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The Consequences of Cutting Music Programs in K-12 Public Schools

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Introduction

The very first singing school in the United States was in 1717 in Boston (Glavin). More than a year later, the Boston Academy of Music was established by Lowell Mason and George Webb in 1832 (Glavin). The Boston Academy of Music is a huge and prestigious school for musicians. Many people dream of going there because of the history it has and the knowledge that is displayed and taught from that school. In the United States, music education in its current form started for the first time with this school (Glavin). This was the first time that the concept of a teacher following a music book to teach music appeared in American musical education. Once it became known, the school became the model for all the other schools in other cities and states to start following their styles of teaching (Glavin).

Music education started out as its own school and then started being incorporated into schools that didn't focus on just music. During the 19th century when public schools started to get more enrollments, there was the start of more bands being created. According to the website "History of Music Education in the United States" one of the types of bands that started during that time were marching bands because there were more marches being composed. The National Education Association (NEA) was established for the music division starting in 1894, but in 1907 was when the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME) was established ("History of Music Education in the United States"). In the 20th century NAfME established A Child's Bill of Rights in Music which "advocated for children to have the free opportunity to explore their musical abilities" ("History of Music Education in the United States"). In 2015 the Senate passed the Every Child Achieves Act ("Senate Passes Every Child Achieves Act"). This

act is described as “a bipartisan educational policy reform bill that would expand state responsibility over schools, provide grants to charter schools, and reduce the federal test-based accountability system of the No Child Left Behind Act" (“S. 1177: Every Child Achieves Act of 2015”). This act should help the school districts be able to keep music programs in their schools because they are being funded by the government to keep programs open.

Despite historical support for music education and contemporary support in the form of bills like the Every Child Achieves Act, music programs have been cut from many schools, especially public schools. Public schools are funded by taxes, unlike charter or private schools that are funded by outside sources. The music programs in K-12 public schools are one of the first things to be talked about when talking about cuts in the district.

Reasons Music Programs Are Cut

When thinking about music programs getting cut, there are many reasons why it can happen. Every district and every school has their own specific reasoning as to why these programs can be cut. Some of the reasons for the program to be cut could be budgeting and funding, people in the school district who don't fully understand the effect that music has on the students, and lack of teachers being able to teach classes.

As a whole, those who make these decisions have to look at how much money they have and how to distribute it. Districts and schools have many different programs and clubs they have to fund, so administrators look closely to see what clubs or programs should get what amount. With many subjects in need of funding, music programs can find themselves at a lower priority:

In an age of increased accountability and educational standardization accompanied by tighter budgets and fewer funds, core subjects, such as math and reading, receive more

funding and instructional time in public schools, while noncore subjects, like music, potentially face reductions or elimination in budgets, programs, and staffing. (Major 6) Particularly when challenging circumstances lead to reduced budgets, this prioritization of subjects identified as core can leave music programs vulnerable to cuts. Juan Sanchez, who is the Executive Director and Founder of Palenke Arts, which is a multicultural art center located in Seaside, California, explains how budget cuts are decided:

Ultimately, the Board of Education has to approve yearly budgets - but down the line, the Superintendent suggests a budget informed by the Assistant Superintendent for instruction, also informed by the site principals and Coordinator of Visual and Performing Arts AND the community through the Local Control Formula meetings/survey forms.

So, the prioritization for budgeting involves many decision makers within the school district.

The current events of the Coronavirus (COVID) have made an impact on public schools nationwide financially and teaching-wise. It has been hard for teachers for the last year to be teaching online, and it has been hard for the parents to be teachers as well to their children. A lot of people got laid off during the pandemic, especially music teachers due to the school districts not having enough funding to pay the teachers: “At the time that COVID-19 hit in 2020, K-12 schools employed 77,000 fewer teachers and other workers than they did when the 2008 recession began forcing layoffs, while the number of students had increased by some 1.5 million” (Timon). Ever since the recession in 2008 it has been hard to recover the staffing numbers as a whole and when COVID happened, it made things a lot harder and worse. COVID hit the nation hard financially, and the economy is barely starting to get back to how it was before the pandemic.

In some school district offices, administrators don't go into the schools to see how the students are doing in their classes and in the environment; they only go by what it says on paper. John Freeman, a current band director in a high school, states some reasons decisionmakers have used to justify cuts: "Choir teacher retired, perceived lack of student interest, higher staffing priorities." Speaking in terms of faculty at the schools, there aren't as many music teachers in schools for the fact that districts are not making it a priority. Lourdes Flores, currently a high school biology teacher, states that "probably [due to] funding or staff availability" some schools don't offer music classes in elementary, and they start in middle schools. If the district or school doesn't have a teacher for it, there isn't a way to have the program; hence why it gets cut.

Negative Effects of Cutting Music Programs

When thinking about music programs there are many things people miss, but the main thing is the effect it has on the students. Music affects students in many ways, academically and personally. A lot of these students don't get exposed to music education unless their school offers it, and they may not get the opportunity to play or use an instrument unless it's from the school. There are a few negative effects that cutting a music program has on students.

For many students, school isn't the thing for them, and for many students school is their thing. Within every person there is a motivation and a drive that they have to keep them going. In this case, the students who aren't very fond of school can have this motivation and drive to go to school if they are excited for their elective, which can be music. For these students, "taking it [music education] away from them is basically saying that their interests aren't of importance, so much so that the school is eliminating it altogether" (Regoli). This demonstrates that not only will taking the program away will make them not as interested in school and make them be

absent more, but that it will make them feel that their interests aren't important. Lourdes Flores stated, "I have seen students show up to school because of the music program, it is what motivates them to continue attending school. Students find comfort and support among the music program community and losing that would be detrimental for their mental wellbeing." Once students are absent more than they lose motivation to continue school after high school, the likelihood of them to go to college lowers, especially for those in lower income families (Regoli). Their motivation for school can easily be taken away if music programs are cut. Since the music program is usually considered an elective, if they take out the music program then there would be less access to electives (Freeman).

Many students are going through many things in life, either personally or something at home. In the adolescent stage especially, students have trouble expressing their emotions and understanding their emotions. There are many things that students can turn to that will help a bit, but the most common thing that students turn to is music. If music programs get cut, students may not know how music can help them express themselves, or they will not be able to express themselves as much as they would if the program was still there (Regoli). For those students who get interested in playing and performing music, they also use that as a way to express themselves because they are able to connect with what they are playing. Those who write music are able to express themselves as well. Not only are they unable to express their emotions and themselves through music, but students lose their creativity outlet. Ashley Mireles, currently a middle school multiple subject teacher, stated, "Students also do not have a creative outlet, and I've seen the creativeness diminish in the classroom after the program was cut." If they lose their creativity outlet, then they will lose a huge amount of who they are. Julie Jaeger, a current English high school teacher stated, "Students suffer and have no outlet for their musical passions." Many

students find that music is their passion by having the music program be in their schools, and when they lose the outlet for their passion, it does take a toll on them.

Students who are involved in music learn many different skills. Music helps students get out of their comfort zones, learn how to perform in front of others, and get out of their shells to be able to talk to others. Not only does music help students develop those social skills, but it also helps them develop acceptance of “others who aren't like themselves” (Heibutzki). Although music has an effect on a student's life and personal skill set, it also impacts their education.

Music and Academics

The connection between music and academics is huge. Music and academics can go together, and music impacts the brain. Studies have determined that music has a huge impact on brain activity (Regoli). Arts can stimulate the brain and help enhance aspects of its function that may not be used as often. Some ways music and academics correspond to one another are by the effects music has on students' test scores, music's cognitive development effect, and the skills taught through music.

Music has helped students' standardized test scores. Those who had a musical background tested higher in the English, reading, and science portions of exams (Johnson and Memmott 294). Ten years later there was another study done that shows that the scores in the math section in the standardized tests completed by students who had studied music was significantly higher than other subjects (Johnson and Memmott 294). Also with no music in one's life, test scores are lower than those who have music in their life (Regoli).

An approach that can help someone learn how to memorize something is learning an instrument or singing a song melody. There are many ways that music can help students

academically; an example of how it can help is by students using melodies to help memorize things for exams. One subject that music helps with studying is math (Chandler). There are lots of videos and lots of songs that help with memorizing math equations and math formulas. An example of this would be in elementary school, to help students learn their multiplication. Teachers and some videos on YouTube have song melodies to help students memorize the multiplication. An example of how the song works is Miss. Clarke's Multiplication Song, which goes through the multiplication tables of two to twelve (Clarke). The way they do this is that they take a song and use the melody and get the beat of it and instead of singing the actual lyrics of the song they sing the times table.

Students learning to play an instrument learn many new skills and develop different ways to study (Mascareno). While learning an instrument, students learn how to be responsible by learning how to take care of their instruments. They learn how to take care of their instruments by learning how to clean it and how to fix minor things that happen to the instrument. It takes a lot to go perform something in front of a big crowd of strangers, and they will soon build the self-confidence to be able to perform on stage without feeling as nervous. As time goes on, they may learn leadership skills by being first chair in their section. They are the ones the band director puts in charge to make sure their section knows how to play their parts. Being first chair in an orchestra can also build self-confidence, because of the fact they are the one the band director most relies on.

Saving Music Programs

With music programs being cut and some being on the verge, there are many ways to help save them before the process happens. Some of the many ways to save music programs are

getting the community involved, creating a plan, and looking into different ways to fund the program.

In K-12 public schools, the community is very much involved. They are involved because they know someone who's going to the school, they live by the school, or the school has been around a long time so that everyone knows it and is involved in it. Some things that the community can do is write a letter to the school board, make petitions, and do fundraisers ("The Real Reason Why Music Programming Is Being Cut from Schools"). The community as a whole could help by doing these things, but the parents of children who are involved in the music programs are extremely important. A former band director Joshua Alvarez said, "Last but not least, parental voice and support is especially important to help save music in schools. Parental voice is most powerful to let district boards and supervisors know that music is important to them and their children." The community speaking up to the school district helps a lot more than they think, but there are more ways to help than just doing that. They can help by volunteering and supporting the music program (Flores). The music programs have events and the community can help by volunteering because if the school district hears how much help there is for events, then they may consider keeping the program. Supporting the program can go a long way; seeing all the support can also make the school district consider keeping it because of how important it is to the public and students in it.

When wanting to get something done, there have to be plans. There are a few plans that can happen to help save the music program from being cut. The first plan would be to talk to the school district, specifically the people who have control in making budget cuts (Regoli). Talking to the school district and taking an interest helps push to keep the program. The second plan is to show and share the values of the program importance to the school district, stakeholders, and the

community (Freeman). Having facts and statistics help the argument to save the program be taken seriously by the school district. The last plan is to get the community, families, and students in the program to advocate for the importance of the program while demanding it not to go away periodically (Sanchez). Advocating and demanding gives off that the people are serious about this and are determined to get what they want. Having efficient and well thought out plans will help in the outcome down the road.

Funding any program, not just music, can be a challenge because the school districts may not want to fund it and will find a way not to. There are other ways to help fund these programs. One of the ways are instrument donations and grants (“How to Secure Funding for Music Education for Public Schools”). Donating instruments helps the band director and school district save money on buying instruments, and they may just have to spend money on repairing the instrument, which is cheaper than buying a new one. There are many grants available that could help a music program and should be given to programs on the verge of getting cut from their schools. Anita Thomas, a former elementary school teacher, suggested another way to save music programs is by getting outside donations. This can help greatly by getting donations of different things at once to help fund the music program. There could also be fundraisers that can happen throughout the year to help reach their goal. For example, there can be raffle tickets, car washes, and baked goods sales.

Conclusion

Music programs in K-12 public schools have been cut for many years. The decision makers of what to cut in the schools are the superintendent, the school board, the principal, and the school district. There are many reasons why these programs are cut. Some of those reasons

are funding, the decision makers not understanding the effect music programs have on students, and not having enough teachers be able to teach. There will always be an issue with trying to budget for everything evenly, and it will always be a concern for everyone involved. A lot of those people in the school district don't come and see how the students are doing in school and don't realize how important things may be to them and just go off of what they see on paper. Nowadays it's hard to find music teachers or even art teachers; it's not as common. Some of the academic requirements have changed and will continue to change. The reasons given for cutting the program are understandable, but there are two sides to every situation.

Looking at these on the other hand of the situation, there are many drawbacks to cutting music programs. Some of these drawbacks are the attendance of students will decrease, students' academics will suffer, they lose the chance to be creative, and they lose some social skills. It has been shown that some students enjoy music and that it's their drive to get them to go to school and get them through the day. If they lose that, then they will feel different towards everything. This has a much greater impact on them than others think. They are going through a lot while going to school, and the removal of a musical outlet can add more onto them. This can also affect their performance in school. Students might not want to go or they won't show up to school, which means they won't learn new things in school. Not only will their performance in school decrease, but their brain development will be negatively impacted.

Although the reasons for cutting music programs are strong on all sides of the situation, there are ways to save the program. The community can speak up how they feel about the music program, and having community involvement helps show the importance. There can always be a plan in motion to help out. These plans should be done by the families of those students involved, the community, and the school faculty who support the music program. Lastly, there

can be grants given to the program to help fund them in their needs and donations of any type. Instrument donation or monetary donation will help in long and many ways.

Music programs are constantly getting cut all around the world. Music programs help students in many ways. This topic goes a bit under the radar, and it should be brought up more than it is. The decision makers should take all the negative effects into consideration next time they have to decide on taking any program. There are ways to save it, but it takes everyone around to help save it.

Appendix: Interview Questions and Answers

Interview #1

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Lourdes Flores

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 7 years

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: Longer than 20 years

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: No

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: School board, if this was the case but thankfully not the case at IHS

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: Not the case but probably funding or staff availability

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: If the program was cut; loss of save community for the students involved, loss of benefits such as scholarship opportunities, motivation, and engagement. I have seen students show up to school because of the music program, it is what motivates them to continue attending school. Students find comfort and support among the music program community and loosing that would be detrimental for their mental wellbeing.

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: None besides adding that money somewhere else in the budget

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: Promoting the benefits, fundraising, educating people on the importance of music education, volunteering, and supporting music programs even if you are not directly involved with them.

Interview #2

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Joshua Alvarez

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 1

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: 20+ years

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: There have not been any discussions on cutting the music program at the school I am currently working at.

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: The middle school music programs are funded by the District, any decisions to cut the middle school music programs would be determined by district personnel.

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: Thankfully there have been no cuts or talks of cuts to the music program at our school.

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: Cutting a music program is a huge loss for students. Removing this elective opportunity means removing an opportunity for growth. Music supports mental, emotional, and social growth and development that other programs cannot offer in the same way. When music programs are cut, students are left without an opportunity to develop in ways that only music can provide.

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: I have not heard of any positive effects of cutting music programs. If there are other elective opportunities on campus, some may view it as an opportunity for students to expand their choices. I do not view it in that same light. There is nothing positive about eliminating the music program at a school.

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: Music must be deemed a priority at the district, county, and state level. The first priority should be to see all students exposed and have an opportunity to learn a musical instrument, or develop their voice. Additionally, schools must prioritize this in their budget to support the program with instruments, uniforms, and the appropriate materials needed to be successful. Last

but not least, parental voice and support is especially important to help save music in schools. Parental voice is most powerful to let district boards and supervisors know that music is important to them and their children.

Interview #3

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Julie Jaeger

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 28 years

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: At least 30 years

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: no

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: The school board and superintendent

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: N/A

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: Students suffer and have no outlet for their musical passions.

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: More money for other electives and trade programs like ROP

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: A nearby district has had yearly fundraisers to fund their music programs.

Interview #4

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Juan Sanchez

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 5 years - to clarify I do not work for the school, but rather work for Palenke Arts, an multicultural arts center

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: Not sure - the program expands and shrinks periodically

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: not at this time - during the pandemic all of the music program was placed on hold - now things are getting restarted

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: Ultimately, the Board of Education has to approve yearly budgets - but down the line, the Superintendent suggests a budget informed by the Assistant Superintendent for instruction, also informed by the site principals and Coordinator of Visual and Performing Arts AND the community through the Local Control Formula meetings/survey forms.

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: N/A - I run an independent nonprofit that leases space from the district

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: In this particular school district there is an uneven distribution of resources and priorities. For example, it is incredibly difficult for our families to receive private instruction, All of the instrument instruction is done in a group setting, so there is a huge disadvantage with wealthier communities who can afford \$100/hr private lessons - which of course yield much better results.

When classes are cut altogether for a couple of years (as it happened during the pandemic) they have devastating consequences down the line: the pipeline of musicians with strong fundamentals is suddenly cut - middle school bands do not receive elementary school kids with knowledge of the instrument, high school bands are also decimated or have much lower quality. Additionally, (and incredibly important to our work!) we are dealing at the school district level with predominantly EUROCENTRIC classical music forms - there is a very little emphasis, if any, in studying other cultural musical traditions or art forms. We offer, for example, Afro Caribbean and West African percussion, traditional Mexican folkloric music, as well as present artists from all over the World.

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: Money is saved. Musicians get to look for a more lucrative path to employment. Campuses are less noisy and pets seem to have a more peaceful time. (Sorry - I had to use some humor!)

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: I think that the effort has to be done by different strata in our society: at the Federal and State levels, music education should be considered a core competency and budgeted/offered CONSISTENTLY throughout pre-k-12 education. Universities should likewise train more qualified music educators in traditional and nontraditional music, electronic, contemporary, etc. Nonprofits need to step up their efforts to continue filling in the gaps. The general public, families and students need to SPEAK UP and advocate for the importance of these programs and DEMAND that they don't go away periodically - holding elected boards of education accountable for the lapses in funding. Finally, teachers and administrators need to continue being trained consistently on the value of music education.

Interview #5

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: John Freeman

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 8 years

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: 64 years

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: Band - No; Choir was cut this year; unclear on possible return timeframe

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: Site administration, district administration and school board

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: Choir teacher retired, perceived lack of student interest, higher staffing priorities

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: Loss of student access to electives, reduced opportunity for school involvement, reduction in community appearances through performance

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: Redistribution of staffing/funding, additional facility availability, lower budget expenses, less scheduling conflicts

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: Shared values of program importance by shareholders at site, district and community. Examination of actual financial costs as music classes can carry "oversized" classes compared to other classes.

Interview #6

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Ashley Mireles

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 11 years

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: This is our first year without a music program. We've had one for the past 5 years before this year. We do offer a keyboarding elective for students who are interested.

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: Due to our SIG grant (School Improvement Grant) coming to an end, music was cut this past summer.

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: Our superintendent and principal

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: The two reasons that were given were:

1. Lack of student interest
2. Lack of funding

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: The students who were interested in music lost the one thing that helped them look forward to school. We are a small school with limited opportunities for extracurriculars. The opportunities that do not involve sports are even more limited.

Students also do not have a creative outlet and I've seen the creativeness diminish in the classroom after the program was cut.

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: We were able to expand the physical education program with another teacher, so PE classes are smaller and not overcrowded. Other than that,, there has not been any positive effects.

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: Fundraising

Getting students interested at a young age

Parent involvement

Community involvement

Various musical opportunities (choir, band, musical production, etc.)

Teachers can help increase involvement by incorporating music into CORE classes.

Interview #7

Question 1: What's your name?

Answer: Anita Thomas

Question 2: How long have you been at the school?

Answer: 15 years

Question 3: How long has the music program been at the school?

Answer: Only available during after school program

Question 4: Has there been talk about the program getting cut?

Answer: Yes

Question 5: Who would be the decision makers for the music programs being cut?

Answer: District office

Question 6: If your program has been cut or has been at risk of being cut, what were the reasons the decision makers gave for the cuts?

Answer: Budget cuts

Question 7: What negative effects from cutting music programs have you seen?

Answer: Lack of exposure to the art of music

Question 8: What are the positive effects of cutting programs have you heard?

Answer: None

Question 9: What are the ways to save music programs from being cut?

Answer: Outside donations

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