

Natasha Hamid

Mr. McElrath

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The Value of Music Education for Student Development M

unlikely that average Americans realize the many complexities of music when they hum their favorite song at work or tap their fingers to a beat while waiting in traffic. Music has become so abundant in people's daily lives, that many have begun to lose sight of its real value. This has become especially true in the education system where people will overlook music and its innumerable benefits to society in favor of seemingly more important subjects. Although many believe that music education holds less value than other academic pursuits and does not warrant as much recognition or funding, schools should fund music education because it holds a myriad of benefits for students by increasing their aptitudes for academic subjects, enhancing their cognitive skills, and promoting unification in schools and beyond.

In the United States, education has become an increasingly significant area for discussion with common Americans and lawmakers alike. In the wake of this discussion, educators have shifted their focus to emphasize STEM subjects, often diminishing the importance of seemingly less important subjects, such as music. The No Child Left Behind Act caused much of this shift and a decreased recognition and funding for arts programs at schools (Stoll). The lack of recognition for music education has become evident in schools across the country as often



“neurological research is cited showing music education enhances abstract reasoning needed in learning math and science” (Petress). Music education has proved to stimulate children’s development of “cognitive modifiability,” a development of skills that help students learn across all curriculums (Popescu). One prevalent example stems from music’s impact on reading and language. Jesse Hamlin quotes Dr. Nina Kraus, a neurobiologist at Northwestern University, who says, “Music and language have common biological mechanisms. Musical training strengthens them.” Some of these strengthened mechanisms include attention and memory which Kraus suggests add to children’s “‘phonological processing’ and [enhance] their reading skills” (Hamlin). Music requires players to process and analyze patterns, further developing a young musician’s cognitive processes much more than a child who has no musical background (Hamlin). In addition, cognitive development from music benefits students in ways other than

must “work as a team for their performance to be appreciated and valued” (Petress). Music programs also help students become more active members of their schools, and thus more engaged in their learning environment. According to multiple studies conducted by NAMC, such as the National Education Longitudinal Study, “music education involvement reduces disruptive students in the school” (Petress). This provides for a more connected overall academic environment. Schools need this kind of student engagement to be successful. Furthermore, a mentality of promoted unification between children and within schools leads students to search for connections and unification throughout their lives. Music teaches more than pitches, or beats, or chords in that “music teaches one about history and culture and builds tolerance of and appreciation of other peoples” (Petress). Students cannot easily attain this kind of learning from other subjects. With music education, students do not just gain knowledge of how to play a scale or a difficult rhythm. They gain appreciation that originates not simply from a use of reason, but from a use of emotion. The result, according to jazz educator Todd Stoll, is that music and the arts “inoculate a new generation against the fear of not knowing and understanding those who are different from themselves.” These lessons remain extremely important in creating well-rounded, knowledgeable children.

While many do not see its importance, music education holds tremendous value for students of all ages. School boards across the country decide that if they must make cuts to the budget, they will reduce music programs first. However, music education deserves just as much funding as any other school subject. An emphasis on music education can help schools see the improvements that the No Child Left Behind program hoped for because music develops skills necessary to cognitive development in children and thus improves their academic capabilities. In addition, music creates more engaged and active community members by unifying students and

connecting them to their world. Music provides an education like no other because it becomes a bridge between a student's knowledge and emotions and requires that they express themsel-

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