wauwatosa promotes  
new and traditional  
music opportunities  
for students**

*Shelby Anderson*

In Will Ulrich's new digital music class at Wauwatosa East High School, heads are bobbing and fingers are tapping as students wearing headphones and ear buds produce their own beats and songs using professional computer software. Down the hall, students warm up for orchestra, playing scales before launching into "Jingle Bells" and other songs for an upcoming holiday concert.

Staff and leadership at Wauwatosa East High School have made a concerted effort to offer the traditional performance-based music classes such as orchestra, band and choir in addition to newer music classes such as recording technology, rock band, and a digital

music class. Michael Hayden, orchestra director at Wauwatosa East High School, said it's important for music education to continue to grow and evolve.

"Students want to make the kind of music they listen to," Hayden said. "It's our job to find new ways to get kids into music."

The digital music class at

Wauwatosa East High School just started this school year. Ulrich said the school didn't advertise the class — it was simply listed in the prospectus. Even without advertising, the school had no problem filling two sections of the class. In addition to the two classes at Wauwatosa East High School, Ulrich also teaches the class at Wauwatosa West

High School. In total, about 100 students are taking a digital music class in the district. As word about the class has spread, Ulrich expects more students to sign up for the class for the second semester.

"Our goal with this class was to get more students involved with music," Ulrich said.

The class also provides new,

**Michael Hayden** conducts the Wauwatosa East High School Orchestra.





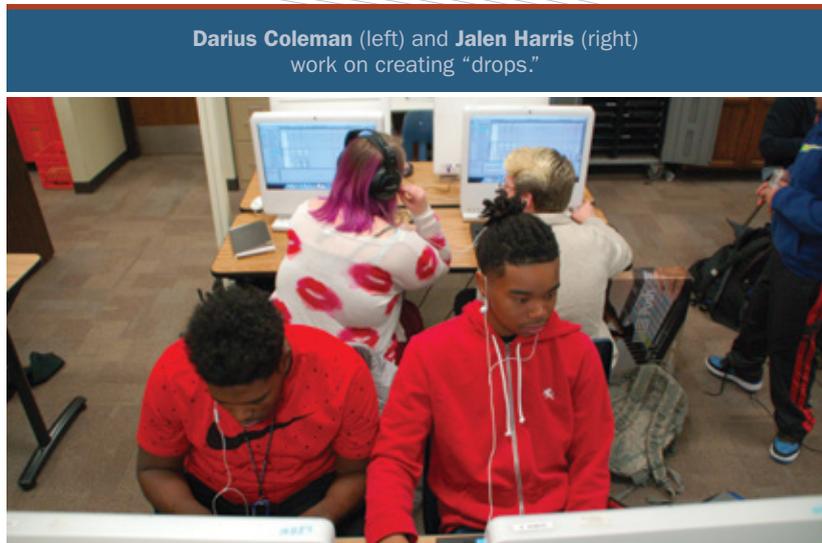
creative outlets for students. Ulrich had one student in his first semester class who, in the past, was usually late for school. But when the student had digital music first hour, he was rarely tardy. “He’ll be in here working 15-20 minutes before class starts,” Ulrich says.

### ■ Vision for Music

The Wauwatosa community and school district have long supported the arts. The district’s high schools — Wauwatosa East and Wauwatosa West — boast strong band, orchestra, choir and theatre departments. Despite its many music programs and opportunities, the district wants to see music education continue to evolve in Wauwatosa.

“Our biggest vision is music for all,” Hayden said. “Anyone who wants to be involved in music can be.”

Hayden, who just joined the school district as high school orchestra conductor this school year, was awarded the Melvin F. Pontius Creative Sparks in Music Education Award by the Wisconsin Music Educators Association in October 2016. The award recognizes “imaginative, creative, and innovative teaching practices in a music education setting.” Hayden received the award for work done in his previous position at the Whitnall School District but he brings the same inno-



**Darius Coleman** (left) and **Jalen Harris** (right) work on creating “drops.”

novative practices and outlook to his work in Wauwatosa.

In his role as orchestra teacher, Hayden is a big advocate of individualizing learning and using technology to help his students grow as musicians. He works with students to set personalized goals. “They have more buy-in when they set their own goals,” Hayden said.

In a large-group class like orchestra, it can be hard to give students individualized attention and guidance. Hayden has students record themselves using their district-issued laptops. This creates a back and forth dialogue between him and his students and allows him to give individualized guidance.

Additionally, students build a portfolio of videos and can see their progress.

The benefits of playing an instrument have been well documented with connections to improved brain function and reading and math skills. Additionally, by playing an instrument in a group, students hone listening skills and build aesthetic and emotional capacities.

“It teaches them to be global students, to listen to others, and to be able to communicate with those around them,” Hayden said. “For me, it’s not just about teaching them music, it’s helping them to learn.”

### ■ Embracing Change

Hayden and Ulrich want to expose more students to the benefits of playing and creating music. The good thing is that in many ways, it’s easier than ever to create music.

“It used to be that you needed to know how to play an instrument to create music,” Ulrich said. “That’s not the case anymore. Students can create music using technology.”

Anyone with a computer and an internet connection can produce digital music or record their own music. In Wauwatosa, students use Ableton Live, professional-grade music producing software. The software comes with hundreds of drum samples and instrumentation. Students can add audio effects to the samples and layer the samples on top

Teacher **Will Ulrich** (left) provides feedback for **Parker Stark** in his digital music class.



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of each other to produce their music. “This is really a form of coding,” Ulrich said. “Students use templates to create something new.”

The school was fortunate to acquire the software for free through a partnership with Ableton. Ulrich says the district wouldn’t have been able to afford the software otherwise. But Hayden said there are good, free internet-based programs that students can use to make digital music (see sidebar). Digital music classes can be an option for schools anywhere.

“If you have some kind of technology, laptop or computer and you have access to the internet, you can make music,” Hayden said.

Although this is a new form of music class, Ulrich said students still

learn traditional music terminology and concepts. In addition, students are learning concepts unique to digital music and to the software itself. Ulrich admits that it can sometimes be challenging to stay ahead of the students but he said this creates moments where students step up and teach other students about a concept or aspect of the program.

Looking ahead, Ulrich said interest in the class will continue to grow and he thinks an advanced digital music class could be a possibility.

“I really think these students are just scratching the surface of what they’re capable of.” ■

*Shelby Anderson is the editor of Wisconsin School News.*



## Free Music Programs

**Free, internet-based programs** recommended by Michael Hayden, orchestra director at Wauwatosa East High School, that students can use to produce music.

- ▶ [Soundtrap.com](#)
- ▶ [Soundation.com](#)
- ▶ [Audiotool.com](#)

Notation-based programs used to create music compositions:

- ▶ [Noteflight.com](#)  
*(notation-based composing software)*
- ▶ [Flat.io](#)

**Wauwatosa East High School** bassists warm up with scales during class.

