Heartland Music Together

Arts Programming Overview + Teaching Artist(s) Bio

The arts programming staff at Heartland Music Together comprises a dedicated team of early childhood music specialists led by Center Director Katie O'Dea. Bringing extensive experience in music and movement education, the faculty includes registered instructors Lorna Dries, Katie Duvall, Sandy Sumpter, Magda Peña, and Leslie Meng, alongside apprentice instructor Clare O'Dea.

Every programming staff member has successfully completed the rigorous Music Together® teacher training program. This background requires passing live auditions and comprehensive musical assessments to demonstrate elite capabilities in vocal pitch, rhythmic movement, and interactive leadership. Grounded in contemporary research regarding early childhood development, this professional team specializes in fostering an inclusive, family-centered environment across the Greater Louisville and Bowling Green regions. Their collective focus ensures pedagogical integrity, community growth, and the cultivation of lifelong musical competence for thousands of local families.

Heartland Music Together provides research-based early childhood arts programming through distinct in-school and out-of-school-time tracks. Both pathways utilize integrated music and movement curricula designed to develop basic music competence—such as singing in tune and keeping a steady beat—while supporting broader cognitive, social, and physical milestones.

In-School Arts Programming:
The In-School Curriculum integrates comprehensive music education directly into the daily schedules of partner preschools, daycares, and elementary schools, such as the Village School of Louisville. This programming model features five core elements: Specialist-Led Classes: Highly trained music specialists visit classrooms weekly to lead interactive, developmentally appropriate music and movement activities. Professional Development: Classroom teachers receive training and ongoing services to confidently lead musical activities throughout the regular school day. Family Engagement: School programming includes physical and digital take-home music components to bridge the gap between classroom learning and home routines.

Out-of-School-Time Arts Programming:
Out-of-school-time programming consists of public community classes scheduled six days a week across multiple studio locations in the Greater Louisville and Bowling Green regions. These programs focus heavily on family-centered, multi-generational learning and include: Mixed-Age Family Classes: The cornerstone program where children from birth to age 5 gather in informal circles with parents or caregivers for singing, instrument exploration, and rhythmic movement. Babies-Only Classes: Specialized introductory sessions tailored strictly for non-mobile infants (birth through 8 months) and their

caregivers. Music Together® con Español: Mixed-age immersion sessions that integrate Spanish and English song collections to introduce secondary language skills through musical play. Rhythm Kids® and Camps: Active, rhythm-focused classes and camps engineered specifically for older pre-K through 3rd-grade students, incorporating advanced drumming, animal rhythm stories, and music games.

Artistic Content of Programming

The artistic content of Heartland Music Together programming is rooted in an intentionally designed, culturally rich, and multi-genre musical catalog. Rather than limiting early childhood education to standard nursery rhymes, the curriculum utilizes a three-year rotation of distinct song collections featuring 44 unique songs per year. The artistic structure emphasizes: Diverse Tonalities and Meters: Children are exposed to complex musical frameworks beyond major keys and standard duple meters. Content includes songs in minor and dorian modes, as well as complex triple and asymmetric meters (such as 5/8 or 7/8 time signatures), providing a sophisticated foundation for auditory development. Global Musical Styles: The programming spans authentic traditional folk music, jazz, blues, classical arrangements, and global world music. Songs are researched for cultural integrity and often recorded in collaboration with musicians from those specific heritage traditions. Expressive Creative Movement: Sessions incorporate large-motor movement, structured folk dances, and tactile instrument play utilizing rhythmic shakers, sticks, drums, and colorful scarves. Improvisation and Vocal Play: To foster artistic agency, activities deliberately feature "songs without words" (using open vocables or phonemes) alongside open-ended prompts where children co-create lyrics, offer spontaneous physical choreography, and experiment with vocal pitch.

Heartland Music Together evaluates program efficacy by tracking developmental benchmarks through both standardized qualitative tools and observational frameworks. Outcomes are measured using three distinct methodologies: 1. Formative Behavioral and Musical Indicators Instructors and administrators track qualitative success metrics through documented parental reports and classroom milestones, which include: Spontaneous Music-Making: Observing children initiating vocal play, making up original songs, or humming outside of class routines. Auditory and Vocal Accuracy: Evaluating a child’s expanding capability to duplicate short tonal patterns or match pitch with the instructor. Rhythmic Synchronization: Measuring a participant's emergent physical ability to independently mirror a steady geometric beat during live drumming or movement.2. Integration with Standardized Early Childhood Assessment Tools For in-school programming, the curriculum is mapped directly onto established academic evaluation systems. This allows partner schools to gauge progress using standard early learning metrics: The Creative Curriculum® Assessments: Utilized to track quantitative growth across cognitive, language, and physical developmental domains. External evaluations by groups like the Michael Cohen Group have verified that participating children achieve statistically significant gains in cognitive problem-solving and language development compared to non-participating peers. CLASS® (Classroom Assessment Scoring System): Used to measure the quality of teacher-child interactions. The musical activities are evaluated based on dimensions like "Regard for Child Perspectives" by measuring how effectively student-focused improvisation supports autonomy, leadership, and emotional regulation. Head Start Framework Alignment: Progress is monitored

against the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework to verify that musical engagement directly satisfies state and federal standards for early socio-emotional development and effortful executive control.

Educational Content of Programming

The educational content of Music Together is rooted in decades of research in early childhood development and music psychology. The curriculum treats music as a core learning domain that naturally accelerates a child's cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional growth. Core Music Competence The primary musical goal is helping children achieve basic music competence before the end of early childhood. The educational content systematically builds two fundamental milestones: Pitch and Tonal Development: Classes feature regular tonal pattern play, where children learn to accurately process intervals, match pitch, and sing in tune through guided vocal imitation.Rhythmic Development: Through instrument play, marching, and chanting, the curriculum helps children internalize a steady pulse, decode rhythmic patterns, and coordinate their bodies to move to a beat. The educational content is intentionally mapped to support holistic early childhood learning objectives across four major areas: Language and Literacy Growth: The repertoire uses phonemes, rhymes, alliteration, and storytelling. Singing builds phonological awareness, expands vocabulary, and strengthens the auditory processing skills required for reading readiness. Cognitive and Executive Functioning: Navigating song structures, remembering sequence patterns, and executing stop-and-go musical games exercises the brain's prefrontal cortex. This directly improves working memory, inhibitory control, and attentional focus. Gross and Fine Motor Skills: Fingerplays, pattern tapping, and instrument manipulation develop fine motor control and bilateral coordination. Large-scale movement, dancing, and rhythmic locomotion build spatial awareness, balance, and gross motor strength. Social-Emotional Maturity: Group music-making requires turn-taking, active listening, and co-regulation. The non-formal, non-performance-oriented classroom structure eliminates anxiety, boosting self-regulation, empathy, and collaborative social skills. A distinct component of the educational model is training the adults. Parents and caregivers receive real-time coaching from instructors on how to recognize and encourage their child's emerging musical behaviors (such as a brief rhythmic freeze or a spontaneous vocal response). Educational take-home materials, including songbooks and family user guides, extend this learning by teaching parents how to integrate music into daily care routines to support behavior management and home learning.

Process for hiring, training, and evaluating my performance/effectiveness.

Heartland Music Together specifically recruits responsible, creative professionals who can connect well with young children and adults. While formal university music degrees are not required, the application process mandates a selective local vetting phase: The Audition Requirement: Every potential teacher must pass a live audition before advancing. Core Competency Assessment: Candidates must demonstrate accurate vocal pitch, solid rhythmic tracking skills, and the natural leadership presence required to guide parent-child classes.2. Standardized Global Training-Once selected locally by Heartland's director, the teaching artist must undergo the parent organization's international

credentialing process: The Training Workshop: Candidates complete a rigorous 21-to-30-hour instruction block built on early childhood music development research. Focus Areas: The training covers evaluation techniques for a child's rhythmic development, lesson planning, and modeling behaviors for adult caregivers. Local Mentorship Apprenticeship: Following the coursework, teachers-in-training complete a structured 6-to-10-week local apprenticeship, learning directly under senior Heartland mentors before taking over a classroom alone. Registered Designation: Teachers must pass all phases to earn the designation of a Registered Music Together Teacher.3. Performance Evaluation and Effectiveness- Heartland Music Together sustains ongoing pedagogical quality through localized supervisory frameworks: Peer Reviews and Planning: The staff meets regularly to review classroom management strategies and coordinate performance techniques for upcoming song collections. On-Site Observations: Senior leadership, including Owner and Center Director Katie O'Dea, provides mentoring, in-class tracking, and direct feedback to ensure instructors maintain the educational standards of the curriculum. Professional Development Tracks: Teachers are provided with professional development assistance, continuing education plans, and access to advanced certification pathways (Certification Level I & II) through the parent network to refine their teaching artistry over time.

How are participants of all backgrounds and abilities included in programming?

Heartland Music Together ensures the complete inclusion of families from all backgrounds and developmental abilities by establishing a flexible, non-performance-oriented environment. Grounded in the central philosophy that every voice is valued and all children are inherently musical, the programming removes traditional barriers to arts participation. Inclusion of Diverse Abilities and Neurodivergence The program accommodates neurodiverse learners, children with physical or intellectual disabilities, and varied learning styles using tailored pedagogical strategies: The "Accept and Include" Philosophy: Classes are inherently informal. Children are never required to sit still or conform to a rigid standard of performance. Whether a child actively dances in the center, quietly sits back to observe, or vocalizes spontaneously, their unique response is accepted and integrated into the lesson. Multi-Sensory, Multi-Modal Learning: Musical content is delivered through a blend of auditory, visual, and tactile experiences. Children interact with music through large-body movement, fine motor fingerplays, tactile instrument manipulation, and vocal play, providing accessible entry points for different physical and cognitive needs. Autism-Inclusive Certified Spaces: Heartland Music Together is a recognized partner of the Autism Friendly Business Initiative via FEAT of Louisville. Staff are trained to provide a welcoming, low-pressure atmosphere that fosters shared attention, self-regulation, and natural social interaction for children on the autism spectrum. Inclusion of Diverse Cultural and Language Backgrounds Program design deliberately fosters a culturally accessible and welcoming space for families of all structures and backgrounds: Ethnomusicological Diversity: The foundational song collections feature a vast array of global music genres, distinct regional styles, diverse tonalities, and complex meters. The parent organization utilizes a specialized Song Advisory Board to ensure that all global music selections preserve historical accuracy and cultural integrity. Language Immersion Frameworks: To serve bilingual and non-Englishspeaking families, the center integrates programming tracks like Music Together® con Español. These sessions combine Spanish and English song collections,

ensuring that language is a tool for play and inclusion rather than isolation. A Broad View of "Family": Class frameworks are structurally designed to embrace diverse family dynamics. The curriculum is structured to support multi-generational learning, welcoming moms, dads, same-sex parents, grandparents, foster guardians, or neighborhood babysitters into the musical circle with equal footing.

How do I engage teachers and community center staff before, during, and after programming?

Heartland Music Together structures engagement with partner schoolteachers, child care staff, and community administrators into a continuous loop of preparation, real-time collaboration, and ongoing reinforcement. This collaborative timeline ensures that the educational, social, and emotional benefits of the arts curriculum are deeply integrated into the facility's daily environment rather than acting as a standalone weekly distraction.

How do I engage participants in the creative and learning process?

Heartland Music Together engages participants in the creative and learning process by utilizing a research-based, playful methodology that strips away the pressure of performance. By treating music as a natural birthright, the organization creates an accessible learning environment where children and adults learn by doing.