

Music Education in America: How Far afield Are We from *Vision 2020*?

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## **Music Education in America: How Far Afield are we from *Vision 2020*?**

As professionals, music educators have often struggled to maintain a place of equality for music in compulsory education. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), formerly Music Educator's National Conference (MENC), asserted in its mission statement that it has worked since 1907 "to ensure that every student has access to a well-balanced, comprehensive, and high-quality program of music instruction taught by qualified teachers" (NAfME, 2014a). Evidence from a broad range of disparate fields including neuroscience, sociology, psychology, learning science, cognitive therapy, physical therapy, and linguistics suggests that the experience of music cognition proffers significant and unique benefits to individuals. (Alexandria 2013; Brown and Parsons 2006; Collingwood 2014; Baird and Sampson 2013; Flohr 2010; Ludke and Ferreira 2014; Overy 2014; Peterson 2011). Despite this fact, recent years have seen significant reductions in public school music programs (Bloom 2015; Pergola 2014; Hambeck 2016).

NAfME's document *Vision 2020*, published in the year 2000, charted a course for the next 20 years of the profession, and was intended as a statement of utopian optimism as music education entered the new millennium (Madsen 2000). The *Vision 2020* authors articulated a philosophical rationale for the study of music and, by extension, justified the necessity of music education in public schools. Among the influences the authors anticipated would affect the future of music education were rapid demographic change, emerging data from the field of neuromusicology, an ever-evolving technological revolution, and changing societal attitudes towards music education. Yet while each of

these variables did lead to transformation in subsequent years, none of them proved to be the most significant forces of change.

Instead, that distinction belonged to the far-reaching implications of the standards-based No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the economic collapse of 2008, realities the authors of the document could not have foreseen. Despite the good intentions of NCLB, the educational reform it spawned led to what many educators now view as a *dystopia* for U.S. education. As we approach the year 2020 with a newly elected administration and continued challenges for the inclusion of music as a curricular offering in public schools, it is important to consider the aspirations of the *Vision 2020* (Madsen 2000) authors in light of historic developments and newly emerging evidence of the effects of music on the individual, in order to best articulate the value of music and music education in a broad and comprehensive American curriculum.

### **Idealism and Imagination for the New Millennium**

Four of the six *Vision 2020* papers identified the philosophical underpinnings of most educators' music education advocacy efforts. As professionals, we believe that (a) music has innate value; (b) the study of music proffers benefits that are unique to music and cannot be achieved through study in other areas; (c) music should be treated as cognitive and academic in nature, should be included in school curricula, and should have a standardized curriculum; and (d) all people should be meaningfully engaged with music across their lifespans, just as they are meaningfully engaged with language (Madsen 2000). Utopia for the profession represents a circumstance in which all people are aware of and support these ideas.

Arguably, the two most important questions to consider are (a) What is the nature of music and its value for individuals and societies, and (b) What is the rationale for the study of music? More than any other variable, lack of information about the answers to these questions leads to the exclusion of music from the curriculum and the perception that music classes are “extracurricular” and therefore unnecessary in programs of academic rigor.

Reimer (2000) opened *Vision 2020* with a treatise entitled, “Why Do Humans Value Music?” He begins:

Whenever and wherever humans have existed music has existed also. Since music only occurs when people choose to create and share it, and since they have always done so and no doubt always will, music clearly must have important value for people. What is that value? (25)

Reimer (2000) identifies five shared values that enable music educators to examine the nature of music, justify its value, and articulate a rationale for its study:

1. Music is end and means.
2. Music encompasses mind, body, and feeling.
3. Music is universal, cultural, and individual.
4. Music is product and process.
5. Music is pleasurable and profound.

First, Reimer asserts, music provides its own justification; it does not require validation from other academic areas or creative endeavors. As a music educator I agree, but I recognize that the public might not understand *why* this is so. How can we justify music as an autonomous academic subject? Although some researchers have sought to

link the study of music to increases in the efficiency of other types of cognitive processing—and therefore to suggest that music makes one “smarter” (Alexandria 2013)—most of the data emerging from the field of neuromusicology points to the *unique* nature of music cognition.

Some scholars have identified similarities between musical and linguistic processing (Bluestein 2000; Gordon 2012), theorizing that the human brain is innately equipped for processing syntactical sound systems. Such claims are buttressed by neurologists who suggest that both musical and linguistic processing incorporate hierarchical organizational structures for sound, meaningful content, and reference. Yet other researchers caution that “evidence from brain-damaged individuals, as well as recent neuroimaging studies, challenge the link between language and music at the level of structural processing” (Perrachione et al. 2013, 1).

In addition, definitive structural adaptations appear to result from studying music, among them increased brain plasticity and overall activity, and an increase in the size of the auditory and sensorimotor cortices, as well as the corpus callosum (Peterson 2011). Further, Alluri et al. (2013) reports that music activates the auditory, motor, and limbic (emotional) regions of the brain simultaneously. The auditory cortex processes the sound, the motor cortex processes rhythmic information, and the limbic regions fire sympathetically, creating an emotional response in the listener.

In addition to structural changes in the brain, studies of neural activity point to activation throughout the brain, rather than in a single music-processing center, supporting the idea that musical processing is a whole-brain activity (Flohr 2010). During musical processing, areas of the brain coordinate synergistically in a way that does not

occur with any other activity; moreover, music seems to increase the connection between brain hemispheres. Finally, evidence exists that the capacity for musical processing is innate, as infants seem to have a predisposition for musical processing and prediction (Peterson 2011). Overwhelming evidence from neuromusicologists suggests that musical processing is *unique*, conferring different neurological benefits than other cognitive activities. Reimer (2000) suggests that one of the advantages of musical processing is that it is “a way to ‘know’ what cannot otherwise be known” (26).

The second universal value Reimer (2000) identifies among music educators is the understanding that music as a medium encompasses mind, body, and feeling. Much of the neurological data supports this claim: clearly, there are cognitive (mind), physical (body), and limbic (emotional) components to musical processing. Most humans experience mental representations of musical sounds via active cognitive processing and physical sensations, including a compulsion to move rhythmically and other phenomena such as galvanic skin response (VanderArk and Ely 1993). As humans experience these responses while listening to or creating music, they simultaneously experience sympathetic (and subjective) emotional responses.

Despite the distinctive and vital benefits of music education, the U.S. educational system places a disproportionate focus on subject areas that emphasize Descartes’ (1596-1650) “pure intellect.” Reimer (2000) asserts that as long as this system endures, the arts—which involve a complicated interaction of cognition, emotion, physical sensation, and action—will always be secondary. In addition, he asserts that a variety of forms of intelligent musical functioning coexist, manifested in such distinct tasks as composing, performing, improvising, listening, and “thinking in sounds.” Reimer observes that this

type of thinking “is an act of intelligence, reason, thoughtfulness, rationality, intellect and mindfulness” (33) that is infused with feeling. It is noteworthy that although affective responses to music are an undeniable part of each listener’s experience, they may also be the most difficult elements to quantify and categorize, and are therefore easily dismissed by the academic world.

The third shared value Reimer (2000) identifies is the cultural, individual, and universal nature of music. Music is cultural in that it is produced within a given culture and communicates information about that culture. It is individual in that each person’s response is unique and subjective. At the same time, music is universal in that it is found in every human culture, and this is perhaps the most compelling argument for its value. The universal experiences of music include emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, the sharing of musical experiences and meanings with others, entertainment, and spiritual fulfillment (Reimer 2000). In addition, music validates and stabilizes social norms and establishes connections among humans of the past and present across the globe.

The universality of music across all time periods and cultures is well established. Peterson (2011) observes:

Study of archaeological artifacts and current cultures that have little contact with the modern world has produced the theory that music is a universal element of the human experience. No culture exists or has existed without some form of music. (209)

Indeed, although many textbooks begin their historical examination of Western music with the Greco-Romans (Bonds 2011; Forney and Machlis 2007; Grout and Palisca 1994; Kamien 2008; Weiss and Taruskin 1984; Yudkin 2008), archaeological evidence

suggests that humans' engagement with music predates recorded history (Huron 2001; Service 2013; Sousa 2009; Turk 1997). Turk (1997) asserted:

The fossil record demonstrates that humans (and our close evolutionary relatives, the Neanderthal) have produced music for many millennia. To date, the oldest known musical instrument is a bone flute excavated from the Divje Babe site in Slovenia. Carbon dating shows that it is a minimum of 43,000 years old. (777)

Archaeologists also found a bone flute in southwest Germany they believe to be approximately 40,000 years old; the flute was displayed as part of the British Museum's Ice Age Art exhibition in 2013. A point of interest is that it plays the pentatonic scale (Service 2013), a mode with five notes per octave that still provides the foundational tonal material for elementary music methods in many schools across the U.S. today.

Reimer's (2000) posits the fourth shared value as music simultaneously process and product—uniquely verb and noun. For most people, Reimer suggests, the construct of “music” is conceived of as a noun, referring to a product possessing attributes the listener defines as musical. However, Reimer reminds us that these attributes are only one aspect of music's value. No product can exist without the process that created it, an important distinction for music educators. Teachers of music are intrinsically interested in the process of making music. They cultivate skills that aid in creating musical works, both written and aural, in addition to those that allow the interpretation and decoding of musical symbols so the works can be recreated. The *process* of learning to manipulate all of music's dimensions yields the *product*, and music arguably embodies both of these interdependently.

Reimer (2000) posits music's fifth value as its quality of being both pleasurable and profound. The pleasurable qualities that result from listening to or creating music abound. Music is an element of almost all forms of entertainment and has a "singular capacity to arouse or elicit experiences that are amusing, uplifting, and delightful" (Reimer 2000, 41). In addition, music has the capacity to provoke deeply meaningful experiences in listeners and to communicate significance beyond the commonplace. Beyond textual information, music conveys sounds that embody meanings more significant than words alone can impart. Reimer suggested that these meanings may be part of the reason for the intimate connection between music and the sacred throughout history.

Reimer (2000) acknowledges that pleasure and profundity are both qualities of feeling, and that the affective nature of music is the most subjective aspect of the human experience of music. These qualities are inherently difficult to evaluate, as attempts to do so must rely upon a self-report of the listener or performer. However, Reimer suggests:

The human capacity to feel—to consciously experience one's self and one's world subjectively, including sensations, emotions for which descriptive words exist (love, fear, joy, etc.), and complex feelings for which no words exist—is at the heart and center of the human condition. In a real sense, to feel consciously is to be human. (41)

Although it might be given the least credence in the academic world, the affective domain is what makes musical experiences singularly penetrating.

Following Reimer's (2000) analysis of music's value, Gates (2000) addresses: perhaps the second most important question of advocacy for music educators: a rationale

for the study of music. If, as educators, we believe all persons should study music, *why* should they study it? In the preamble to its mission statement, NAFME (2000) asserts that, “every individual should be guaranteed the opportunity to learn music and to share in musical experiences.” Its mission, simply stated, is to “advance music education by encouraging the study and making of music by all” (Peterson 2011).

Each music educator must have a reasoned and ready response to this question. Gates (2000) suggests that to consider the question would cause music educators to invite personal risk, as it requires justifying why music study is valuable and necessary. Although present circumstances are challenging for music programs across the United States, at the time of *Vision 2020*'s publication, Gates (2000) suggested:

Music education and education in the other arts are in competition for funds and policymakers' attention during the rapid development of high-stakes, standards-based graduation examinations in so-called basic subjects. School administrators attend workshops on how to motivate teachers to raise standards, usually understood to mean that test scores in reading or mathematics, etc. should go up. They are hearing the policy assertion, “If it isn't among the graduation tests, it doesn't belong in the school.” (59)

Educational resources are always scarce, and competition for these resources is therefore highly competitive. In this context, advocating “music for all” is justified by the recognition of four interactive and overlapping types of growth that result from music study: advances in cognitive capacity, evaluative insight, knowledge, and skills (Gates 2000).

Despite recognizing the difficulty of quantifying and categorizing the affective domain of music, Gates (2000) suggests that certain hypotheses about music cognition can be supported through quantitative research. For example, he posited that the organizational capacity of the brain—its ability to organize sound into patterns and to derive meaning from that sound—increases with music study. Moreover, researchers have found that more of the brain is engaged during the processing of musical information than during the processing of linguistic information (Brown, Martinez, and Parsons 2006). Further, music cognition in any form seems to arouse other closely linked brain functions (e.g., spatial reasoning, attention, and perception). Therefore, Gates suggests that music could be a carrier for other information, and could benefit other forms of cognition.

Moreover, when combined with other modes of learning, music can serve as an effective memory tool. Ludke, Ferreira, and Overy (2014) reports that while attempting to learn Hungarian, study participants performed much better if they sang phrases. Ludke et al. suggests that melodic information might provide an extra cue that helps learners embed information, which also assists with retrieval. This phenomenon is the reason early childhood educators often use songs to teach students information that would otherwise be difficult to memorize and recall (e.g., the alphabet or the continental states).

As music therapists have long recognized, music can also be a strong tool for healing damage to the brain. In a literature review on the use of music therapy with patients suffering from traumatic brain injuries (TBI), Collingwood (2014) asserted that music can help patients recover movement following brain damage. In addition,

Collingwood suggested that therapists could use music to assist patients in regaining synchronization of movement, speech, emotions, and the senses.

Baird and Sampson (2013) reported that when patients with TBI listened to number-one songs from throughout their lifetime, they were better able to recall people and periods from the past. Researchers at the University of Helsinki (2008) found that stroke patients who listened to music daily were better able to recover verbal memory and attention, and that their moods improved more than those who did not. Recent studies in neuromusicology point to music's role in language processing, cultural learning, memory, neural plasticity, stroke rehabilitation, and autism treatment (Altenmüller et al. 2012). Such findings support the recognition of music cognition as a whole-brain activity that creates a unique neural network of normally unrelated brain regions that interact synergistically.

More broadly, Gates (2000) argues that music study “contributes uniquely both to the general and specialized education of people” and that “people create, communicate and derive unique meanings from music” (75). He asserts that music study empowers learners by advancing cognitive complexity and insight and that music study “results in, depends upon, and rewards personal excellence” (75). Finally, Gates posits that a vital part of the purpose of compulsory education is to “promulgate cultural values, promote community, integrate people with society largely through cultural and social means, reduce isolation, and promote an advanced tolerance for diversity” (75). Music study combines these purposes into single occasions and provides an effective means to accomplish all these ends.

To provide a measure of the need for music education, Gates (2000) asks, “What would music in society be like in 2020 if all music instruction programs were closed tomorrow, from Kindergarten through graduate school? Would people still study music? Would America be better off?” (75). Although we have not seen the complete elimination of all music instruction programs since the publication of *Vision 2020*, a serious and debilitating reduction of funding for and focus on arts programs has occurred (Bloom 2015; Pergola 2014; Hambeck 2016). Given music’s significance, its inherent value for individuals and communities, its vital role in every human society past and present, and its numerous cognitive and emotional benefits, such constriction or elimination of music education programs indisputably impoverishes us both individually and societally.

### **Education Policy Gone Awry**

Despite the optimistic predictions of the *Vision 2020* authors, and despite the generally positive outlook for education programs in 2000, changes in education policy led to unintended negative consequences for arts programs in the United States. Following publication, persistent problems in many school districts, including achievement gaps between socioeconomic and racial groups, led President George W. Bush to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Among other policies, NCLB codified the reporting of test scores as well as graduation and retention rates, which dramatically (if unintentionally) harmed music and arts education. Its consequences have been catastrophic not only for arts programs, but also for the U.S. educational system more broadly.

In 1994, Congress published *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (P.L. 103-227 1994), which legislated standards-based education and called for establishing national standards in all curricular areas. To its credit, *Goals 2000* formally recognized music as a core curricular subject. However, although *Goals 2000* identified music as a core subject and NCLB required standardized testing, it did not specify which subjects should be tested (Branscomb 2012). As a result, while the emphasis on math, science, and language significantly increased, the focus on traditionally non-tested subjects such as music proportionally decreased.

At the core of NCLB were a number of measures designed to drive gains in student achievement and to hold states and individual schools more accountable for student progress. Among these measures were annual testing, academic progress reports, report cards, increased teacher qualifications, and funding changes. Annual testing in reading and mathematics was mandated for grades 3 – 8 by 2005 – 2006. Elementary, middle, and high schools were required to test science at least once by 2007 – 2008, and these tests must align with state academic standards. Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) was to be measured, and states were required to bring all students to the level considered “proficient” by academic year (AY) 2013 – 2014.

Schools were required to meet AYP goals (based on a formula) for their entire student population as well as demographic subsets. If a school receiving federal Title I funding failed to meet the target two years in a row, it would be provided “assistance” and students would be given a choice of other schools to attend. If a school failed to meet AYP goals three years in a row, it would be offered “assistance” and students would be

provided with private tutoring. With continued failure, a school would be subject to outside corrective measures, including governance changes (The White House 2014b).

With regard to teacher qualifications, NCLB stipulated that by the end of AY 2005 – 2006 all teachers in core areas must be “highly qualified.” This was defined as completing at least two years of college, obtaining an associate’s degree or higher, or passing an evaluation to demonstrate an acceptable level of knowledge and teaching ability in a specific content area. Additionally, changes to the Title I funding formula led to expectations that NCLB would distribute more resources to school districts with high concentrations of lower-income children.

Although NCLB appeared, on the surface, to be a feasible measure to address low student achievement, concerns about the legislation grew, particularly concerning AYP. Traditionally high-performing schools began to make headlines as they failed to meet required rates of improvement. By the year 2010, 38% of schools failed to meet AYP goals, up from 29% in 2006. By 2011, several states saw failure rates over 50% (Rebora 2004).

The impact on arts programs was significant. Beveridge (2010) identified the troubling implications for subjects not evaluated for AYP, the basis for all federal funding, “especially those courses that are typically considered electives” (4). Beveridge asserted that specific problems for arts classes stemmed from a combination of the ways states carried out assessment and the manner of funding these efforts. AYP benchmarks were intended to identify areas of need to close achievement gaps. However, schools that failed to meet AYP were placed on probationary status and required to implement strategies to improve scores using their own funds (Chapman 2004).

Following the market crash and subsequent recession beginning in 2008, accompanied by statewide budget cuts, funding for non-tested subjects was affected first as available resources were directed at areas tested for AYP. Although the arts may be tested under NCLB, achievement in these areas does not affect future funding; thus schools had no incentive to test these areas. As a result, “The consequences for the arts include[d] everything from the elimination of instrument repair budgets to the loss of entire teaching positions and programs” (Beveridge 2010, 4).

There is considerable evidence that the high-stakes testing environment has affected scheduling. Beveridge (2010) asserted:

In my own district, for instance, it is a common practice for seventh and eighth grade students to lose their only elective class if they fail the state test. However, in a class such as a music ensemble, in which each student relies on the others for success, this kind of policy sabotages the success of the entire group, particularly if students are pulled out or added midyear. (5)

In addition, teachers and principals may use “enrichment” subjects to reward students, allowing them to return to a “fun” class only if they work hard in a remedial class (Beveridge 2010). Beveridge aptly noted that this system sends the message that the effort students invest in music classes is not valid. It undermines the professionalism and expertise of arts educators, “casting them as peripheral, rather than essential, players in a student’s education” (5). Adding insult to injury, NCLB allowed the hiring of “teaching artists” instead of certified arts educators, while requiring that core teachers be “highly qualified” to teach (Chapman 2004).

Beveridge (2010) recounted that one Texas superintendent compared AYP goals to basketball, suggesting that if one could not make lay-ups, one would have to work on lay-ups. Beveridge notes that the obvious flaw in this logic is that no basketball game was ever won via lay-ups alone. Although increased time for intensive reading and math may assist in raising standardized test scores, focusing exclusively on testing in these areas will fail to prepare students “to be successful in anything but the most menial tasks and jobs” (Beveridge 2010, 6). Emphasizing rote memorization in a limited learning context will not equip students to think and act creatively and innovatively.

The Council of Chief State School Officers has characterized the arts and other non-tested subjects as “the lost curriculum” since the implementation of NCLB, and the Council on Basic Education cited the de-emphasis of these subjects as evidence of curricular atrophy (Chapman 2004). Grey (2010) noted that the impact of NCLB may be to regard the arts as equivalent to recess, as purely extracurricular activities, or even to eliminate arts programs altogether. A survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy found that 71% of schools had reduced instruction time for non-tested subjects, and that many elementary schools offered arts for only nine weeks of the academic year (Grey 2010). Additionally, although NCLB initially included the arts, funding for arts programs was cut in 2003 as a result of the Bush administration’s policy of terminating small programs with limited impact on curricular goals (Chapman 2004).

In “Why It’s Time to Replace No Child Left Behind,” Webley (2012) argued that NCLB created a culture of teaching to the test, narrowed the curriculum, and placed unnecessary pressure on students and teachers with little appreciable payoff. Webley noted that NCLB was intended to identify schools that were failing their students so the

federal government could provide resources to assist them. In practice, however, neither of these outcomes has occurred, and it is generally accepted that the legislation was flawed.

However, little consensus exists regarding how to move forward. NCLB was up for reauthorization in 2007; however, instead of significantly revising it, lawmakers allowed the original legislation to remain on the books (Webley 2012). NAFME (2007) responded by publishing *The Benefits of the Study of Music*, in which it cited the “harsh reality of limited time and funding” (1) for music education programs. The report noted that both school schedules and funding for music were being diverted to subjects for which NCLB required accountability testing.

In addition to the negative effects of NCLB legislation, music programs have faced shrinking budgets resulting from the financial meltdown of 2008 and the subsequent recession (Major 2013). Between 2002 and 2012, the unemployment rate more than doubled (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012), lowering tax revenues and increasing the difficulty of passing tax levies to support public education. As the economy declined, school districts were forced to meet AYP goals with decreasing funds. As a result, administrative priorities shifted dramatically to tested subject areas. National statistics on music education indicate that schools have decreased the total minutes allotted to music classes during the day, and have seen a concomitant decline in enrollment (Major 2013). Some schools have eliminated kindergarten through grade 5 music classes altogether, while others have laid off teachers, reduced budgets, and/or demanded that remaining teachers work overloaded schedules.

Scholarly and anecdotal evidence of such cutbacks abound. For example, in the county in which my university is located, music teaching positions are distributed among several teachers who rotate between schools. Full-time middle and high school music directors taught in band and choral programs until 2009, when budget cuts caused administrators to eliminate the middle school positions and cover all levels of music with a combination of elementary and high school teachers. This situation is detrimental to students and teachers for a multitude of reasons. Music teachers specialize within age disciplines; thus a high school band director is often not trained to teach elementary general music. Moreover, the health and vitality of music programs depends on recruitment and growth, neither of which can effectively happen when a teacher is limited to one or two classes per school.

### **Reforming Dystopia: A Renewed Vision**

The negative consequences of NCLB are plentiful and pervasive, not merely for arts programs but for teaching and learning in general. To offset these detrimental effects, in 2011 the Obama Administration proffered flexibility from NCLB to states that agreed to actively strive to “close achievement gaps, promote rigorous accountability, and ensure that all students are on track to graduate college” (The White House 2014a). The administration acknowledged that NCLB “encouraged states to lower standards and narrow curriculum, focused on absolute test scores instead of student growth and gains, and created one-size-fits-all federal mandates” (The White House 2014a).

The White House (2014a) stated:

Although NCLB started a national conversation about student achievement, unintended consequences of NCLB have reinforced the wrong behaviors in

attempting to strengthen public education. NCLB has created incentives for states to lower their standards; emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success; focused on absolute scores, rather than recognizing growth and progress; and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that miss their goals.

The White House (2014a) further explained that the administration's blueprint for ESEA (NCLB) reauthorization asked states to determine appropriate improvement and support options, but that because Congress would not reauthorize ESEA, the administration had moved forward to provide increased flexibility for states and districts.

By November 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (2014) had granted waivers to 43 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, with other applications pending. Implementation of the increased flexibility from NCLB was left to individual states, as they grappled with the obligation to document academic achievement and report graduation rates. Finally, on December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the ESSA [(Every Student Succeeds Act) S. 1177].

A reauthorization of ESEA (1965), ESSA retained the use of college- and career-ready standards, annual statewide assessments of all students' learning, student performance targets and school ratings, and accountability interventions and support developed by each state with dedicated funding for the lowest-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education 2016). The newly authorized ESSA named music and the arts as core curricular subjects, finally granting them equal footing with other subject areas and acknowledging the narrowing of the curriculum that occurred under NCLB. The

legislation specifically called for “well-rounded” education to include music and the arts, and advocated promoting arts education programs in schools (NAfME 2016).

I am hopeful that state-led initiatives will be more effective in overhauling educational policy than the top-down mandates of NCLB. However, attempts to elevate the status of music education in schools must occur from the ground up. Music education has been marginalized among academic subjects because of a widespread lack of understanding of the nature of music and a failure to recognize the value of music learning. As a result, advocacy efforts must begin with individual educators. It is crucial for each educator to inform themselves and remain abreast of the latest advocacy research. The federal recognition of music and the arts as valid curricular subjects is a welcome step forward, but policy change alone cannot replace the vital need for grassroots advocacy within individual schools and districts.

A wealth of new information from the field of neuromusicology emerges each year, reinforcing the finding that music cognition is a unique and profound phenomenon. Evidence from the social sciences and therapeutic organizations, as well as from the field of medicine and psychological organizations, overwhelmingly confirms that music is an influential agent for good in people’s lives. Evidence from educational researchers continues to demonstrate correlations between participation in music programs and academic success in other areas, greater self-confidence and social adjustment, and general success in life (NAfME 2014b). Moreover, these benefits are conferred alongside affective experiences that plumb the depths of human emotion.

Music educators must have a well-reasoned and ready response to the question, “Why should music be offered in schools?” Each must be able to articulate the value of

music and music education—in our immediate sphere as well as to a broader audience. They must become involved with advocacy organizations and must work to educate students, colleagues, and supervisors of the value of music education, and of how important it is for students to have access to music instruction. They must communicate the importance of what it is that they do, and must explain how critical it is for students to have access to music instruction. Advocacy efforts must occur at the district, state, and national levels. Music educators must support those who lobby on behalf of the profession and must become actively involved in professional organizations. Music organizations must work in conjunction with organizations in other educational areas not as distinct entities with distinct agendas, but as partners advocating for the betterment of education as a whole.

All educators must jointly acknowledge that the problem is far more significant than the reduction or elimination of music education in schools: it is the *loss of creativity in the curriculum*. They must continue to assert vociferously that with the narrowing of school curricula, our schools began neglecting to teach students to “think outside of the box.” They must emphasize that in the absence of arts education, schools fail to equip our students to become individuals who have the necessary tools to experience and contribute to the world to their fullest capacity. Finally, as a nation, we must acknowledge what did not work. In the aftermath of NCLB, our students are not smarter. They are not more equipped to enter the workplace, nor is our nation better positioned to compete in the global market. Emphasizing test scores and instituting a rigid curriculum did not advance, but diminished American education.

Although music education is a distinct field of study, music educators must continue to assert that they are an integral part of school curricula, and that the goals of education should not be to teach students *what to know*, but *how to think* creatively and imaginatively. They must focus on cross-curricular connections that enable students to transfer learning to other disciplines and to real-world situations, and they must continue to articulate the value of music and music education as we approach the year 2020.

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