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Slashing Music Destroys Opportunities

Music is a necessity for enriching a student's life. As former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee stated, "Nothing could be stupider than removing the ability for the left and right brains to function" (MENC 2). But as research indicates, "music education is credited to improved math scores, spatial-temporal reasoning, reading, and as a tool to inspire creativity" (Moran 2). Yet today, the 'bridge' needed to connect a child's well-rounded education is falling steadily. Between 1999 and 2004, music enrollment has dropped by a rough 50%, despite the increase in the student population (1). Budget cuts within numerous school districts and the "tyranny of test scores" (1) continue to strike at the music education system, only adding to these percentages. Because of the decline in music education, non-profit organizations must continue to lobby for the preservation of music in school in order to slow the degeneration of fine arts programs.

The Establishment of Music Education and its Struggles

The inclusion of music in schools came about as a mere experiment, starting out as an after-school activity that was normally student led. However, music did not gain official acceptance until 1927 when Joseph Maddy's orchestra performed for a board of superintendents. In the early twentieth century, communal bands were in decline. In an effort to reverse those statistics, instrument manufacturers began pushing the idea of music into the school system by paying band directors' fees until they could prove their worth (*Encyclopedia of Educational*

Research 880). Over the years, the band programs began to slowly increase as the academic course loads at schools attempted to climb to higher standards, yet only one could prevail. In 2001, the Bush-mandated No Child Left Behind Act distributed continuous hits against music education programs. The act “requires that standardized testing in public schools, such that they gain or lose funding based solely on reading and math scores. It nearly ushered music education out of existence as valuable programs and learning strategies were tossed aside in order to prepare for the onslaught of state exams” (Ma). Sadly, the existence of funds will continue to determine the future of music programs today.

Music Education on the Decline

Because the inclusion of a fine arts program within a child’s life is beneficial to both their education and future opportunities, a state’s societal view of the subject should not lead it to be slashed from curriculums nationwide without proper consideration of the child’s well being.

An inferior subject

“Every student in the nation should have an education in the arts” is the opening statement of “The Values and Quality of Arts Education: A Statement of Principles” (MENC 1). When Bush issued the No Child Left Behind Act, it had initially included the arts as a core academic subject because of its importance to a child’s education (Moran 2). However, when funds lack in a school district, the music education classes and programs are the first ones to be blindly severed from curriculums across America. Districts tend to overlook the importance and benefits that music offers a student. “Music teaches the child, with immediacy and intensity, all the basic lessons of life in a civilized community, including to work together with a spirit of peace, friendship, trust, cooperation, and harmony” (McLaren). In addition, involvement in

music contributes to better memory, higher graduation rates, and the lowest lifetime and current use of all abused substances (MENC 2-4).

Figure I Average IQ Points Increase of 6-Year Old Children Involved in Music Study, 1991

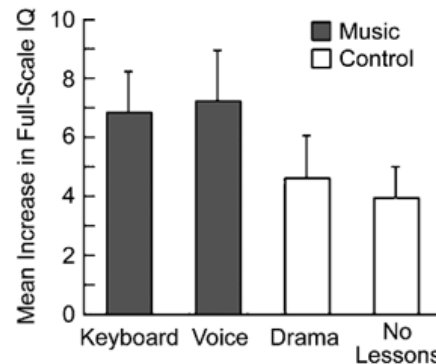


Fig. 1. Mean increase in full-scale IQ (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition) for each group of 6-year-olds who completed the study. Error bars show standard errors.

Source: E. Glenn Schellenberg, *Music Lessons Enhance IQ*, University of Toronto, 18 June 2003, Web, 2 November 2009, Figure I.

As research studies show (see fig. I), the benefits of music have been clearly outlined in the graph. A study conducted in 1991 by E. Glenn Schellenberg required two groups of 6-year old children, a control and an experimental group, to be exposed to either drama or music. The control group did not study music of any sort and only resorted to drama lessons while the experimental group had only been subjected to music studies. Results showed that children who studied within music were, on average, 3-4 IQ points ahead of those who had been involved in the drama studies or those who did not receive any lessons at all. While there were significant changes in social behaviors and patterns among the drama students, the actual IQ point increase was among the musical group. The long, focused rehearsals and the learning of fine-motor skills involved with music contributed to the IQ point increase over the drama students.

As Daniel A. Carp, Chairman of the Eastman Kodak Company remarked in regards to music education benefits, "Music is one way for young people to connect with themselves, but is also a

bridge for connecting with others” (4). But alas, the fine arts programs are deemed inferior when there are insufficient funds within a school district, and are currently declining due in part to budget cuts.

Budget cutbacks inhibit learning

Money, as the common phrase states, really does make the world go ‘round, and happens to apply to music education programs as well. Without money, little leeway exists for the classes to expand or progress. Unfortunately, with the economy in a crisis state, the school districts now endure rigorous budget cuts that force schools to sever programs in an effort to distribute funds throughout the mandatory areas of their curriculum. The programs that top the list as the first to be cancelled are, in fact, music education classes. In California, local schools have turned to eliminating the entire music education staff as part of the millions of dollars in budget cuts (Moran 1). Lance Libby, head director of the band programs at Gilbert High School in Gilbert, Arizona, when asked about the budget cuts, agrees that they have hit every department and, for right now, the band programs weren’t entirely targeted (yet). Within the Gilbert School District alone, 6th grade music festivals are no longer in existence, and now only one band director for each school band program exists, both due to lacking funds. As Libby explains, the Gilbert School District increased the minimum number of students a class must contain in order to receive a band assistant, giving them a written reason to justify depriving band classes of that much needed help. Libby also confided that without the additional help, he never has enough time to focus individual attention on the separate sections (of instruments), dwindling the effectiveness of the class as a whole (see Appendix A). Although budget cuts play a significant role in the decline of music education, the pressure of standardized tests, as predetermined by Bush’s 2001 act, contribute to the degeneration of the programs as well.

The 'tyranny of test scores'

Bush's No Child Left Behind Act includes a subsection that outlines the process of the way in which schools shall receive funding. In essence, funds are determined by the school's results of state standardized testing. With the establishment of the act, state and federal laws have made test scores more visible and consequential than ever, resulting in the removal of the school's leadership or transfer of teachers if the school doesn't make the grade. With excessive amounts of pressure on the schools to raise test scores, music performance doesn't figure into the school's ratings, and in the politics of education, the subjects that are tested are the ones that will be taught. As the schools narrow academic concentration to strictly math and reading, music teachers, along with their classes, are forced out of the bigger picture, and the No Child Left Behind Act's accountability provisions have affected curriculum decisions (Moran 1). With test scores determining a school's stability, the act has "nearly ushered music education out of existence as valuable programs were tossed aside, silencing young musicians and their classrooms" (Ma). However, despite these difficulties surrounding music education, efforts are in effect to slow the decline of the fine arts programs.

Fighting the Decline*Bring that beat back*

Even with the 'NCLB [No Child Left Behind] stranglehold [on music education]' (Ma), a nonprofit organization deemed as the CMP, or California Music Project, has committed itself to fighting and reversing the decline. Consisting of parents, artists, musicians, and students, the organization has realized that music has been waning at a much faster rate than all other academic subjects, contributing to a 50% decline in music enrollment and a half-million students and teachers who've been stripped of music and its benefits (Ma). As a San Jose State professor,

Diana Hollinger, stated, “[The meeting] was a diverse group of people who had ideas and the power to do something about this. We wanted to create a synergy that would have long-term effects for music education.” The CMP has managed to recruit famous musicians to come together and compile a music benefit CD featuring artists such as Jack Johnson, Beck, Dwight Yoakam, and Ben Harper as a way of raising money and awareness. Moreover, the organization has also partnered with the California State University System to fund a credit program for SJSU students looking to major in music education as a way of encouraging students to pursue a career in teaching music. The CMP even funds \$1,000 grants that are available directly to teachers and their students of deserving schools (Ma) as means to save faltering music programs. On top of it all, as Hollinger mentioned, “the CMP has [brought] together so many different people from all different backgrounds simply for the sake of music education.”

Save the music

VH1’s campaign, established in 2001 to restore public school music education programs, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of music education in American as well as raising awareness of the importance of music education for the youth of the nation. To extend their efforts, VH1 has expanded its campaign amongst 43 states, working closely at the community level to organize advocacy efforts and other activities with the universal goal of restoring instrumental music programs in addition to increasing access to music education for students. Bob Morrison, Executive Director of VH1 Save the Music Foundation, believes that “[the organization] can provide the much-needed support directly at the community level so that every child will be able to receive the benefits of an education that includes music.” With VH1’s various other partnerships, the organization has conducted many awareness campaigns and musical fundraising events in conjunction with public schools to fight the waning decline. Over a

span of 12 years, VH1 has donated more than \$10 million worth of musical instruments and has improved the lives of over 200,000 children across America (VH1 'Save the Music' Campaign). In addition to VH1 and The CMP, the released report, *The Sound of Silence*, has urged local school boards to avoid allowing the No Child Left Behind Act to interfere with music education programs and has called parents of the public to become activists out of their homes in an attempt to reverse the rapid decline. According to Laura Johnson, associate director of the American Music Conference, "active participation in music is vital to kids' success," and prominent organizations or advocates must continue to raise their voices on the important issue at hand (Music for All Foundation).

Libby's proposed adjustments

Lance Libby, head director of the band programs at Gilbert High School, offered some insight in regards to possible solutions in the continuous decline in music education. From his experience as a band director across the nation, he has seen, first hand, numerous Midwestern schools that have all experienced the same budget cuts, yet have managed to keep all of their teachers and programs with excessive amounts of money left over. Libby proposes that studying the frugal habits of these other school districts across the nation could provide important information as to budgeting our districts' money in order to keep teachers and necessary programs, such as music education. He also mentioned the concept of spreading taxes out among different areas as a way to stretch money to its fullest capability. Moreover, Libby hinted that teachers this year have been positioned among subjects they don't teach, and believes that a conversation with the department heads before making switches would work out probable issues and the flow of issues on and off paper (See Appendix A). With combination of the

organizations at work, the advocates for reversing the decline in music education have and will continue to be hard at work against this rising problem.

Inferences Regarding Music Decline

It would be pure idiocy to even consider cutting programs that enable a student to develop who they are as a person, create foundations for a better future, enhance one's ability to learn, and hone an individual's skills that are essential for life. Music teaches a person to connect with their inner self through the beauty of melodic sounds and provides one with the opportunity to make the most of their education. If educators are set out to provide their students with the fullest education they can offer, why would the idea of cutting the program that betters an individual even be considered? Music education instills a higher self-esteem and promotes the avoidance of substance abuse as well as boosts standardized test scores. It teaches life skills vital to living in the real world and allows one to connect with themselves on deeper levels other than the superficial personality traits. Retiring a program that provides so much opportunity for a student would be ludicrous, not to mention a mindless operation, because of the benefits it presents in an individual's life. Music education is vital in a student's life and in thanks to the efforts of organizations that share mutual feelings, the decline has been a target for reversal in the public school systems.

Join the Fight against the Decline

The declining music programs pose bigger problems than the one that is 'trying to be fixed.' As the school systems may be trying to detour around the rising budget cuts, those terminating the programs do not realize to the full extent of what the students will be deprived of and how many opportunities will be lost in the process. In regards to bettering a student's education and overall life, more people must become actively involved in raising awareness of

this rising problem in order to slow the degeneration of these vital programs. Advocates in support of preserving the music education programs must join an organization committed to reversing this growing issue and raise their voices against the illogical thinking behind these operations, for the future of tomorrow's leaders depend upon it.