

Advocacy Corner-Fall 2018 Edition

Pull-Out Lessons vs. Specialized Music Instruction: The Power of Language

In a conversation with a colleague recently, I used the phrase “Specialized Music Instruction” when talking about instrumental music. I could tell by their expression—they had no idea what I was speaking of. We began having a conversation about why our school district now calls our lessons Specialized Music Instruction instead of “pull-out lessons.” The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) has also endorsed this title, noting, “[their position statement] uses the term “specialized music instruction” rather than “pullout,” a word that can perpetuate the bias against comprehensive schooling.”

Our conversation grew into one that spoke of how language communicates value. “Pull-out” seems optional. Specialized instruction sounds like something that is right for children. This year, I encourage you to advocate for your students’ learning by referring to “pull-out lessons” as “Specialized Music Instruction.”

In his book *Cultures of Thinking*, Ron Ritchhart discusses eight cultural forces that will transform our schools. One of those forces is language; and within language, there are seven intentional ways we can use language to create cultures of thinking (to two of which I have added bold emphasis):

The Language of Community (vs. Distance)

- Pronoun choice can communicate a sense of inclusiveness, collaboration, and community (we, us, our); or it can deliver a message of division, separateness, and control (I and you)

Language of Identity

- These words communicate that it is learning to do and act authentically that matters, not just learning about the subject.

Language of Personal Agency (vs. Rescuing)

Language of Noticing & Naming

Language of Knowing (Conditional versus the Absolute)

Language of Feedback & Praise

Language of Listening

http://ronritchhart.com/ronritchhart.com/COT_Videos_files/Language%20of%20the%20Classroom_V3.pdf

Our use of language impacts community and identify. Richhart hits the nail on the head by saying, “These words communicate that it is learning to do and act authentically that matters, not just learning about the subject.” So, the big question is, how does Richhart’s connect to advocacy and music education?

In May of this year, PMEA District 1 sent out a survey to membership to get a picture of how instrumental music instruction is being delivered. With 91 respondents, we now see the wide array of programming happening across the five counties that span our district. As you review the data and read the qualitative feedback, you will notice trends, things to celebrate, and areas of concern. You may want to see where your program fits in with the results. Do you see ways other programs offer instrumental music that you could offer in your program or use this data to make a case for a change with your administrators? My challenge to you, is to turn this data into information, and refer to Richhart’s research on language to help you determine your next steps. Our hope is for this data to be useful and actionable.

Thank you to Cory Neville (Quaker Valley School District) for helping to spearhead this project. Data like this is extremely important, as we can speak to regional trends and practices as we advocate for what is best for our students.

If you have more specific questions about this survey or would be interested in seeing more data like this from the region, please reach out. The best way for us to advocate for our students is to be informed!

PMEA D1 Elementary Instrumental Instruction Survey Results

Total Respondents: 91

1. Please select the county of your school district. If you are comfortable doing so, please name your school district. Naming your school district is optional, but very helpful.

Allegheny	61
Fayette	2
Greene	3
Washington	13
Westmoreland	12

2. Select all that apply regarding when instrumental instruction begins in your district:

Strings begin in 3 rd Grade	25
Strings begin in 4 th Grade	25
Strings begin in 5 th Grade	4
Our music program does not have strings	33
Band begins in 3 rd Grade	0
Band begins in 4 th Grade	79
Band begins in 5 th Grade	11
Our music program does not have band	1
No part of our instrumental program begins until at least 6 th grade	0
Our school district does not have any instrumental music program	1
Other (see below)	7

3. How are students grouped in beginning instrumental instruction?

Homogeneous groupings (ex. Flutes only, Violins only, etc.)	66
Heterogeneous groupings (ex. Woodwinds, Brass, Low Strings, etc.)	19
Mixed groupings (ex. Clarinets and Trumpets, Flutes and Percussion, etc.)	22
Full ensemble	24
Other (see below)	17

4. On average, about how many students are in each lesson group?

Less than 5	33
5-7	35
7-10	11
10-15	7
15-20	5
20+	0

5. Which of the following most closely describes how students receive beginning instrumental instruction?

Pull-out lesson (once or fewer times per week, fixed schedule)	36
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Pull-out lesson (once or fewer times per week, rotating schedule)	41
Pull-out lesson (two or more times per week, fixed schedule)	3
Pull-out lesson (two or more times per week, rotating schedule)	1
Before or after school ONLY	2
Instrumental music is built into the master schedule and is not pull-out	11
Other (see below)	11

6. Does your school offer full ensemble time for beginner instrumental music?

Yes, as a pull-out from other classes during the school day	14
Yes, as its own scheduled time during the school day	21
Yes, before or after school	13
Yes, during lunch or recess	19
No	23
Other (see below)	18

7. What is your perceived level of support from your administration for your beginning instrumental music instruction program?

LITTLE TO NO SUPPORT	NOT VERY SUPPORTIVE-- EXPERIENCE FREQUENT PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	SUPPORTIVE-- EXPERIENCE INFREQUENT PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	VERY SUPPORTIVE-- RARELY EXPERIENCE PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	100% SUPPORTIVE
2	16	34	27	12

8. What is your perceived level of support from other (non-music) teachers you work with for your beginning instrumental music instruction program?

LITTLE TO NO SUPPORT	NOT VERY SUPPORTIVE-- EXPERIENCE FREQUENT PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	SUPPORTIVE-- EXPERIENCE INFREQUENT PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	VERY SUPPORTIVE-- RARELY EXPERIENCE PUSHBACK ON ISSUES OF SCHEDULING, PULL-OUT LESSONS	100% SUPPORTIVE
1	27	34	21	8

9. For how many years has your current elementary instrumental music program been structured the way it is currently structured? Do you anticipate significant changes to your current elementary instrumental music program structure in the next 5 years?

Current structure has been in place for 10+ years and I don't anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	39
Current structure has been in place for 10+ years and I DO anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	13
Current structure has been in place for 5-9 years and I don't anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	9
Current structure has been in place for 5-9 years and I DO anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	8
Current structure has been in place for 3-5 years and I don't anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	3
Current structure has been in place for 3-5 years and I DO anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	5
Current structure has been in place for 1-3 years and I don't anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	9
Current structure has been in place for 1-3 years and I DO anticipate significant changes in the next 5 years	6

10. Has any teacher or administrator in your district spoken to you about beginner instrumental music instruction having an effect on standardized testing scores? Please elaborate in the text box below if you answer "yes" to any of the options.

Yes, my administration has.	7
Yes, fellow teachers have.	8
Yes, both my administration and fellow teachers have.	9
No, neither my administration nor fellow teachers have spoken about the elementary instrumental music program having any effect on standardized testing scores.	67

Qualitative Responses

Q2. Select all that apply regarding when instrumental instruction begins in your district:

- We begin guitar ensemble in 4th grade.
- One trimester of "exploratory" instrumental music in 3rd grade (recorders and strings); just the basics are taught, which gives students a chance to see what it's like to practice and play in an ensemble.
- Students may start at any time from 4th through 6th grade. No one is turned away.
- Soprano recorder begins in third grade as an instrumental music class (not general music).
- Students can also begin instruction in 4th or 5th grade but it is generally offered beginning in 3rd for strings and 4th for band
- Instrumental lessons start in 4th grade. Band starts in 5th
- We start lessons in 4th grade, but no band until 5th.

Q3. How are students grouped in beginning instrumental instruction?

- Groupings are by grade level
- It depends upon the numbers of each instrument, and we sometimes re-group during the year according to ability.
- Band has full ensemble once per month and strings rehearse together several times prior to the Spring performance.
- It largely depends on their homeroom grouping and availability.
- Our groups are scheduled classes, so some are homogeneous, some are heterogeneous, and some are mixed. It all depends on how many of each instrument we have enrolled and how many we need in each class.
- Mixed groupings, depending on size of class. Try to keep woodwinds together and brass together with percussion, if possible.
- The students are not allowed to be pulled out of math and reading. This is the biggest factor how students are grouped in their elementary band lessons. In addition, I avoid pulling students out of a special. The administration is ok with them missing their special. However, I find the students will quit elementary band if they are pulled out of a special.
- We do both homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings depending on instruments and grade level.
- We do our best for homogeneous groupings but are told which periods we may have each homeroom of students, so we can't usually make them all fit. We do our VERY best to get percussion separate.
- Depends on scheduling
- Every student begins with three private lessons with me.
- lessons are small homogeneous groups; full ensemble rehearsals are done once per week during lunch recess
- Some groups may be mixed based on total numbers for classes.
- Mixed groupings for lessons every 6-school days. Full 5th and full 6th grade full band that alternate every day in the morning for 30 minutes. That occurs during the school day after kids check in to homeroom.
- Students are in group lessons but join as a full ensemble later in the school year in preparation for their spring concert.
- Students receive a homogenous lesson group per week, as well as a full ensemble rehearsal every week.

Q5. Which of the following most closely describes how students receive beginning instrumental instruction?

- Small group lessons occur during recess time, once per 8-day rotating cycle.

- 1 lesson (30 minutes) per 6-day rotation. average of 3 lessons per month.
- Some lesson groups rotate, some do not.
- It is a class that students sign up for in replacement of general music.
- Full Ensemble rehearsal once per week in addition to the once per week rotating pull out lesson.
- Third grade and fifth grade are built into the master schedule. Fourth grade small group lessons are pull-out lessons once every 7 days. Fourth and fifth grades also have instrumental as a homeroom for large group rehearsal twice per 7 days.
- They also have full band one night a week, starting in January
- Students have their instrumental music lesson as their music class. Students do not have a general music class.
- I teach pull-out lessons once a week on a fixed schedule in one building and a rotation schedule in another building. I also see students on a fixed schedule for ensemble that is indicated on the building master schedule.
- Each building is different - some do fixed schedule, and some do rotating schedules

Q6. Does your school offer full ensemble time for beginner instrumental music?

- Full ensemble time is built into the schedule and meets twice during our 8-day rotating schedule.
- Once every other week. Close to concert time, a few extra rehearsals are scheduled.
- one full ensemble rehearsal per month. usually runs from 9:30 - 11:00.
- Instead of teaching lessons, a full band rehearsal is held instead as a pull-out
- This occurs only before concert time.
- We have Orchestra and Band as an ensemble after school, but not in the first year, only starting in the second year of instruction. Still beginning, but not the initial year.
- Students have full ensemble time when we play at our school mass once in a while, and when I can adjust schedules right before a concert for at least one time together.
- Fourth grades do not receive a beginner band period. However, fifth graders do receive an advanced band period for 30 minutes once a week for thirty minutes.
- Full Ensemble is not an official part of our schedules. If we need to schedule a rehearsal, we work it out with the classroom teachers and it happens during planning time either before school, at recess, or during workshop time.
- Currently 1/3 of the band meets on a rotating basis every 3 weeks during Personalized Learning Time. (PLT)
- At each of our 5 elementary schools, both band and strings ensembles take place at the same time in separate rooms (music room, art room, gym, teacher's lounge at times). 80% or more of our students play instruments in 4th grade, so the teachers have few students left in their rooms at this time.
- We try to have several before school rehearsals prior to the May concert.
- We have full ensemble rehearsals for 3 days before the Spring concert. 55 minutes for orchestra, 30 minutes for band.
- once per week.
- At this time band is before school, strings rehearse in mixed lesson groups
- We have an "Activity Period" near the end of the school day in which the band/orchestra teacher has the option of rehearsing in a somewhat full ensemble. The day prior and the day of a concert, students are excused from class for a portion of the day for "dress rehearsal."
- We have a fifth grade Titan Time Ensemble that rotates every other 6 days.
- Yes, as a pull out but only for a month prior to their spring concert.

Q9. Has any teacher or administrator in your district spoken to you about beginner instrumental music instruction having an effect on standardized testing scores? Please elaborate in the text box below if you answer "yes" to any of the options.

- They complained that my pull-out lessons are causing low scores.
- NO, and if anything, being a music student HELPS raise these scores!!!
- A past administrator admonished pull out lessons, and I gave her significant research on how the lessons actually helped, which she promptly put back in my mailbox.
- Yes, but in a negative way. We couldn't pull students for band during reading nor math because they needed that time to prepare for standardized tests.
- Not directly, but we are not allowed to pull students for lessons from any PSSA tested subject.
- Admin does not currently believe that elementary ensemble is having a POSITIVE impact on test scores
- Principals have acknowledged that they are aware of the impact that instrumental instruction has on the overall education of our students, including the positive impact on test scores.
- Even though I answered no, I do know that our test scores have gone up in the past 4 years.
- We recently had the issue that the administration had concerns about students participating in both band and strings pull -out lessons at the elementary level. They stated that this is not "best practice".
- About 7 years ago, an administrative decision was made to prohibit any pull-out lessons during tested subjects, including math, ELA, and science. The argument wasn't that band students' scores were falling due to pull-out lessons, but that the disruption of students being pulled was affecting scores. No evidence was ever presented or found to support this. We were told to schedule all lessons during special area classes, social studies, recess, or unstructured time. At first, scheduling was very challenging but as the years have passed we have been able to work with the teachers to find additional times when kids can be pulled while continuing to minimize disruptions to the core academic classes.
- Everyone has come to the realization that music is a "sweet spot" for our students and that participation has had positive effects for our students overall. Since this is our third year of this type of implementation, the effects on standardized test scores have yet to be seen.
- Teachers/administrators are concerned that students who are missing core instruction in Math, ELA, and Science will score lower on standardized tests such as the PSSA.
- Teachers have to re-teach lesson or "catch-up" students who have been pulled out of class for lessons.
- Teachers and administrators have expressed concern that elementary instrumental instruction has negatively affected test scores. They have said that students are constantly pulled from their classes and that they always have to be making up work with students. They have also said that students lacking in math or ELA skills should not be pulled out of these classes in order to play an instrument. They claim that the 30 mins. that students are pulled out weekly for a lesson is negatively affecting the 4th grade test scores.
- It's widely accepted that music instruction helps the scores, but little is actually done to support the programs. Guidance teachers will send out articles or talks that corroborate these findings, but.....
- A few principals and our Superintendent recognize the positive influence the arts have on academic learning.
- It's always positive!
- Teachers do not want the students pulled out until after the testing is over....
- We used to have 3rd grade strings, but it was cut, ostensibly to help test scores. We haven't heard about problems since.

- not in a formal way, more in a complaining way, especially regarding large events such as one rehearsal for a concert, etc.