

Study Links Music Making and Music Education with Improved Academic Performance

Research indicates quality of music education programs is a factor affecting student performance on standardized test scores.

A recent study revealed that students in high-quality school music education programs score higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools with deficient music education programs. The study, funded by the NAMM Foundation and published in the *Journal for Research in Music Education* in June 2007¹, is the first one to examine the quality of school music programs as a factor affecting test scores, independent of the socioeconomic level of the school or school district.

Methodology aligns with No Child Left Behind Legislation

This study was designed to investigate relationships between elementary and middle school students' academic achievement, as measured by scores on state-mandated standardized tests of English and mathematics designed to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation, and the instructional quality of their school music programs. The standardized tests analyzed were those administered to meet state assessment requirements stipulated by No Child Left Behind legislation.

The research was conducted by Dr. Christopher Johnson, professor of music education and music therapy and associate dean of the School of Fine Arts, University of Kansas. Johnson analyzed test scores from the 2004–2005 school year from 4,739 elementary and middle school students in four regions in the United States—South, East Coast, Midwest and West Coast. The breakdown of participants was 1,119 in either third or fourth grade and 3,620 in either eighth or ninth grade. Participating schools were identified by a team of university music education professors familiar with the school districts in each region and familiar with the caliber of the music education programs at each school.

Data collection for the elementary test scores consisted of entering the anonymous academic scores into a database. For the middle school data, in addition to entering each middle school student's standardized test scores, each students' music participation, as defined by enrollment in a music class during the 2004–2005 school year, also was recorded.

¹ This research was funded by the NAMM Foundation as part of its *Sounds of Learning* initiative, a program devoted to studying the associated learning benefits of making music. Dr. Johnson of the University of Kansas conducted the study with Jenny Memmott also of the University of Kansas. The findings were published in the Spring 2007 issue of the *Journal for Research in Music Education*.

The NAMM Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to advancing active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs from the international music products industry.

Results from the elementary schools

- Students in top-quality music programs scored 22% better in English and 20% better in mathematics than students in deficient music programs.
- These academic differences were fairly consistent across geographic regions.
- Students at the four elementary schools with high-quality music programs scored better than students participating in programs considered to be of lower quality.

Results from the middle schools

- Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 19% higher in English than students in schools without a music program, and 32% higher in English than students in a deficient choral program.
- Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 17% higher in mathematics than children in schools without a music program, and 33% higher in mathematics than students in a deficient choral program.
- Students at schools with excellent music programs had higher English test scores across the country than students in schools with low-quality music programs; this was also true when considering mathematics.
- Students in all regions with lower-quality instrumental programs scored higher in English and mathematics than students who had no music at all.

Conclusions

This research reveals a relationship between quality music instruction and heightened academic performance: music supports academic performance and quality music programs are related to higher test scores.

These results come at a critical time when some music education programs are being cut around the country, and local communities and school districts continue to make curriculum decisions that emphasize instructional time for reading and math, impinging on access to music and arts education. This study demonstrates the importance of considering music education programs in any definition of a quality curriculum, thereby ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to succeed in school.

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