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The State of Music in Secondary Schools

The Principal's Perspective

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The purpose of this study was to profile secondary school music programs in the United States and investigate principals' perceptions of those curricula. A survey form was sent to 1,000 secondary school principals, yielding a 54% response rate. That form was designed to answer the following questions: What is the profile of secondary music programs in the United States? How effective do principals think music programs are in helping students attain specific learning outcomes and broad educational goals? To what degree do certain variables (e.g., standardized tests, teachers, parents) impact a given music program? Ninety-eight percent of respondents indicated that their schools offered music courses, yet 34% required music. There were significant differences in the diversity of course offerings based on school socioeconomic status profiles. Standardized tests and No Child Left Behind were thought to have the most negative impact on music programs.

Keywords: *secondary school music; curriculum; principals; policy; advocacy*

Recent polls show that an overwhelming number of Americans believe that the arts are a vital and necessary part of the school curriculum (Bianchi, 2005; Gallup Organization, 2003). However, this support has not resulted in an increase of arts offerings at schools throughout the country. Although a survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2002) for the 1999-2000 academic year reported that 94% of public elementary schools and 90% of public secondary schools offered music courses, more recent investigations conducted by the Music for All Foundation (2004) and the Council for Basic Education (2004) documented decreases in instructional time for courses in the arts, a decline in student involvement in music, and a decline in the number of music teachers. These declines were thought to result from shrinking budgets and increased attention to "tested" subjects.

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This information is corroborated by recent research studies conducted in California and Illinois. Woodworth, Gallagher, and Guha (2007) conducted a statewide survey of arts programs in California in which they utilized survey results from 1,123 respondents along with case studies of 31 schools in 13 districts. Results indicated a decline in students enrolled in music from just fewer than 820,000 in 2000-2001 to approximately 520,000 in 2005-2006. Results also showed a disparity in arts education offerings, with students in high-poverty schools having less access to arts programs than their counterparts in more affluent school districts.

In the spring of 2005, Illinois Creates: The Illinois Arts Education Initiative (2006) conducted a statewide survey of 234 superintendents and 751 principals to assess the status of arts education in the state. Although an overwhelming majority of principals (94%) and superintendents (92%) agreed that the arts were an essential part of the school curriculum, survey results indicated that approximately one third of elementary students received no instruction in the arts (including music), and only 25% of high school students were enrolled in any arts courses. Moreover, results indicated that students in rural areas received the least amount of arts instruction. Respondents cited budget considerations and available time as the major barriers impacting arts programs in their schools and districts. Although large-scale studies such as these have focused on arts programs as a whole, few have specifically focused on music programs.

School and district administrators are highly influential in determining what course offerings are made available to students. Therefore, information regarding their attitudes and perceptions of music programs can help music educators, arts administrators, and policy makers make informed decisions in the quest to ensure the music program remains a viable facet of the overall school curriculum. Music education researchers have investigated the attitudes of administrators regarding music education in schools by comparing administrators' views to those of music teachers regarding general goals of the music program (Liddell, 1977; Payne, 1990; Punke, 1972) and specific aspects of the music program such as band competitions (Rogers, 1985). Other research has sought to ascertain principals' attitudes toward specific types of music programs such as band (Greenwood, 1991) and elementary general music (Stroud, 1980). In these studies, school administrators demonstrated their support for music education, but this support reflected the view that nonmusical outcomes were of equal import as musical outcomes.

Abril and Gault (2006) sought to investigate principals' perceptions of the elementary general music curriculum by asking principals from across the United States to rate how well they thought their music education programs were helping students attain 7 music learning outcomes and 13 broad educational goals. Although all outcomes and goals in this study received generally positive ratings, respondents perceived some variables were being met more effectively than others. For instance, principals believed that students learn to perform and listen attentively through the study of music more so than they learn to compose and create their own music. In a

review of the research literature, Williams (2007) concluded that music teachers also believe that more time and energy is invested on performance goals than on other musical goals, such as improvising and composing. Abril and Gault also asked principals to rate each music learning outcome and broad educational goal based on what was currently happening in their respective schools and what they felt should happen in an ideal music curriculum. Results indicated significant differences between the current and ideal conditions for all outcomes and goals, suggesting principals believed that improvements were possible. A final item in this study asked principals to indicate the degree to which 10 variables affected their music programs. Music teachers, parents, and students were found to have the most positive effects on the music programs, whereas No Child Left Behind, budgetary concerns, standardized testing, and scheduling were found to have the most negative effects on music at the elementary level. The authors of the current study sought to build on this study by examining many of these same issues as they relate to secondary schools.

Prior research has investigated the views of society in general regarding music's role in education, sought administrators' views of specific components of a music curriculum, and investigated the perceived effects of current issues in education on the music curriculum. A majority of these studies have focused on specific regions or states, and although this information is valuable, few studies have expanded their scope to the national level. A national survey could help the profession to better understand the state of secondary school music programs in the United States from the perspective of the school principal.

The purpose of this study was to profile secondary school music programs in the United States and to investigate principals' perceptions of those curricula. The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the profile of secondary school course offerings, requirements, and staffing?
2. What are secondary school principals' perceptions of music learning outcomes as they are currently being met?
3. What are secondary school principals' perceptions of broad educational goals as they are currently being met?
4. What are principals' perceptions about the degree to which certain variables impact music education?

Procedures

Survey Form

A survey form was designed to profile music programs and measure secondary school principals' perceptions of music curricula. Its construction was informed by extant research, the National Standards in Music Education, and informal discussions with local music educators and principals. A draft of the survey form was

reviewed by two secondary school principals, two secondary school music teachers, and a music education researcher. Comments and suggestions were considered when revising the form. The final survey form was divided into four sections. The first section was used to collect information about the programs, including the characteristics of the school in general and the music program in particular. Principals were asked to indicate (from a list of 11 courses and 3 open-ended spaces) which music courses were currently offered, which courses were not offered but they would like to offer, and which courses are not offered but they would need more information about. The second section of the survey consisted of seven music learning outcomes, loosely based on those found in the National Standards for Music Education (e.g., perform music, create and compose music). Principals were provided with a Likert-type scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) to indicate the degree to which they believed certain goals were being met as a result of music instruction at their school. The third section consisted of a series of statements representing 13 broad educational goals—drawn from prior research (i.e., Abril & Gault, 2005, 2006; Hanley, 1987; Punke, 1972). After each statement, principals used the same 5-point scale to indicate the degree to which they perceived these goals were being met. The fourth section asked principals to measure the overall effect of 10 variables on their music program (*strongly positive* = 5, *positive* = 4, *no effect* = 3, *negative* = 2, *strongly negative* = 1). Finally, in an open-ended section, principals were asked to describe the greatest obstacles hampering their ability to support the music program at their school.

Sample

A stratified random sample of 1,000 active secondary school principals at both public and private schools was drawn from a list of 19,510 members of the largest national association of secondary school principals. The sample was proportionally stratified to reflect the proportion of members in each of four major regions of the United States and so that the sample might closely reflect the population. A mailer was sent to the principals in the sample in which they were asked to complete the survey independently and return it using a self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed in the mailer. A second mailer was sent out approximately 18 days later to those who had not responded. A small incentive (wrapped tea bag) was included in the second mailer as a token of appreciation for completing the survey. Surveys were returned from 54% of respondents. Principals who responded represented each of the four regions of the United States, and the proportions were strikingly similar to the population: Midwest (population = 32%, returned surveys = 35%), South (population = 22%, returned surveys = 23%), Northeast (population = 25%, returned surveys = 23%), and West (population = 21%, returned surveys = 19%). In all, 11 mailers were returned because of invalid addresses, and eight response forms were invalidated because a large portion of questions was left unanswered.

The majority of principals worked at the senior high level (57%), a smaller percentage worked at the middle/junior high level (30%), and the remainder (13%) worked in schools with other grade level configurations (e.g., 6th-12th grades). Respondents indicated what percentage of their student bodies qualified for free and reduced-price meals, resulting in the following: 0% to 25% (46% of schools), 26% to 50% (33% of schools), and more than 50% (21% of schools). Schools were located in rural (46%), suburban (32%), and urban (22%) communities.

Results

Profiles

Virtually all of the schools surveyed offered some music course taught by a specialist (98%), yet music was a required course in only 34% of those schools. Data for schools that did not have any music programs (2%) were not included in subsequent analyses. More middle/junior high schools required music (58%) than did senior high schools (18%) or those with other combinations of grade levels (49%). When asked to describe more details about these requirements via an open-ended space, several principals who indicated that there was no specific music requirement explained that there was a general fine arts requirement that could include music. Principals reported that this requirement was mandated at the state and/or school district levels (67%) in most cases and at the school level (33%) in fewer. Most principals (51%) claimed that the decision determining whether there will be a music position at their schools was made by the state and/or district school board. Some principals (36%) claimed they were charged with that decision, whereas fewer (9%) claimed it was a joint decision between the principal and the district school board or the principal and a school-based committee comprising of teachers, parents, and/or community members. Some principals (4%) were unsure who made this decision. Principals were asked to indicate how many music specialists worked at their school, resulting in the following: one (18%), two (44%), three (22%), and four or more (16%). The number of these that were full-time employees ranged from one to seven, with a mean of 1.96 ($SD = 1.02$). Means for number of full-time music specialists were also calculated by school locations, resulting in the following: rural, 1.70 ($SD = 1.00$); urban, 1.98 ($SD = 1.18$); and suburban, 2.31 ($SD = 1.33$). There was a significant difference by school location, $F(2, 477) = 12.61, p < .001$, but post hoc analysis revealed significant differences only between suburban and rural schools.

The most commonly offered music course in secondary schools was band, which was offered in 93% of schools. Other common offerings included chorus (88%) and jazz/rock ensemble (55%). Other, less common courses (in fewer than 50% of the schools) included general music (45%), orchestra (42%), theory (40%), guitar (19%),

Table 1
Frequency of Secondary Schools That Currently Offered
or Would Like to Offer Certain Music Courses

	Band	Jazz/		General Music	String Ensemble	Theory	Guitar	Piano	Music		Mariachi Ensemble
		Vocal Ensemble	Rock Ensemble						Technology	Composition	
Offered	502	476	297	243	227	217	103	69	54	40	31
Would like to offer	12	37	81	81	92	81	113	119	102	97	21
Need more information	8	7	40	49	65	54	85	62	114	125	168

piano/keyboard (13%), music technology (10%), composition (7%), and mariachi ensemble (5%). A handful of principals indicated that they offered other types of courses, including: “Caribbean Ensemble,” “Brazilian Ensemble,” “African Drumming,” “Bluegrass,” “Celtic Music,” “Musical Theater,” and “Math-as-Music.” For a more detailed breakdown of courses “currently offered,” courses that principals would “like to offer,” and courses they would “need more information about,” see Table 1.

To compare the variety of music courses offered based on school location type and school socioeconomic status, a diversity of course offerings score was calculated for each school. This score was calculated by adding the numbers of different courses that principals indicated were currently being offered. A mean score was then calculated for all schools by location type, resulting in the following: rural, 3.57 ($SD = 1.90$); urban, 4.38 ($SD = 1.74$); and suburban, 4.86 ($SD = 1.83$). Although there was a significant difference found among the three school location types, $F(2, 528) = 25.31, p < .001$, post hoc analysis indicated significant differences between rural schools and their urban and suburban counterparts. There was no significant difference between urban and suburban schools in the diversity of course offerings. Mean scores for diversity of course offerings were also calculated by school socioeconomic status (SES), resulting in the following: high (0% to 25% free and reduced meals), 4.73 ($SD = 1.86$); middle (26% to 50% free and reduced meals), 3.97 ($SD = 1.86$); and low (more than 50%), 3.29 ($SD = 1.72$). There was a significant difference by SES, $F(2, 528) = 24.33, p < .001$.

The second section of the survey sought to determine principals’ perceptions of the music learning outcomes that arise from participation in school music. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for these results. Responses were generally positive, with all mean scores above the midpoint (3). Confidence intervals were low and fairly stable across variables, ranging from ± 0.04 to ± 0.09 (see Table 2). Section 3 of the survey sought to determine principals’ perceptions of broad educational goals as they were being met in their respective schools. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for these data. Mean scores for every broad educational goal were on the positive

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals for
Music Learning Outcomes in Current Conditions

	Perform	Listen	Read and Write Music	Analyze	Relate Other Subjects	Relate Culture/History	Create and Compose
<i>M</i>	4.79	4.30	3.89	3.85	3.75	3.75	3.28
<i>SD</i>	0.46	0.73	0.90	0.86	0.89	0.89	1.02
Confidence interval	±0.04	±0.06	±0.08	±0.07	±0.08	±0.08	±0.09

side of the 5-point scale. Mean scores ranged from a high of 4.59 ($SD = 0.58$) for cooperation to a low of 3.80 ($SD = 0.81$) for tolerance toward other cultures. Confidence intervals were low and fairly stable across variables, ranging from ± 0.05 to ± 0.07 (see Table 3). These data suggest that principals believe that music programs are highly successful in helping students meet both musical and broad educational learning goals.

The fourth section of the survey measured the degree to which 10 variables were perceived to affect the music program (*strongly positive* = 5, *positive* = 4, *no effect* = 3, *negative* = 2, *strongly negative* = 1). Means and standard deviations for these ratings are found in Table 4. Mean scores indicate that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and standardized tests had the most negative impact on music programs, with scores below the midpoint. The frequency of positive responses (strongly positive and positive) and negative responses (strongly negative and negative) were collapsed for subsequent analysis. It is interesting to note that the majority of principals indicated that NCLB (49%) and standardized tests (57%) had no effect on their music program. Nonetheless, a sizable number did consider them to have a negative effect (38% and 26%, respectively). Most principals considered the following variables to have positive or strongly positive effects on the music program: students (96%), parents (94%), music teachers (93%), other teachers (70%), the school board (68%), and educational research findings (51%). Responses for the following two variables were strongly divided: budget/finances (46% positive and 39% negative) and scheduling (46% positive and 34% negative); very few indicated that these variables had no effect on the music program. In other words, most principals agreed that these two variables had a strong impact on their music program in one way or another.

Chi-square analyses were used to test for differences in the ways principals perceived these 10 variables to be impacting music programs: highly positive/positive, no effect, and negative/highly negative. Results indicated significant differences for

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals for
Each Broad Educational Goal in Current Circumstances

	Cooperation/ Teamwork	Self- Esteem	Creativity	Lifelong Learning	Future Involvement With Arts	Artistic Sensitivity	Diversion
<i>M</i>	4.59	4.50	4.41	4.31	4.31	4.29	4.27
<i>SD</i>	0.58	0.65	0.67	0.71	0.70	0.65	0.84
Confidence interval	±0.05	±0.06	±0.06	±0.06	±0.06	±0.06	±0.07

	Self- Expression	Intelligence	Critical Thinking	Interdisciplinary	Heritage/ Culture	Tolerance of Others
<i>M</i>	4.27	4.21	4.07	3.96	3.90	3.84
<i>SD</i>	0.73	0.73	0.85	0.79	0.87	0.81
Confidence interval	±0.06	±0.06	±0.07	±0.07	±0.07	±0.07

each of the 10 variables ($p < .05$). Of the variables, four (budgeting, scheduling, NCLB, and standardized tests) were perceived to be negatively impacting music programs in more than 25% of schools. These variables were further analyzed to test for differences in responses by school location (rural, urban, suburban) and by school socioeconomic status (free and reduced price lunch percentages). Results of chi-square analyses revealed that there were no significant differences ($p > .05$) for any of the four variables by location or socioeconomic status. In other words, school SES and location were not associated with principal perceptions of variables negatively impacting a given music program. The results from this section of the survey were compared to the open-ended responses that asked principals to describe the greatest obstacles they face in supporting the music program and any other comments they would like to share.

Out of 541 principals, 337 provided responses for the first open-ended question asking them to describe the primary obstacles inhibiting their ability to fully support the music programs at their respective schools. Several respondents provided multiple answers, resulting in a total of 468 statements. These statements fell into seven general categories: (a) financial/budgetary (32.5% of total responses); (b) scheduling/time (19.9% of total responses); (c) outside pressures (testing, legislation, upper administration, community attitudes; 15.4% of total responses); (d) staffing (10.9% of total responses); (e) no obstacles (9.2% of total responses); (f) unique characteristics of the school such as decreasing enrollment, socioeconomic status of the population, or special focus of the school (i.e., alternative school; 7.1% of total

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for the Effect of Each
Variable on the Music Program

	No Child Left Behind	Standardized Tests	Budgets	Scheduling	Music Education Research	Classroom Teachers	District Administration	Parents	Students	Music Teachers
<i>M</i>	2.69 ^a	2.87 ^a	3.12	3.19	3.52	3.81	3.90	4.33	4.36	4.54
<i>SD</i>	0.84	0.75	1.10	1.11	0.70	0.69	0.79	0.63	0.59	0.76

a. Variables that were below the midpoint.

responses); and (g) facilities/equipment (5.1% of total responses).¹ The findings are consistent with principal responses on Section 4 of the survey form, in which NCLB, standardized testing, financial issues, and schedule-related issues were cited as having a more negative impact on the ability to effectively implement a school music program than other variables.

Specific responses that cited NCLB (“No Child Left Behind has devastated our Industrial Art, Music, Business and Vocational programs. The only thing that counts anymore is what is tested”)² or state-mandated curricular requirements (“Increased state mandates for graduate requirements also hamper music support and interest”) as primary obstacles to implementing a strong music program further highlight the connection between these open-ended responses and results from Section 4 of the survey. For respondents who cited financial issues, one frequently described concern related to districtwide financial problems (“The biggest obstacle at this time is a shrinking budget with a huge deficit caused by our state’s QED law”). Additional responses in this category cited the expense of music programs as another limitation (“Finances—music [band] is an expensive program, requiring far greater resources than the academic areas”). Respondents who cited time or scheduling issues discussed the challenges related to fitting all classes within the daily schedule (“Scheduling issues have kept many out of music”) or competing activities (“Our students are committed to too many activities, some are forced to make choices, and music is often times removed”) as contributors to limited support for music at the secondary level.

The percentage of statements in each category is strikingly analogous to comments made by elementary school principals who were asked a similar open-ended question (Abril & Gault, 2006). However, one additional category of statements provided by secondary school principals dealt with the specific characteristics of their given schools. Secondary school principals cited school-specific issues related to decreasing enrollment (“Declining enrollment affects the size of number of students in the bands/music classes”), school size (“We have 110 students”), or socioeconomic status of the school population (“Many students do not participate in band because their families cannot afford it”) as reasons why their given music programs were not more successful.

Discussion

One of the purposes of this study was to profile secondary school music programs in the United States. It should be noted that there was a 54% response rate, and although this is a respectable rate of return for survey research (Rea & Parker, 1997), there may be an inherent bias in those who returned their surveys. For example, principals whose schools did not offer music were probably less likely to complete the survey because it seemed irrelevant to them. With that said, results were fairly positive considering that an overwhelming number of schools provided some music course taught by a music specialist. Of concern however was that only a portion of those schools (34%) had a specific music course requirement. This figure does not reveal that many of those schools without a music requirement did have an arts requirement that could be met by completing a music course. More middle/junior high schools required music than did high schools. In the United States, it is typical for students in upper grades to be given more curricular choices than those in elementary and middle schools. Responses from high schools might explain the low overall percentage of secondary schools specifically requiring music. In most cases, these requirements were reported to be established outside the school building, although 33% of principals claimed it was a decision made at the school level. In most schools, the decision to allocate funding for a music specialist was made by outside administrators; however, a large number of principals (36%) were charged with that decision. Open-ended responses revealed that some principals worked at private schools, which might help explain this high percentage. The number of music specialists in schools reflected a wide range (one to seven), although the majority of schools employed about two full-time music specialists. There were significantly fewer full-time music specialists employed in rural schools than there were in suburban schools.

It should come as no surprise that band and chorus were the most common course offerings. They have been popular course offerings in American secondary schools for many decades (Reimer, 2004; Williams, 2007). Jazz/rock, general music, theory, and string ensembles were courses in the next tier, with between 200 and 299 schools out of 541 offering them. It is of particular note that a popular music ensemble was so common, although many of these groups were most likely jazz ensembles that were a part of a given school's instrumental program. It is also interesting to see how many principals would like to offer courses such as piano, strings, guitar, and music technology. This might simply be due to the fact that these courses were offered less frequently. It could also reflect principals' desire to involve more students in music through expanded course offerings, a possible sign of value toward music education. The low numbers of principals claiming they would like to offer mariachi could be explained by their unfamiliarity with it or a feeling that such a course would not be culturally relevant to students. The high numbers of principals indicating they needed more information about certain courses suggests that they

lacked knowledge about certain types of courses, such as music technology, composition, and mariachi. These courses have not typically been a part of school music programs in the United States.

When comparing the variety of course offerings by location, rural schools were found to provide significantly less than their suburban and urban counterparts. This finding is consistent with prior research in arts education (Illinois Creates, 2006; NCES, 2002) and further supports the notion that students in rural schools do not necessarily have access to the same arts education experiences as those in suburban or urban areas. This is likely because rural schools have relatively low student enrollment, which might result in fewer resources (human and financial) being allocated to music and the arts. This study found a disparity of course offerings by socioeconomic status, with high SES schools having significantly more course offerings than all others. This is similar to findings reported nationwide for the 1999-2000 academic year (NCES, 2002) and in California schools, indicating that students in high-poverty schools had less access to arts programs than their counterparts of more affluence (Woodworth et al., 2007). This is of great concern, especially because students from less affluent backgrounds are unlikely to have the financial resources to study formally music in venues outside of school. Interestingly, SES and school location were not associated with principals' perceptions of variables negatively impacting music programs (i.e., budget, scheduling, standardized tests, and NCLB). In an effort to find solutions that give all students equal access to music and arts education, future research might help uncover the characteristics of exemplary music programs in rural and/or low SES schools with rich course offerings.

In general, it seems that principals believed that music education programs in the secondary schools were highly successful at helping students meet an array of music and broad educational goals. Creating and composing were rated lowest among music learning outcomes. The fact that principals labeled creating and composing as the musical learning being met least effectively was consistent with findings reported in a prior survey of elementary school principals (Abril & Gault, 2006). Creativity, however, was the third most highly rated broad educational outcome. These seemingly contradictory views might be due to the fact that principals consider performing to be a creative activity. Although they may frequently see evidence of performing in their music programs, observing students develop skills as composers is usually less obvious to principals who do not observe the everyday activities of a music classroom (Abril & Gault, 2007). Furthermore, creating and composing were specifically music-related in the survey, whereas creativity was found within the broad educational goals. Creativity in this capacity may have been seen as a general human characteristic manifest and applicable in many facets of life. Principals' views on creating and composing in the music classroom are similar to those of music teachers (see, Williams, 2007). It may also be the fact that students are not composing in secondary school music programs. The two musical learning outcomes that principals perceived were being met most effectively

are performance and listening. Broad educational outcomes that were thought to be most effectively met through participation in music included cooperation/teamwork and self-esteem. Cooperation is a skill necessary for ensembles to be successful in performance, and self-esteem is likely to be observed through the students' various performances throughout a school year.

The final section of the survey sought to uncover the impact of certain variables on a given music program. Clearly, there were certain variables perceived to impact music programs positively. Principals considered music teachers to have the greatest positive impact on a program. This corroborates with the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding teachers in their schools (Abril & Gault, 2006). Interestingly, in a few open-ended responses, teachers were also cited as having a strongly negative impact on the music program when they were perceived to be ineffective. Teachers' actions and work with students are likely to have a strong impact on the way the music program is perceived in a given school. Principals also thought students and parents exerted a positive impact on the music program. Overall mean scores for scheduling and budgets were not overwhelmingly negative; however, they were commonly cited on the open-ended section of the survey as being major obstacles. The high standard deviations indicate a high degree of variability for these two variables. It is possible that when budgeting and scheduling issues did affect a given program, the magnitude of the effect was quite strong. This would help explain the number of open-ended responses related to funding and scheduling, and the fact that respondents indicated having either positive or negative effects, but that very few viewed them as having no effect. In the open-ended section, some principals cited the high cost of music programs as a reason for excluding some students from music. Music educators and administrators might consider lower cost music course alternatives for secondary schools, such as general music, guitar, technology, or composition classes.

Those variables with the most negative impact on the music program included standardized tests and No Child Left Behind. These variables were rated lowest and were the only ones below the midpoint on the 5-point Likert scale. Frequency data based on whether the response was positive, negative, or had no effect revealed that the majority considered NCLB to have no effect, followed closely by having a negative effect. Standardized testing had a similar distribution, with the majority saying it had no effect, followed by a sizable number claiming that it had a negative impact (note the high standard deviation for these two variables). Very few principals considered either of these to have a positive impact on the music program. The fact that approximately 7% of open-ended responses discussed characteristics related to school size and/or location as variables hindering the music program seems to corroborate with comparisons of course offerings by location. It also supports findings from the Illinois Creates (2006) study that noted a disparity between urban and rural schools in relation to availability of music instruction. Analyses of data from the current study, however, revealed no differences in variables perceived to be negatively impacting music programs based

on SES or school locations. These variables may be perceived to impact music programs around the country in similar ways.

In this study, we sought to investigate the perceptions of secondary principals regarding the music programs at their schools. Although current results do indicate a general sense of support for music education, more in-depth study is needed to determine how elements both in and outside of a given school setting contribute to the viability of music programs. A longitudinal study that followed specific programs over the course of several years could provide insight regarding how successful music programs manage challenges over an extended period of time, providing valuable ideas for policy makers and decision makers.

Understanding the perceptions of people in their school community might help music teachers develop strategic ways to build awareness and support for their programs (Abril & Gault, 2007). In *Transforming Music Education*, Jorgensen (2003) wrote, “Teachers . . . need to be more skillful as politicians, willing to work with their colleagues . . . to demand and secure appropriate support, recognition, and remuneration for their work. . . . It cannot be left to others to defend” (p. 117). Teachers might serve as agents for change most effectively when informed with an understanding of the ways in which people in the educational community think about music in schools.

Notes

1. Percentages do not always equal 100% due to rounding error.
2. Comments found within parenthesis are direct quotes from principals’ open-ended responses.

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