

Music Education Advocacy Post ESSA

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In December 2015, history was made when music education was included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as a subject that should be taught to all students. No longer should a student's education focus solely on core academic subjects that were mandated through testing by the federal government. We now find ourselves in an environment that seems more favorable at the federal level for music educators than we have seen in years. While it may seem an appropriate time to rest on our laurels, this is the perfect opportunity to create momentum and strengthen music programs across the country as new federal philosophies, and the funding that goes along with them, are often challenged in their infancies.

Using federal funds effectively to enhance your music programs through state and local advocacy will show lawmakers that their investment was the right one. The flexibility of these federal funds means that they are available for the use of music programs. Nothing written in ESSA requires that these funds be used for music education, but we can steer decision makers by showcasing what we all know: music changes a student's life for the better.

Moreover, with great power comes great responsibility. Being enumerated in the federal K-12 law of the land requires us to live up our civil rights obligations. Are we truly doing our very best to ensure music learning for all students? Advocacy on all levels is intertwined with our commitment to learning equality. Creating robust advocacy efforts in all these areas will bring us closer to the goal of a quality music education for all students.

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ESSA's Commitment to a Well-Rounded Education

While just a small percentage of education funding comes from the federal government, federal policy has helped set the tone for education policy at the state and local levels since President Lyndon Johnson first signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. ESSA, ESEA's latest iteration, has changed the philosophy from a focus on the "core academic subjects" to a commitment to "well-rounded subjects," which includes music education. Well-rounded programs within ESSA provide a flexible framework for federal funding to be used by states and local school districts to supplement a strong, well-rounded education.

Title I, Part A, perhaps the most historic section of ESSA, seeks to improve basic programs for disadvantaged students. One way it prescribes to do this is by providing well-rounded funding for schoolwide programs in schools that receive Title I, Part A, funds (determined through a funding formula based on U.S. Census Poverty), and through targeted assistance funding to individual students. Efforts are already under way to further clarify that funds for Title I, Part A, recipients can use well-rounded funds for sequential standards music education and community-based music programming. For individual students, music advocates are seeking to clarify that targeted assistance funding can be used for instruments, sheet music, and other expenses associated with music programs. The results of these advocacy initiatives will largely be driven by how successful music advocates are in navigating these funds toward their local music programs. In the early years of Title I, funding was used to enhance music programs across the country.¹ The opportunity exists to head toward those heights again.

Title II, Part A, of ESSA offers funding for the recruitment and professional development for well-rounded educators. Distribution of Title II, Part A, funds are done annually by each state to each district through a funding formula with heavier weight given to districts with higher poverty. The House of Representatives requested the elimination of this program as recently as 2018 until professional development advocates, which included music educators, forced them to reconsider. Advocacy saved the program, but future dedication to

advocacy will be necessary to ensure its survival.

Potentially the most impactful program for music education found in ESSA is Title IV, Part A, Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG). This program is designed to ensure that local school districts have access to programs that foster safe and healthy students, increase the effective use of technology in our nation's schools, and provide students with a well-rounded education. If fully funded and administered in the way ESSA intends, nearly every school district in the country would receive an annual allocation that they could use toward well-rounded funding that includes music education. The advocacy in support of Title IV has been powerful, resulting in substantial funding increases. In Fiscal Year 2017, the program was funded at \$400 million, just a quarter of ESSA's authorized funding level of \$1.6 billion. Through advocacy, that number has raised to \$1.17 billion in Fiscal Year 2019.

It's essential that advocates for music understand and participate in the comprehensive needs assessments associated with Title IV, Part A, funding. Needs assessments are being utilized by school districts to determine and identify where access may be lacking for their students, such as in music education. After identifying the deficiencies, school districts create a plan to address those needs, which become a part of their funding request to the state department of education. After receiving the funds and implementing a plan, districts reevaluate the outcomes and repeat the process again the following academic year.

Music advocates can be involved with, and should volunteer for, their school or district Title IV planning committee, as it creates a needs assessment and evaluates programs. Advocates are uniquely qualified to identify and incorporate the needs of music programs into Title IV, Part A, plans. Invite parents and business and community partners to be part of this work too, as they can be key stakeholders for a school district. Encourage the district fine arts coordinator to join the conversation so the district understands its specific assessment and funding needs. Finally, be sure to document successes by sharing anecdotes with lawmakers and other music advocates. Doing so showcases the need for the grant program to continue and provides fellow music advocates a template to succeed in their own districts.

Higher Education Policy Must Align with ESSA

The Higher Education Act (HEA) was enacted by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 with the goal of strengthening the educational resources of our colleges and universities, and to provide financial assistance for students in post-secondary education. President Johnson signed the historic legislation in the gymnasium of his alma mater, Southwest Texas State College. Today, this college is Texas State University and is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI; the term “Hispanic” was not an official government term until the 1970s) as defined by later amendments of the Higher Education Act. The symbolism could not be more important today, as HEA is slated for reauthorization. Texas State University has a diverse music program that includes signature degree programs in Latin music studies, sound recording technology, and jazz performance. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) like Texas State University should have federal resources available to fund all programs for its students. Unfortunately, HEA does not explicitly provide resources for higher education music programs, although ESSA makes clear that music is one of twenty-one subjects that comprise a “well-rounded education.”

Note that ESSA does not simply say that a well-rounded education is a good idea; the language stipulates that Congress expects schools to provide it. As schools assess their ability to provide this well-rounded education, it becomes clear that the best way to achieve the goal is to have highly effective, qualified teachers in content areas such as music.

General grants for teacher preparation are outlined in Title II of HEA and are available to any higher education institution that applies for them. These grants should be available to all twenty-one subject areas, but they are currently focused on STEM, science, math, and English due to the earlier NCLB mandate. Reauthorization of HEA must include language that guides all Institutions of Higher Learning (IHE) to prepare teachers to provide a “well-rounded education”; a college or university should be able to use these funds for its music program if the institution so chooses.

Multiple bills in Congress work to enhance general grants for teacher preparation, both through flexibility

and focus on cultural awareness and responsive pedagogy. Taken in combination, these measures may encourage diversity in the field of music education, resulting in more effective teaching and inclusive classrooms.

Federal funding specifically for teacher preparation at MSIs should also be made available to programs training educators in all twenty-one subject areas. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, HSIs, and some other MSIs are awarded funding for science, technology, engineering, math, and English programs in HEA, but there is no specific funding for music or the arts. There are different thoughts and philosophies on how best an MSI can use HEA funds, but clearly granting authority to use these funds for music programs, if they wish, is a reasonable policy request.

Similarly, incentives for educators should be widened to include the arts and not limited to those based on NCLB test results. The HEA contains loan forgiveness provisions for those who work in high-need areas, professions, and public service; educators currently qualify in three areas of the law. In order to maintain an emphasis on the importance of training highly effective, qualified educators to teach our students, not only must these loan forgiveness provisions be maintained, they should now support all educators of all subjects needed for a well-rounded education.

In each of these arenas, aligning HEA to ESSA is extremely important as we consider the future needs of our country’s students, classrooms, and teachers.

State Advocacy

ESSA required states to reflect on their overall vision and goals for education and determine how to best achieve their goals. Collaborating with a broad range of stakeholders, states considered different elements of their education systems, including standards, assessments, and accountability systems. This led to the creation of comprehensive strategies to advance college and career readiness for all students. Across the country, music advocates worked to include music education in the plans, leading states to include access and participation rates in music and arts education in their planned accountability systems.

Additionally, numerous states called for a portion of

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Title IV, Part A, funds to go to music education, while others directed music and arts education to play a role in after-school programs. States also listed music and arts education as part of the programs that could be supplemented by Title I funds as part of a schoolwide strategy. Still other states required schools on plans of improvement to decide how they would include music and arts education as course offerings. Interestingly, some states thought outside the typical policy box and included music as part of programs that support homeless youth, migrant children, and delinquent children. All this was possible because of state music advocacy.

While the process to create ESSA state plans has been completed, there are still ways to become active at the state level. On the executive level, advocates should know their state board of education's meeting calendar. Anyone can attend a meeting to learn how the process of receiving federal and state funds works. Advocates can also join their state's Title I Committee of Practitioners. This committee typically includes school district representatives, Title I administrators, teachers, parents, and members of school boards. Music advocates should familiarize themselves with their state budget schedule and when their state distributes funds to their school district. Advocates should get to know their Title I director and Title IV State Education Agency (SEA) lead. These are the points of contact for each respective title of funding in that state.

There are other federal education laws where effective music advocacy at the state level can enhance music programs. One such example is the Carl T. Perkins Act, the main federal funding source for career and technical education (CTE) that was reauthorized in 2018. Through this reauthorization, school districts must provide detailed information on how they plan to incorporate a well-rounded education into their career and technical education programs. Perkins plans are being drafted and developed by state CTE directors across the country, and some states are fortunate to have strong relationships between CTE and arts departments. Music advocates can work with their state education department and board of education to include music technology in Perkins plans.

Perkins plans require school districts to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment biannually and submit

it with each funding application. This ensures ongoing attention to the need for a well-rounded education locally. In addition, there is now a consultation requirement for the needs assessment and local plan that gives music advocates direct access. Perkins suggests that the following groups be consulted: secondary and post-secondary educators and support staff; state or local workforce or development boards; businesses and industry representatives; and parents and students.

By including "well-rounded education" language in the Perkins reauthorization, we are laying the groundwork for future recording engineers, music producers, audio visual technicians, composers, and performers to receive high-quality, specialized music education. The key is that their education should go beyond technical considerations to address music literacy within public schools supported by Perkins funds. Music technology will play an increasingly crucial role in the twenty-first-century economy, and we must commit to providing access to high-quality technical programming for students who wish to use new technologies in creating, enhancing, performing, and producing the music we love.

The steps above require outreach, but music advocates should not forget to target the legislative side of lawmaking. Advocates should begin building relationships with state legislators. Even if an advocate has no specific policy fix in mind, simply educating a policymaker on the importance of music education can lead to policy improvements in the future. Most states have bills dedicated to music education in some form, so it is proven that effective advocacy will spark lawmakers into action.

Local Advocacy

It has been said all politics is local, and that could not be truer about music education today. With ESSA, music education is enumerated as a well-rounded subject in federal law for the first time in our nation's history. Coupled with this is the intent of lawmakers to focus education policy at the local levels. This gives music education advocates an extraordinary opportunity to implement quality music programs in local school districts across the country.

Local advocacy should include all pertinent law makers, including your mayor, city board, and local representatives. However, a music advocate's attention should focus on the policy makers in your school district. School board members, principals, and music supervisors are the audience that will ultimately decide where your district and school funds go.

Before beginning a music advocacy endeavor, it is advisable to do some deep thinking about the vision of the music program in question. What does the future success of the music program look like? What will students gain from being a part of the music program? Taking a step back to think about this vision will serve as a guide to ensure every goal set and action taken supports the broader mission. A vision also communicates the music program's values to the school.

After identifying a vision, an advocate should evaluate the resources available in the music program. An honest assessment of the program's current state will help in determining the goals that will move the program closer to the vision. One should gather a sense of where the music program is and where it needs to go. Setting goals is important. Goals should be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. Goals should be student-centered and focused on areas such as curriculum, assessment, standards, or building and strengthening relationships. Goals should reflect what students will accomplish in the music classroom. Receiving funding dollars, for instance, is not a goal by itself; it is a tactic used in pursuit of goals. Reaching new goals takes resources. Understanding the school and district's budget processes is necessary to credibly seek financial support for the program. Budget deliberations will include school administrators, school boards, school employees, and community members.

Inherent in all effective advocacy is the art of persuasion. Decision makers may not automatically consider music education a priority, especially if they themselves have never had access to a high-quality music education experience. The list of benefits derived from a high-quality music education is long. Numerous pieces of research exist that highlight the ways in which music education has been proven to have a positive effect on the individual, including heightened cognitive abilities, increased participation in school, and social/emotional

development.

While research is important, the history of music education advocacy teaches us the most effective method is storytelling. The stories music educators tell are deeply compelling and resonate with virtually anyone. Think of all the times students have been transformed because of music. Tell those stories, then use research to support the message.

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Consider how a potential coalition member could help achieve the advocacy goals. For example, people might be able to attend school board meetings, assist in recruiting volunteers, or provide physical supplies. The core group can brainstorm for possible partners, particularly those with whom they have ties. Determine who the best person on the team would be to approach each partner and have a specific "ask" in mind. Throughout the coalition building process, continue reaching out to people at various events, ranging from parent nights to school events to personal endeavors. Strong relationships provide a firm foundation for future advocacy work. There is a role for everyone to play.

Periodically, after each semester or conclusion of a budget cycle, it is a good idea to consider what worked, what didn't, and what still needs to be done. In many instances, every advocacy goal may not be reached after the first attempt, and that is fine if you are informing and building relationships. Achieving advocacy goals can be a multi-year proposition, regardless of the issue, topic, or person to whom your advocacy is directed. Taking time to evaluate progress will help keep advocacy on track toward the vision for the program.

Advocacy is a proverbial marathon, not a sprint. One must institutionalize their advocacy efforts for as long as they remain active in the profession. Habits of patience, grit, and collaboration make a great advocate.

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At the beginning of this process, some of the most important work will come through a critical element of music training: listening. Whether listening to the needs of the other music advocates in the coalition, or by understanding the needs of other departments, hearing the views of peers will make a more effective champion for the cause. Developing trust with colleagues, parents, and policymakers is likely to prove fruitful over the course of a career and beyond. Such benefits can impact the students in a local program and in classrooms across the country.

Commitment to Civil Rights

Public education is a civil right that ensures every child receives a K-12 education. The roots were laid in the 1960s, nearly a decade after the historic *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The *Brown* decision did not immediately change the laws nor the desire of many states to desegregate their schools. Ten years after the landmark decision, just one in eighty-five southern black students were taught in desegregated schools. More recently, the prevalence of “white flight” to suburbs, movement to private schools or academies (with a corresponding reduction of support for public schools), and a variety of legal tactics sometimes stymied progress toward integration or even led to re-segregation in many communities in the South and nationwide.

However, the decision that formed the basis for legislative, administrative, and eventually social developments began to chip away racist social structure and was one of the catalysts for the Civil Rights movement. This eventually led to President Lyndon Johnson’s signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Less than a year after enacting the Civil Rights Act, President Johnson enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These two historic laws have worked in tandem in responding to local intransigence and expanded desegregation across the South in ways that had not occurred prior to 1964. ESEA provided federal funds in such quantities to schools that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act became a critical tool in desegregating schools.

Without the Civil Rights Act, ESEA would have been unable to withhold funds from segregated districts, and conversely, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act would

have been less effective without ESEA funds with which to threaten districts. However, the Civil Rights Act is limited in furthering school desegregation because of the law’s provisions and enforcement. These constraints were particularly visible in the years following the law’s passage when federal officials lacked the resources and expertise to fully carry out enforcement.

What is inherently evident to the music advocate is not necessarily so to those who make policy and curricula decisions.

Unfortunately, access to a quality education remains segregated today. More work must be done to advance music education by encouraging the study and making of music by all. According to figures from the Department of Education (ED), more than 1.3 million elementary students fail to get any music instruction, and the same is true for about 800,000 secondary school students. In studies conducted by the ED, only 26 percent of Hispanic students receive any kind of arts education. African American students have only slightly higher access, with 28 percent.²

Furthermore, students who met the eligibility requirement of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) had significantly lower scores on the music portion of the arts National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than students who are ineligible for the NSLP, suggesting that there are significant barriers that prohibit low-income students from receiving music instruction.³

Scholars such as Carlos Abril and Kenneth Elpus documented that nearly two-thirds of music ensemble students were Caucasian and middle class, while only 15 percent were African American students.⁴ Related research found that only 7 percent of music teacher licensure candidates were African American, while only 15 percent were African American students.

To this end, music advocates should oppose deregulatory efforts or actions that affect the mission of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights.

Such efforts work in opposition to the intent of both the Civil Rights Act and ESEA. Furthermore, music advocates should implore the Department to add access and participation rates of well-rounded subjects, including music and the arts, to the data collection and reporting undertaken by the Office of Civil Rights, similar to the reporting of student access to school nurses and counselors. Finally, because laws and administrative actions do not in themselves do all that is needed to solve social problems, music advocates should support all music teachers to look for ways to increase access for, and to invite participation by, all students.

The best way to honor the monumental efforts of those who have strived for equality and equity in education is to persistently continue their work to achieve it. Music education advocates of this generation must do their part to ensure that every child receives a well-rounded education.

Music Belongs and Advocacy Must Continue

The tireless efforts of music education advocates ensured that music was enumerated in federal law. In a bipartisan fashion, federal lawmakers signaled by their vote that music belongs in the curricula of all students. This influence has laid the groundwork in many state plans to include music education in some form. Furthermore, opportunities exist on the local level to more effectively advocate for music education. These opportunities can open the doors for more equity and access to a quality music education. Now is the time to fully embrace the role of music advocate. Educators, parents, local businesses, and general music advocates can have very busy “day jobs” that require time and resources. However, music advocacy must be seen as part of the “job” to instill the consistent persuasion necessary to create and enhance quality music programs. The political landscape is changing more quickly than it once did, and policies can change at the stop of a dime. Elections matter,⁵ and being an engaged citizen is as important as ever. All this requires a steady commitment to advocacy.

We must be willing to relay supportive data and anecdotes in an effective manner to convince decision makers. What is inherently evident to the music advo-

cate is not necessarily so to those who make policy and curricula decisions. We cannot take that for granted.

The good news is that two of the most important attributes to effective advocacy seem intrinsic in those who love music: passion and the ability to listen. Getting ourselves in the habit of using these skills to advocate for music education is crucial because we know music belongs, and we need it in every school across the country. ■

NOTES

- ¹ M. L. Mark and C. L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education* (Chapter 8). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield (2007).
- ² B. Parsad and M. Spiegelman, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999–2000 and 2009–10* (NCES 2012–014). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC (2012).
- ³ National Center for Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Educational Progress: An overview of NAEP* (2016), Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept. of Education.
- ⁴ K. Elpus and C. R. Abril, *High School Music Ensemble Students in the United States: A Demographic Profile*. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 59 no 2 (2011): 128–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429411405207>.
- ⁵ <https://nafme.org/wp-content/files/2018/10/Civic-Action-Field-Guide.pdf>