



May 10, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

As the 2020-21 academic school year comes to a close, and budgets are determined for the upcoming school year, members of the Seton Hill University music faculty wish to advocate strongly for school district administrators and decision makers to consider reinstating and/or increasing their arts education programs and music teaching positions for the coming school year. We all understand our current, turbulent economic climate and the need for districts to be financially prudent. We also recognize that there is no “easy” decision when it comes to balancing a budget for a school district. However, living through a pandemic has demonstrated the invaluable need for in-person learning as well as the social, emotional, and creative needs of students that are so easily diminished with the reduced access to equitable and quality arts education (particularly music education). The current reduced programs undermine some of the most vital aspects of a well-rounded and rigorous education for students within a community.

What is the value of fully supporting quality music education for your students?

Quality music education provides:

- Opportunities for individual and group expression through varied art forms; in this case, specifically through the performance and creation of music.
- Unparalleled social and emotional learning opportunities through self-expression and self-reflection that is inherent and unique to these art forms.
- Unique curriculum-based classes where students of varying ability levels can work towards common projects and performances.
- The culture and spirit of a school, often representing their school and district at events both locally, regionally, and abroad.
- A primary means for student social identity development; simply stated, music classes are the place where so many students find their “home away from home.” This is particularly true of ensemble-based music education experiences that are established in late elementary and middle school.

Students must have access to these experiences and opportunities consistently within their education. This is only possible when school districts commit to the fact that music

education (which is considered a core-subject in the Every Student Succeeds Act–ESSA) is curricular. As such, priority must be placed on providing students with equitable access to subject-specific certified music teachers during the school day consistently throughout their education. These educators alone have the expertise to cater music curricula to meet the varied needs of their students, as well as the needs of the community at large through pedagogically appropriate, standards-based, and systematic instruction. And, the solutions for preserving music education programs within school districts are often more about adjusting school site schedules to allow for students to have access to programs more so than reducing teaching positions.

To help avoid or mitigate future fiscal decisions that reduce music programs in our area, we hope to provide a clearer understanding of the extraordinary value that music education has for our local schools and the students they serve. Therefore, the music faculty at Seton Hill University is committed to providing teachers, parents, and community members with the tools necessary to effectively make their voices heard. In the coming weeks, our music education faculty (Dr. Jessica Vaughan-Marra and Dr. Christopher Marra) will be offering free webinars catered to art education advocacy. These are intended to directly provide support for all teachers, parents, community members, and administrators interested in developing and refining advocacy messages to proactively support their local arts and music programs. The virtual event is scheduled for May 24, 2021 from 6–8PM EST.

More information will be published through social media and can be found at this webpage. <https://www.setonhill.edu/centers-community-programs/community-arts-programs/music-education-advocacy/>

Feel free to share the message and reference these materials to help start conversations within your local communities about the necessity for music education.

Sincerely,

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