

## **Articulating the Why, Mission, and Data for Effective Music Education Advocacy**

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“Music education has required advocacy to carry its message to the public since it became a curricula school subject” (Mark & Gary, 2007, p. 402). A changing educational landscape and current climate of high-stakes accountability have created the need for music education advocacy to be reframed into a systems approach to traditional enrichment. This paradigm shift for music advocacy must be literature-supported, data-driven, and aligned with the school district mission, vision, and goals.

If we believe that music for music’s sake *is* important, we must develop the appropriate vocabulary, explanations, and metaphors to effectively communicate with the administrators who control school district resources. Winning the support of these administrators will ensure that music education programs can thrive in an environment of constantly evolving educational priorities and district goals.

“Music advocacy must also attack the problem at the root, offering administrators solutions for the difficult dilemmas they must solve regarding public policy and a finite budget” (Major, 2013, p. 22). When properly presented, the combined elements of Why, Mission, and Data have the power to change conversations about reductions to music programs into discussions about expansions to music programs. The WMD approach helps to present win-win (Covey, 2004) solutions that allows student access to music education programs to grow within the context of the educational system. According to Benham (2011), we must move away from developing strategies of survival and toward considering how to effectively share our vision. The Music Education *Why, Mission, and Data* (WMDs) provide the format for sharing our vision for music education with administrators.

## **Why**

As an advocate, a music teacher or Fine Arts administrator should synthesize a research-based, literature-supported strategy for the *why* for music education. Empirical data provides the foundation for affirming or leveraging anecdotal beliefs and passions. Data from research studies also provides a relevant toolbox of arguments that the decision-maker can adopt, becoming the *de facto* advocate for music education.

## **Mission**

Tying the objectives of music education directly into the school board and district *mission*, vision, and goals is powerful technique for engendering administrative support. This practice can essentially decode the intrinsic support of the district for music education.

## **Data**

It is essential for music educators to embrace *data* driven decision-making. The truth will set music education free, particularly when applied to relationships between student achievement and district expenses. In addition, simple charts can graphically encapsulate what might otherwise take paragraphs to convey.

### **Elevator Speech: The WMDs in Action**

Pink (2011) holds that we are all involved in some aspect of sales as a part of our work, and every good sales person should be able to succinctly present the benefits of his idea, product or service during a brief elevator ride. What should be included in an elevator speech for music education? This paper will present arguments and support for the following literature and research-based platform:

Strong music education programs increase the “bang for your educational buck.”

Music classes:

- Have high potential student/teacher ratios,
- Fulfill graduation requirements,
- Help increase attendance, graduation rates, and tests scores.

Music, as an integral part of a well-rounded liberal arts education, is a high-yield investment in our students, school, and community.

### **Music Education-Friendly Authors**

Three authors who incorporate language and terminology that are familiar to school administration are Daniel Pink, Sir Ken Robinson, and Eric Jensen. These 21<sup>st</sup>-century thinkers are commonly accepted authorities of their craft as applied to education, and their work has been the subject of many staff development programs and book studies. Drawing conclusions from their research studies, all three authors have found the need for strengthening music and arts education. While some forthcoming citations will reference this arts-supporting trinity of education-friendly writers, it is well advised to synthesize their convincing messages.

### **Why Music Education?**

Research consistently indicates that a methodical approach to music and arts education enhances learning through strengthening cognitive development (Rickarda, Vasquez, Murphy, Gilla & Toukhsatia, 2010). Jensen (2009) found that these benefits can be particularly positive for children raised in poverty. According to Creedon (2011), “The arts not only build our brains, they insulate them from our stressful urban environments” (p. 34). In his March 2011 article in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, School District of Philadelphia Director of Comprehensive Arts Education, Dr. Dennis Creedon, identified the necessary role that arts play in the education of all children—especially those students with great deficits.

In addition to confirming the positive influence music education has on student achievement outcomes in reading and math, Deere (2010) contends that music education will help students learn important 21<sup>st</sup>-century life skills, such as self-discipline, diligence, and delayed gratification. Martin (2012) found that school superintendents believed fine arts education not only assisting with academic achievement, but also equipped students with better life skills.

The high-stakes, easily politicized arena of standardized testing emphasizes measurement over engagement, alienating minority students by promoting assimilation over systemic development of character and/or resiliency (Parkay, Hass, & Anctil, 2010). (Jensen, 2001) believes that instruction in the arts is not efficient and much of the value added through arts education is in areas normally not objectively measured, (p. 107). In other words, the benefits of music education take longer to manifest than the length of time an upwardly mobile administrator or elected official stays at one position.

As public education spirals toward defining achievement exclusively through correct answers on standardized tests, arts education has the potential to increase in value if it can be shown to help students to ask the right questions. The research by Jensen (2001) and Pink (2006) clearly indicates that systemic arts education helps to improve brain function and develop transferrable life skills among students. Both Jensen and Pink also claim that the benefits of arts education are a pragmatic necessity for the future of the American economy. In this context, the paradigm of arts education as a process for making a handful of professional artists must shift to arts education as a process for creating a competitive workforce of professional people.

### **Liberal Arts Education**

Music has been a component of a liberal arts education “since the medieval university” (Lapp, 2012, p. 28). As part of the system-wide benefits to high quality fine arts programs, music education is an essential facet to a well-rounded liberal arts education.

Success in the arts is a result of a body of work: a portfolio of tangible achievement that cannot be assessed through a snapshot provided by one test on one day. In contrast to the *law of the school* where cramming and regurgitation is tacitly or purposefully promoted, Covey (2003) describes the natural processes of education as requiring their due time as in the “*law of the farm*” (p. 81). The arts help to break free from the law of the school and move toward instituting a new set of rules, including rewards that are achieved through relationships.

The arts help schools to emphasize relationships as the center of study, making education a more meaningful and rich experience (Nathan, 2008). Embedded in the study of music are opportunities to experience the elements identify by Pink (2010) as essential for realizing personal satisfaction: *autonomy, mastery, and purpose*. Music education can provide stability for education based on personalization, building achievement around the discovery of individual talents of children and creating customized environments in which students want to learn and can find their true passions (Robinson, 2009).

### **What About After?**

Recent research indicates that the cognitive benefits of instrumental music education positively manifest later in life, well after students are no longer involved in the study of music (White-Schwoch, Carr, Anderson, Strait, & Kraus, 2013). In other words, years of consistent music study has been shown to have significant effect on brain function even after a three-decade gap in participation. In addition, Jensen (2001) points out that there is zero downside risk in terms of engaging in music education.

Although institutions and administrators may seem to wish for a top performance rating that equates to magazine-cover model appearance for their district, the net result may be a quick-fix that amounts to academic bulimia. The good news is that the arts offer an alternative to the quick-fix along with viable balance. With properly aligned efforts, the community of advocates for music education has the capacity to help our students and nation prepare to answer the alarm sounded by Pink (2006). The future of the American economy may well rely on the development of right-brain characteristics, skills, and talents among our students.

### **Mission Possible**

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new paradigm for funding for education was created by the federal government, connecting resource support to decisions previously left to the states (Mark & Gary, 2007). High-stakes accountability has changed how local resources are allocated, so it is now crucial that advocacy reflect the hearts and minds of local stakeholders.

Tying advocacy strategies to the school board's preferences and the district's mission, vision, and goals adds relevance and weight to the case for music education, because the "mission statement defines the fundamental, unique purpose" for a school district (Hunger & Wheelen, 2007, p. 6). In general, district stakeholders influence the development of mission statements, so congruence between the message of music advocacy and the direction and values of the district should appeal to stakeholders. Being familiar with the preferences of the school board and the district's mission, vision, and goals can also inform the promotion and packaging of requests to enhance the local music program.

District and campus improvement plans are additional tools that can be used to buttress music education initiatives. Because these documents are commonly progress-monitored, whatever is listed reveals what is typically more frequently addressed. From dropout prevention

to enhancing outcomes on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), there are many sections of district and campus improvement plans to which music education can be linked; therefore it is essential for music educators to serve on campus planning committees in order to promote music education.

### **Drive Home Data: Set the Bar (Graph)**

The climate of high-stakes accountability coupled with diminishing resources creates an environment in which music educators must not leave financial allocations or investments in music programs to chance. The good news is the value of music education has research and data on its side.

### **Music Education and Student Achievement**

Campuses with higher participation in fine arts classes report increased academic achievement, higher campus ratings, higher attendance rates, and lower dropout rates (Texas Music, 2014).

Figure 1.1 **Higher Graduation Rates Consistently Reported with Higher Fine Arts Enrollment** (Texas Music, 2014)

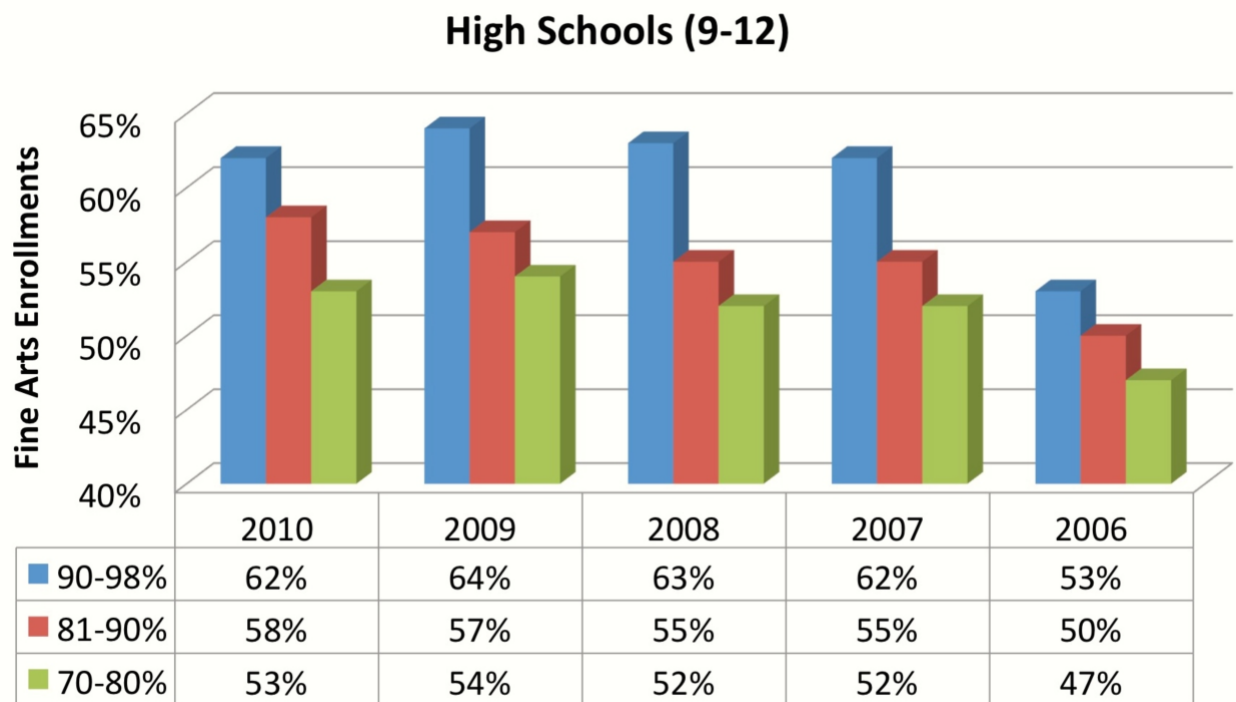


Figure 1.1, using Public Education Information Management System data supplied by the Texas Education Agency, demonstrates that campuses with higher percentages of students enrolled in fine arts courses experience higher graduation rates.



Correlations exist between the longitudinal study of the arts and increased academic achievement. Students of the arts consistently out perform their non-arts peers on national standardized tests. Figure 2.1 shows fine arts students record SAT scores 11 to 13 percent higher than non-fine arts students.

**Figure 2.1 Students Enrolled in Fine Arts Courses Score Higher on the SAT than those with no Fine Arts Coursework (TMEA, 2011).**

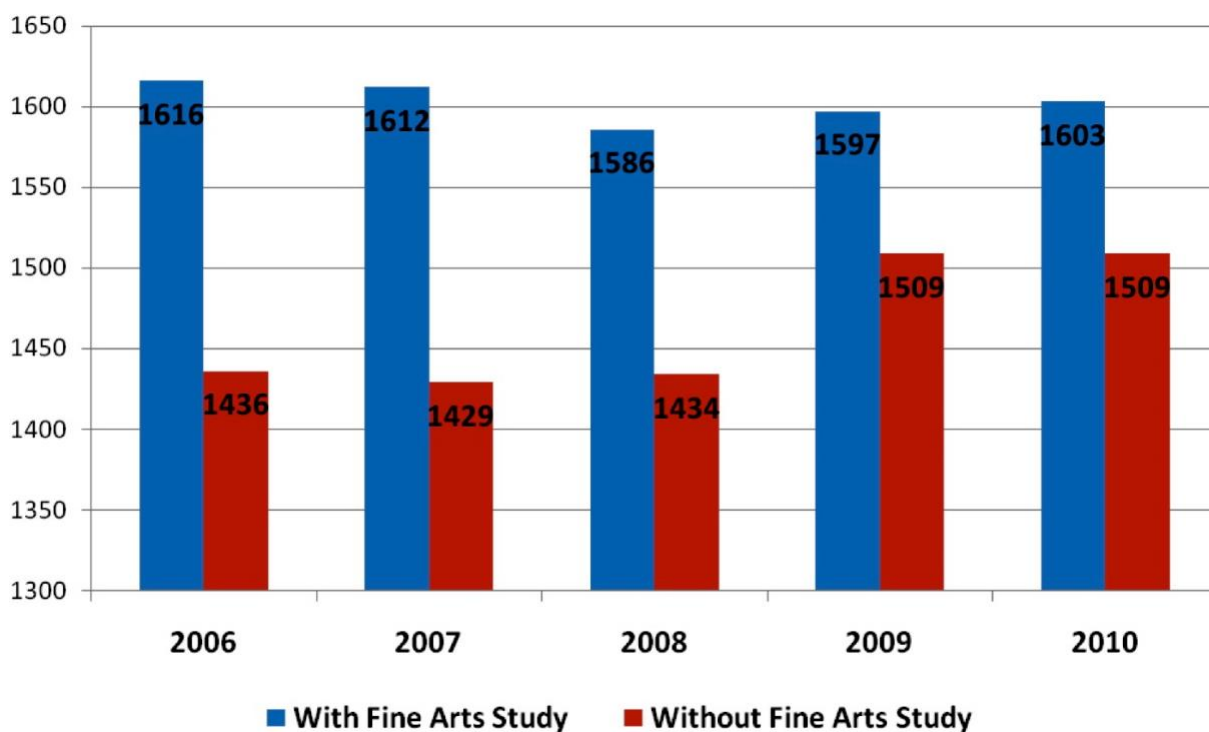


Figure 2.1 presents data from the College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Reports from 2006–2010 show that students enrolled in fine arts courses score from 11% to 13% higher than students not enrolled in any fine arts courses. (TMEA, 2011)

As Jensen (2001) points out, there is overwhelming evidence that cognitive development is enhanced through music training. In contrast, it may be argued that the benefits of music education are self-fulfilling, because students with strong academic achievement records are often drawn toward music participation. Regardless of divergent perspectives on the causal effects of music study, most stakeholders would probably prefer for students in their district to be on the *taller bar* of the bar graph (Figure 2.1). Figure 2.1 is an example of a graphic presentation of data can be a powerful ally.

Focusing on high schools, Waller (2007) confirmed his hypothesis that “music students out perform their non-music counterparts in academic achievement, attendance rate, and student conduct” in his Virginia-based dissertation. Focusing on 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade outcomes in reading and math, Deere (2010) documented the positive effects of music study on student achievement in her dissertation “The Impact of Music Education on Academic Achievement in Reading and Math.”

Further, the *quality* of the arts program has been found to be related to academic achievement. In their article in the *Journal for Research in Music Education*, Johnson and Memmott (2006) explored relationships between a school’s standardized test scores and the relative quality of the school’s music programs. Johnson and Memmott found significantly higher achievement scores among students in excellent music programs compared to lower achievement scores among students in deficient music programs. Given the data correlating student achievement with quality music education, advocacy efforts should be focused on providing access to high quality music education for all students.

**Economic Implications**

Many do not realize that strengthening and improving in-school music programs can actually save money (Benham, 2011). The first administrative quick-fix for alleviating a budget shortfall is often reducing or eliminating music programs. However, music classes usually have high student-teacher ratios, so cutting music programs and/or Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) at the beginning level actually has negative longitudinal cost implications (Benham, 2011).

Figure 3.1 **Eliminate 5.2 FTE: Projected Savings—\$156,000** (Benham, 2011, p. 157)

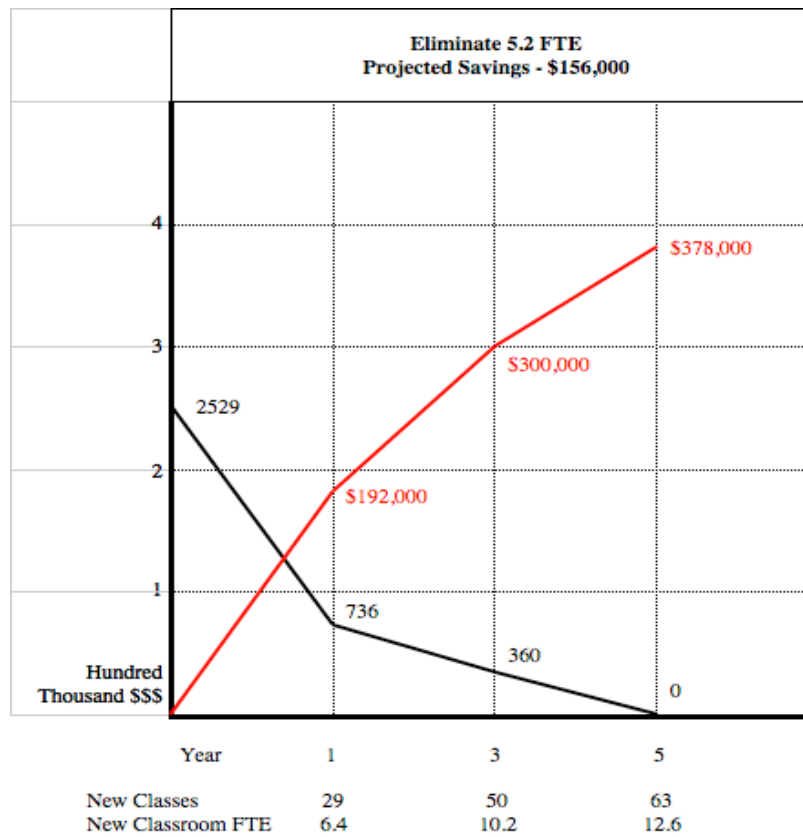


Figure 3.1 demonstrates a reverse-economic effect of \$534,000: 1. \$378,000 to house students in low student to teacher ratio classes, plus 2. \$156,000 anticipated savings.

Figure 3.1 demonstrates that “by year five (of cutting 5.2 music FTE)...the district would have needed to hire 12.6 cumulative classroom FTE for sixty-three classes for former instrumental music students at a cost of \$378,000. Added to the anticipated savings of \$156,000 this would have amounted to an annual budget miscalculation—reverse economic effect—of \$534,000” (Benham, 2011, p. 156).

Essentially, music cuts offer initial cost savings; however districts are then forced to add additional FTEs to provide elective classes with low student-teacher ratios for students in the upper grades who would have otherwise taken music classes, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1. Benham (2011) warns that “Any circumstance that causes a decline in student enrollment or prevents students from participation will have a negative cost effect on the district budget” (p. 95).

### **The World Economy**

Outperforming many more advanced countries, China's education system has been as spectacular as its economic expansion (Sharma, 2011). With less systematized accountability over the past 30 years, China has been transforming its education policy. Chinese educational reform has focused on cultivating all-around, well-developed citizens who are creative, independent, and more capable of competing in the world economy (Zhao, 2004).

Unfortunately, the benefits that research has shown to be provided by American music education simply does not have the glamour necessary for political traction. Academic programs of Japan require music, art, and moral education (Whitman, 1999), and China focuses on developing a creative citizenry. Citing studies and data, Creedon (2011) advises that “for those who feel that we can’t afford arts education, we must remind them about the cost of a child who

drops out of school or becomes incarcerated. A full education that includes the arts is the insurance we pay for our nation's democracy" (p. 36). In sum, related to economics this literature demonstrates cost savings to bolstering music education that are both locally fiscal and geo-political.

### **Conclusion**

Purposefully providing access to high quality and sequential music education is an integral part of a back-to-basics approach to a *renaissance of traditional enrichment*. Increased emphasis on student experience through systemic music education, as part of a well-rounded liberal arts education, is a practical method for countering the effect of the fast-food approach to quality control of snowballing test standardization as manifested through high-stakes accountability.

The communications strategy proposed to help accomplish this goal is: Music Education *Why, Mission, and Data* (WMDs). Music Education WMDs is a literature-supported, data-driven, systems approach to advocacy under the banner of the school district mission, vision, and goals. The resulting elevator speech reads:

*Strong music education programs increase the "bang for your educational buck."*

*Music classes:*

- *Have high potential student/teacher ratios,*
- *Fulfill graduation requirements,*
- *Help increase attendance, graduation rates, and tests scores.*

*Music, as an integral part of a well-rounded liberal arts education, is a high-yield investment in our students, school, and community.*

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