

Music Makes the Grade

Music Programs Contribute to Higher Attendance and Graduation Rates

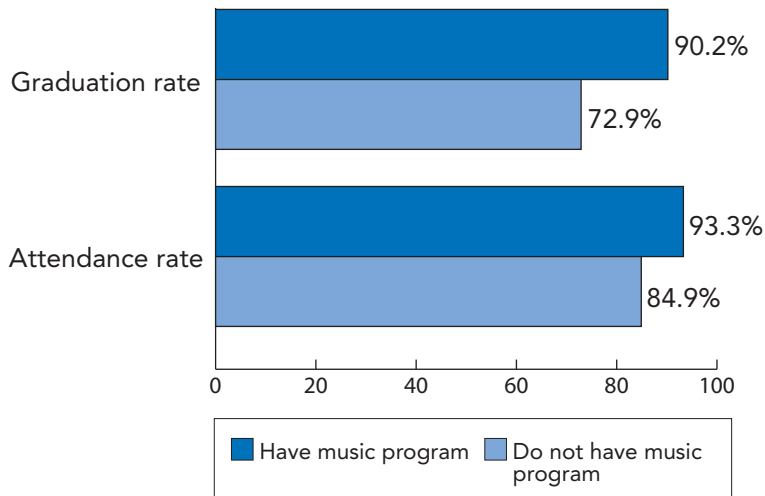


School principals nationwide agree that music education—especially high-quality music education—is important for students’ educational success, according to a study released by MENC: The National Association for Music Education and NAMM: International Music Products Association and conducted by Harris Interactive. This comes at a time when education stakeholders are seeking alternative indicators of school success to augment standardized tests. Graduation rates are one such favored indicator.



“ How about the kid I grabbed in the hallway when he was in the fifth grade, who was about to get into a fight? I made a deal with him that I would not tell on him if he joined band ... Turned out he was on his last chance with the juvenile parole board and one more infraction and he was going to a home. I just got an invitation to his wedding ... I will be sending Dr. Smith and his future wife a lovely gift. ”

—music teacher anecdote, August 2006

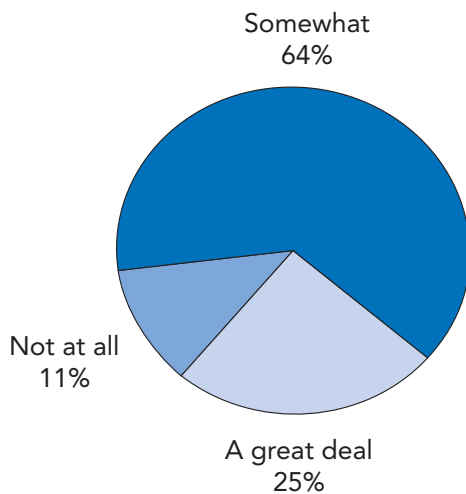


The vast majority of the principals interviewed—96 percent—agree that participating in music education encourages and motivates students to stay in school. Fifty-five percent “strongly agree” with this idea. Further, 89 percent of principals feel that a high-quality music education program contributes to their school achieving higher graduation rates.

That agreement is backed up by statistical data that found:

★ Schools that have music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than do those without music programs (90.2 percent as compared to 72.9 percent). In addition, those that rate their programs as “excellent or very good” have an even higher graduation rate (90.9 percent).

★ Schools that have music programs have significantly higher attendance rates than do those without programs (93.3 percent as compared to 84.9 percent).



In your opinion, to what extent does a quality music education program contribute to your school achieving higher graduation rates? Would you say it contributes ...?

“We’ve always known that music education is critical to keeping our students competitive and successful in school and in life,” said John J. Mahlmann, executive director of MENC. The study makes clear that America’s principals also understand the strong link between vibrant school music and student success.

“We have seen firsthand how music education provides a solid foundation for children to become productive, successful adults, and so have school administrators from across the nation,” added Joe Lamond, president and CEO of NAMM.

In addition to these key findings, the study found additional evidence that supports the importance of high-quality, sequential music programs for schools and students:

- ★ As the percentage of students enrolled in a music class increases, so does the graduation rate of the school.
- ★ Graduation rates are better at those schools whose principals say their music program is stable or growing than at those whose principals say their music program is eroding.
- ★ Those schools that receive awards for their music classes and/or performing groups have higher overall graduation rates than schools that have not won awards for their music programs.
- ★ Those schools that have credentialed music teachers have much higher graduation rates than those schools that do not have a fully credentialed music staff.

Real World Concerns and School Music Programs

The study is based on interviews with a random selection of public high school principals and vice principals conducted between April 14 and May 1, 2006. The margin of error for the sample size is ± 4.6 percent. But perhaps the key importance of the study is that it backs up the strong understanding of generations of parents, teachers, and students.

There are many reasons that music has a place in American schools—remember, for example, that increases in SAT scores correlate strongly with participation in school music programs and that music learning is associated with intelligence measures important for acquisition of math and sci-



ence concepts. This connection of graduation and attendance rates matches a current emphasis placed on education by the public and by the law.

According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000, section 9101, the arts are classified as a “core academic subject.” That in itself is recognition of the inherent value of the study of music. But a centerpiece of the law is the establishment of a system of reporting to the public on the quality of local and state school systems’ delivery of instruction to students. The law establishes specific mandates for specific types of assessments in math and in reading and it establishes a requirement that states report sophisticated, disaggregated data on student progress in those areas. It also specifically requires the reporting of graduation rates for secondary school students.

Graduation rates, then, are key to measuring school success and attendance is key to students’ success. This current data seems to show music is at least one key to students’ success in school.

“**Jamie’s mom passed away when she was in elementary school. During her middle school years, her best friend was in chorus class with her. Jamie was not the best singer and was very shy, but she stayed with her friend in chorus ... During the last two years, Jamie has had some academic problems and was in serious risk of not graduating. Several of the choir kids banded together and started tutoring Jamie in her deficient areas before and after school, and once or twice during choir! Jamie did graduate and has come in several times this summer to help out getting ready for the new school year.**”

—music teacher anecdote, August 2006

What We Should Do

Music programs are under pressure. According to the survey, of the 20 percent of principals that felt No Child Left Behind has had an effect on their school music program, half thought that effect was negative. Our challenge is to administer current law and refine the law during the review process (underway in 2007) to ensure that music teachers—those who work every day to educate our children—have confidence that the programs that best serve our children are fully supported.

Specifically, state and local leaders should:

- ★ Work to ensure that the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act does not have the effect of reducing students' access to music programs.
- ★ Include information on the quality of music programs in the state and local



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“report cards” designed to meet legal requirements for educational accountability. This information need not be the result of specific tests. Parents have a right to know the extent to which their children are being provided the benefits of a full school experience—that is, one that includes music.

- ★ Make certain that administrative decisions, including the allocation of resources and scheduling, always take into account requirements for a strong, sequential music program that benefits all students.