



Music Education • Orchestrating Success

Summer 2016 Backgrounder – Well-Rounded Education

Background:

After years of failed negotiations, in December 2015, Congress finally passed a new version of the ESEA, now titled the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The passage of ESSA is an historic victory for music education advocates, because it includes for the first time a *specific* and *separate* mention of “**music**” as a part of a “**Well-Rounded Education**” (Title VIII, Sec. 8002 of ESSA). The “Well-Rounded Education” provision is the successor title of the “Core Academic Subjects” provision from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), where “the arts” was previously listed as core.

The addition of “music” provides much needed clarity regarding its status under federal education priorities and provides a clear message that students should have access to a “Well-Rounded Education,” a broad and rich curriculum that includes music education. In addition, this inclusion provides numerous opportunities to utilize federal funding to increase the access of music education for all students, especially those most vulnerable.

Key Points:

- The inclusion of “music” as part of a “Well-Rounded Education” serves as an important touchstone for music advocates, nationwide. Advocates rely on this federally protected status to effectively make their case that music education is essential to the American academic experience. Furthermore, listing this discipline in federal statute reinforces the types of learning experiences that we as a nation, feel are most important for all students.
- Constraints on funding continue to limit the prevalence of strong music education programs; hence, the level at which such programs can correspondingly help students develop and achieve in the 21st century. Maintaining “Well-Rounded” status for music and fully funding these related programs aids an overall increase in accessibility to resources fundamental to the honing of effective programs, leaving a lasting impact on students’ lives as the benefits of music go beyond academics and the classroom.
- Music educators have developed a meaningful body of legislative, systemic, and research-oriented support for music as part of a full and balanced education. The Well-Rounded Education provision ensures and maintains a student’s access to music education, especially those in at risk environments who could benefit the very most from school music programs. These subjects have a unique ability to engage at-risk students and improve their overall engagement in academics, ensuring they have the essential 21st century skills to succeed not only in academics, but also today’s workforce.