

The Benefits of a Music Education

“Every student in the nation should have an education in the arts.” This is the opening statement of *[“The Value and Quality of Arts Education: A Statement of Principles,”](#)* a document from the nation’s ten most important educational organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators, the National Education Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the National School Boards Association.

The basic statement is unlikely to be challenged by anyone involved in education. In the sometimes harsh reality of limited time and funding for instruction, however, the inclusion of the arts in every student’s education can sometimes be relegated to a distant wish rather than an exciting reality.

It doesn’t have to be that way! All that’s needed is a clear message sent to all those who must make the hard choices involved in running a school or school system. The basic message is that music programs in the schools help our kids and communities in real and substantial ways. You can use the following facts about the benefits of music education, based on a growing body of convincing research, to move decision-makers to make the right choices.

The benefits conveyed by music education can be grouped in four categories:

- [Success in society](#)
- [Success in school and learning](#)
- [Success in developing intelligence](#)
- [Success in life](#)

When presented with the many and manifest benefits of music education, officials at all levels should universally support a full, balanced, sequential course of music instruction taught by qualified teachers. And every student will have an education in the arts.

- MENC: The National Association for Music Education

Students of the arts continue to outperform their non-arts peers on the SAT, according to reports by the College Entrance Examination Board. In 2006, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 43 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts.– *The College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report for 2006*; <http://www.collegeboard.com>

Nearly 100% of past winners in the prestigious Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology (for high school students) play one or more musical instruments. This led the Siemens Foundation to host a recital at Carnegie Hall in 2004, featuring some of these young people, after which a panel of experts debated the nature of the apparent science/music link. – *The Midland Chemist (American Chemical Society) Vol. 42, No. 1, Feb. 2005*

A 2004 Stanford University study showed that mastering a musical instrument improves the way the human brain processes parts of spoken language. In two studies, researchers demonstrated that people with musical experience found it easier than non-musicians to detect small differences in word syllables. They also discovered that musical training helps the brain work more efficiently in distinguishing split-second differences between rapidly changing sounds that are essential to processing language. About 40 adults, divided into groups of musicians and non-musician, matched by age, sex, general language ability and intelligence, were tested. To qualify, the musicians need to have started playing instruments before age 7 and never stopped, practicing several hours/week. Functional magnetic resonance imaging showed the musicians had more focused, efficient brain activity. “This is the first example showing how musical training alters how your brain processes language components.” – *Prof. John Gabrieli, former Stanford psychology professor, now associate*

director of MIT's Athinoula A. Martinos Center for Biomedical Imaging. (<http://news-service.stanford.edu>, Nov. 2005)

Playing a musical instrument significantly enhances the brainstem's sensitivity to speech sounds. This relates to encoding skills involved with music and language. Experience with music at a young age can "fine-tune" the brain's auditory system. – *from a study supported by Northwestern University, grants from the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation. Nina Kraus, director of NWU's Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory and senior author of the study, which appeared in April 2007 Nature Neuroscience. Other contributing researchers/authors: Patrick Wong, primary author "Musical Experience Shapes Human Brainstem Encoding of Linguistic Pitch Patterns" Other researchers Erika Skoe, Nicole Russo, Tasha Dees; info from www.sciencedaily.com*

"The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of the nation, is close to the center of a nation's purpose - and is a test to the quality of a nation's civilization." – *John F. Kennedy*

An education rich in the arts and humanities develops skills that are increasingly crucial to the productivity and competitiveness of the nation's workforce: the ability to think creatively, communicate effectively and work collaboratively, and to deal with ambiguity and complexity. *Prof. Ann M. Galligan, Northeastern University, in her paper "Creativity, Culture, Education and the Workforce", Center for Arts and Culture, December 2001*