Galvanizing Factors of Communities Applying to be One of the “Best 100 Communities for Music Education”

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to identify those galvanizing factors that discriminate communities maintaining and promoting high-quality music programs from those communities that do not. Three of the communities visited were selected as winners of the NAMM Foundation’s “Best 100 Communities for Music Education” competition, and the other three applied but were not selected. The communities were paired based on size, urban/rural status, and SES. In each school district, the researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with music education teachers, school and district administrators, parents, and members of the community. The individual districts were responsible for the logistics of each visit, so the number and environment of the interviews and focus groups varied widely—from individual interviews in administrator offices to large focus groups under less-than-ideal conditions. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Some key points that surfaced include (a) the “100 Best Communities” competition tended to encompass school communities more than whole communities, and the researchers found themselves actually examining school systems; (b) schools who applied for the competition (even those who did not win) were from the higher end of the continuum (i.e., struggling music programs probably did not apply); (c) teachers from communities that were chosen believed that their school districts placed music programs on an even plane with athletics, whereas teachers from communities not chosen expressed that they perceived their programs to take a back seat to athletics; and (d) funding levels did matter. Within the communities chosen, the music teachers expressed that music programs were adequately funded.

INTRODUCTION
Music programs help forge strong communities, which in turn provide support for strong music programs. Music education, in and out of school, plays a role in the knowledge economy (Jones, 2005) and facilitates group knowledge construction (Olson, 2005), thus developing communities as a whole and meeting the needs of their individual members.
Just as successful communities can serve as models for music programs, successful music programs can serve as exemplars for community development programs (Dillon, 2006). In a broad sense, music participation serves to connect children and youths to one another, and thus to their schools, neighborhoods, and communities (Campbell, 2005). Music programs can take place outside of traditional school settings as well as within. New Horizons and similar ensembles, for example, meet the needs of adult community members (Ahlquist, 2006; Coffman & Levy, 1997; Mark, 1996). A variety of community programs also meet the needs of children and youths (Hedden & Daugherty, 2009).

Authors have consistently drawn the following conclusions about music programs and communities. First, school music programs and communities interact, as do schools and communities in a larger sense. Communities provide economic and human resources for school music programs, while music programs in turn contribute to the building of vibrant communities (Jones, 2005). Second, school music programs, and music participation in general, do more than serve as an indicator of the health of a given community. They substantively influence the vitality of the communities in which they are located (Clements, 2006; Dillon, 2006). Third, children and youths are functioning, participating members of the communities in which they live. Therefore, by meeting the needs of children and adolescents, school music programs also meet the needs of communities (Conway & Hodgman, 2008).

However, what has not been explored are those qualities that make for a successful school music program, one that can interact with and have influence on its community. Most of the extant literature focused on community ensembles (e.g., Coffman & Levy, 1997; Conway & Hodgman, 2008; Hedden & Daugherty, 2009; McCroy, 1998), various partnership opportunities (e.g., Reynolds, 2003; Soto, Lum, & Campbell, 2009), or the relationship of various arts organizations to their respective communities (e.g., DeNardo, 1997; Myers, 2006). Investigations are needed that focus more directly on the qualities of a successful music program, and to the extent possible, how those qualities create linkages to the community at large. With the present study, we sought to meet this need. In particular, we sought to determine the galvanizing factors (i.e., those factors that underpin school and community efforts to develop and sustain high-quality school music programs).

**METHOD**

With this project, we set out to determine which factors were galvanizing in a school or community, resulting in high-quality music programs. Initially, these factors were to be pulled from the survey items and data in the NAMM Foundation’s “Best 100 Communities for Music Education” survey. These data per se yielded little usable information, however, so the researchers decided to pursue a thorough qualitative investigation. A cursory analysis of the survey data revealed some key aspects that communities with quality music programs seem to share. By conducting face-to-face interviews, we planned to explore these key aspects in further detail, seeking to determine just how those characteristics make for a successful music community, and why those characteristics were galvanizing. In communities not selected as one of the “100 Best”, we sought to determine whether those key aspects were either missing or less salient.

**Selection of Participants**

According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Sampling in this manner made the most sense, because institutions with particular characteristics were necessary to the success of the study. Via a series of qualitative case studies, we explored three of the communities selected as winners and three communities who applied but were not selected. The communities were selected in terms of varied geographical locations, matched community types, and SES (as determined by free and reduced lunch percentage), resulting in six configurations: (a) rural–chosen, (b) rural–not chosen, (c) suburban–chosen, (d) suburban–not chosen (e) urban–chosen, and (f) urban–not chosen.

We conducted a series of semi-structured interviews, in which essentially the same questions were asked at each of the six locations. Each location set up interviews with school district level administrators, district level music/arts administrators, building principals, teachers (including the teacher who submitted the application), and focus groups of community members and parents. A few special interview questions were crafted for each of the six different locations. On occasion, we extended beyond the questions to attempt to bring to light what made the sites different. We spent one to three days in each community, conducting interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of stakeholders. All interviews were recorded. Later, project staff keyed the recordings into electronic files, by means of which transcripts were developed.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected primarily through a series of intensive, semi-structured interviews, which allowed interviewees to speak about a similar set of issues, but also provided opportunities for divergences as the need arose. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have contended that a good semi-structured interview “offer[s] the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview” (p. 97), but still allows the interviewer to cover items necessary for the study.

**Data Analysis**

The transcriptions of the interviews with individuals and focus groups were the primary source of data for this study. An inductive approach to analysis was used, which allows categories, patterns, and themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing a prede-
terminated theoretical framework onto them. Because little is known about what factors are conducive to fostering quality music education programs, an inductive approach seemed most appropriate. In the tradition of Glaser and Strauss (cited in Merriam, 1998), we analyzed the data using the constant comparison method. This method necessitates that the researcher compare an incident from one interview/focus group to other incidents in the same or other interviews/focus groups, which leads to provisional categories and ultimately to themes and patterns. Particular attention was given to those categories that correspond with the galvanizing factors that were implied in the original survey data. Some provisional categories were known in advance based upon the way in which the original survey was constructed and upon the questions that we asked. The researchers also looked for additional themes to surface as the transcript analysis progressed. Some themes were specific to one district or type of district (e.g., rural as compared with urban); others were more universal, allowing researchers to make inferences and draw conclusions.

**Trustworthiness**

According to Maxwell (1996), “the main threat to valid description … is the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data” (p. 89). In order to protect against this threat to validity, all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. While careful documentation wards off these threats to valid data, Maxwell has further warned against threats to valid interpretation—mainly the imposition of one’s own opinions and perspectives onto the data rather than allowing the conceptualizations of the participants to guide interpretation. Two methods of protection against this particular threat to validity were employed: triangulation and rich data. Triangulation involved not only talking to a diverse range of individuals, but also employing multiple researchers in various combinations to conduct the interviews and to evaluate the resulting transcripts. Also, the analysis and interpretation consisted of rich data, which was best accomplished with recorded and transcribed interviews and focus groups.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The interviews produced 290 pages of single-spaced transcripts from the six sites. Most of the interviews were with administrators, though all constituencies were represented at each location. While there were some themes that arched across all groups, topic areas did seem to separate themselves according to three groupings: administrators, community members/parents, and teachers. Beginning with administrators, we visit the different areas of discussion for each of those subgroups. Note that, as discussed within the findings, very few differences arose between those schools selected for the award and those not. When those differences arose, they were noted in the results section. Otherwise, the only distinction noted below is whether the quotations came from an urban, suburban, or rural district.

**Administrator Comments**

We spoke with both school-level and district-level administrators in all six communities. In the smaller districts, we spoke with at least one principal and the superintendent; in larger districts, access was more often given to the district-level fine arts administrator in addition to principals or assistant principals. In all cases, the administrators were able to speak knowledgeably and in depth about music in their schools and why music is important. In part, their ability to speak so fluently may have been the result of who was selected to be interviewed (i.e., the assistant principal at a fine arts academy, or the principal at a “music demonstration site” school). Regardless, the information gleaned from speaking with these administrators illuminated how music is faring in these schools and the value placed upon it.

The administrators’ perspective provided interesting depth. Except for the fine arts administrators, administrators interviewed for this study were by necessity advocates of all of the activities and opportunities in their schools and districts. They had the broadest perspective of the role of music education in the school, balancing its value with that of sports, other extracurricular activities, and academics. They also had the keenest appreciation of more comprehensive educational concerns like budgeting, scheduling, and student assessment scores.

**Music and the budget.** Administrators indicated that music programs were faring at least as well as if not better than other curricular units. The timing of our site visits (i.e., during the economic downturn of Spring 2009) made this question more complex than it might have been just one year prior. In general, however, administrators reported making all the efforts they could to assure that the music opportunities their districts provide remained intact. One administrator from an urban community said:

I don’t think [music program spending] is a hard sell here. We have extreme cuts that we have to find, millions in the fall, and millions now, but they are not talking about cutting the arts. Right now, they see the importance of the arts. They understand that it’s the glue.

Further, because of the role that music plays in the districts’ public image, music education may in fact enjoy a small amount of protection from budget cuts. According to another administrator from the same school district, “This community is really focused on the arts. Lord knows, [as] the person in charge of the budget, we don’t touch the arts from a budget standpoint. We think it’s important.”

**Music and “the research.”** Perhaps because of their broad perspective, or because of their less intimate role with school-level music education, administrators were the most likely group to talk about “the research” that supports the importance of music education—to learning, to student discipline, to brain development. Comments about the research concerning the benefits of music education were fairly general, not tied to any particular study, and sometimes inaccurate. An administrator from an urban community said, “Research has shown that music is a niche for kids. Generally, kids who
are involved in music score higher from a standard achievement point of view because of the concentration they have to have, the training, the skills.” According to another from a rural community:

There’s plenty of research that backs listening to classical music and different kinds of music that help with patterns and things like that mathematically…. [T]here’s way more research out there that supports these kinds of activities for academics than sports do, in my opinion.

Music and athletics. Perhaps because of limited resources—in terms of finances, time, and student talent—a tension between music and sports was felt most strongly by some rural-district administrators. The “battle” between athletics and music, and who was perceived as “winning,” was one of the few areas of delineation between the rural community chosen as one of the “Best Communities” and the community not chosen. According to an administrator in the rural community that was chosen:

A lot of educators throughout their careers complain that athletics run the school. I do not feel that way here. I feel like the music department is first and foremost. Athletics may be up there [gesturing upward] with them, but the people in this community are very proud of their music department.

These comments contrast with an administrator’s from the unsuccessful rural applicant, who said, “Our gymnasiums are kind of the center of the community. Everybody comes to watch activities, games, all the sports and different things like that.” One principal from a suburban community offered an insightful perspective on the relationship between athletics and music in her large high school.

Well, I think in high school, you have got to have your music and you have got to have your athletics…. I think both are critical to a high school, and the performance of the high school, and the perception out there. If you have good programs in both of these areas, then it makes the rest of [the school] look good, too…. That’s because the parents are going to come see their kids. If they’re here supporting their kids, [the kids] are going to be better.

Community support. Administrators often spoke on the connection between music and the community from a macro perspective. They viewed their district’s music performances and outreach as an important and effective way to engage the community, beyond school parents, in the activities of their schools.

I think there’s no question, our community values the arts. Luckily, administration knows that. I don’t think they would challenge us for that reason. The community would not stand for it. They just won’t. [The community] supports the arts in this area, not just the music, but they see the importance of music education. They want their children to belong…. The community is very involved. We pack all of our performances…. Almost all of our music performances are at capacity, even at the elementary schools. (Administrator from a suburban district)

The relationship between community and school in small towns warrants some exploration. Because opportunities for sports, arts, or other kinds of activities are often quite limited, the school’s cultural activities often serve as the community’s cultural activities as well. According to an administrator from a rural community, “The school is the center of attention. We are small enough and far enough away from [the city] that what we do here is the most important thing in this community.”

Music as a “hook.” When asked to justify the role of music in their schools, administrators often referred to its ability to be a “hook.” For some students, music (or the arts generally) might be what keeps them in school and focused on succeeding academically.

An administrator from an urban community stated:

This provides an opportunity for students to grab a hold of something and say, “I’m interested in this, I like this, it makes me feel good. It gives me an opportunity to excel. I might not be the best math student, but I can sing. I might not be the best in English, or I might not be the best athlete, but you know what? I can play the trumpet or the violin and I can provide some enjoyment to somebody.”

Another administrator from a suburban community believed that:

For my money, having a student who belongs to something is probably one of the biggest ingredients for success, as far as overall school experience. And I think our music teachers really zero in on that, and they try to connect to kids through the fact that they like music, and also just the fact that [students] need somebody who knows that they are an individual…. And you know, if you can make a kid feel important, you’ve got ‘em in the palm of your hand.

Parent/Community Comments

Our access to parents and community members varied considerably from district to district. The arrangements for interviews and focus groups were left to the discretion of the district hosts; thus, we had to work within the confines of those arrangements. Information gained from talking with parents and community members have been grouped together for two reasons. In some communities, only one focus group was scheduled that combined representative parents and community members. In other groups designated to be solely members of the community, it became apparent that several members were parents of former students. Because information was comingle in these ways, we report it as one category.

Community connections. Both parents and community members acknowledged the importance of community in creating an environment for good music education. Their comments demonstrate this key relationship to be reciprocal. Community members must come into the schools and avail themselves of the arts opportunities available there. Further, the school needs to be involved as an arts provider for the community. By working together in this manner, a culture can be fostered that cultivates the arts.
parent from a rural community said, “I was surprised, when I first hit town, just how active the communities were in the area and how much quality was involved in it too.”

*Parental support of the school.* It is not a surprise that school districts successful in establishing quality music programs do so with the support of parents. A parent from an urban school district made an observation about parental support, saying, “I think you see a really broad base of parental support for whatever the children are doing. And the music programs, whatever they be—band, choral, or some other type of specialized [music]—always have a booster group.”

*Music versus athletics.* Potential tensions between music and athletic programs in the smaller, rural schools were not lost upon parents and community members. Focus group members echoed the concerns expressed by their districts’ administrators. The rural school district not chosen, in which administrators expressed a struggle between these two programs, had parents and community members who felt the same way. One parent stated, “There were several times that we had a dress rehearsal and the kids had to leave because they had sports, and a lot of our coaches don’t make allowances if you’re involved in choir.” In the rural community in which music and athletics appear to coexist more amicably, a parent noted the relationship:

> [The coaches] work well with us. The athletic director knows if there is a parade on this weekend, he will try to schedule volleyball around it. We work together…. We get very busy. But we don’t have to pick one or the other.

*Music and the research.* Like school administrators, some parents and community members were confident in their knowledge of the research on the benefits of music participation. They were, however, somewhat less accurate in their statements than were administrators. According to a parent from an urban community,

> I don’t have the statistics, but I know it’s true. Students who are immersed in the arts are better academically. They always achieve at a higher level…. It’s because they are so disciplined in that art form. It transfers over to their academic success.

*Music for life.* One benefit that parents and community members attributed to music education is that it can develop in students a lifelong appreciation for music. This, they believed, was a key reason music education is important to their children in particular, and their schools in general. According to a parent from one of the rural communities:

> You want them to enjoy music education growing up and enjoying it, but you want more for them. This has been a place that has helped give them that step in the right direction…. [The directors] have done a marvelous job preparing the kids for being more than just a music student, but a community member.

A parent from the other rural community noted, 

> Music is something that kids can enjoy and participate in the rest of their lives…. Once you get out of high school, the opportunities are pretty limited as far as some of the sports. But you know, there’s so many things that involve music and the fine arts, it really is helpful for kids to have that experience.

*The “hook,” continued.* Like administrators, parents and community members credit music with being the enticement that retains some kids who are otherwise at risk of disengaging in school or even dropping out. Parents had this to say:

> The band and choir rooms are safe havens. When they come back into these rooms, the know that they are going to be respected as a part of the program. Not because they are the best player or the best singer, but because they are a part. (Parent from rural community)

A suburban community parent said, “If you don’t have music, you’re going to lose children out of the school system. You’re going to lose them. Because music keeps their interest where it needs to be so much of the time.”

*Teacher Comments* 

Access to teachers varied widely from site to site. The largest site in the study gave researchers access only to the staff in one middle school; another site set up a focus group of music educators from across the district. Generally, access fell somewhere between these two extremes, to include a choral director, band director, and occasionally an orchestra director per site. Of the three groups, the music educators were the most likely to make building-specific comments (the exception being those teachers who currently serve more than one building). They were also the most reflective in their responses regarding the value of music education.

*District-level support.* Support at the district level can be defined as funds, equipment, and/or program and teacher advocacy. All of the schools in this study reported a strong sense of support, particularly for program advocacy. District-level support, or at least the perception of that support, appears to be tangibly felt in school-level music programs. A teacher from an urban community said:

> I have to say that the [district-level] music office were the ones who really enabled us…. I think that sets us apart. As a teacher in this district, just the support. That they would take a chance on what turned out to be an amazing experience.

Another had this to say:

> To be honest, I don’t think [defending music education] would be needed in this county. Most of the board members support the arts and know how important it is to this community. (Teacher from a suburban community)

*Funding issues.* Teacher comments regarding their program budgets were generally positive. Some were given specific dollar amounts to spend each year; others were expected to ask their school-level administrator or district arts administrator for funds to make wanted or needed purchases. Of all of the types of district support, secure funding appears to be the most crucial distinguishing factor between the communities
that did and did not make the “Best Communities” list. According to a teacher from the chosen urban community,

I don’t think we’re in bad shape. We sort of feel like our needs are taken care of here…. [We had some cuts this year], but that was across the board for all programs. And our administrator didn’t just cut music. They cut art, they cut science, they cut across the board.

Other teachers, however, had to deal with disturbingly low budgets.

My budget has been $100, which would buy two pieces of music. When I started at my high school, I had two instruments and no music. Not one single piece of music…. I have spent an enormous amount of my own money just because it’s difficult to teach nothing. (Teacher from an urban, not chosen school)

Some teachers have experienced support in spite of not having a budget. One such teacher from a rural, not chosen school, shared, “You know, I’ve never been told that I have a budget and whenever I turn something in, it’s always approved. And I should probably not point that out to anybody!”

Not all of the funding picture can be represented by the budgets that programs receive from their districts. Family support can also affect the ability of a music program to succeed. The effect of parent economic status, especially on instrumental programs, is best exemplified by access to private lessons, another area where the differences between those chosen and those not are considerable.

Well, yeah, it’d be great if everybody took private lessons, but there isn’t anybody in this county that I’m aware of that teaches band privately. You have to go to [the city]…. it’s a 45-minute drive or so from here, each way, in addition to whatever it is payments you make and then it’s a matter of scheduling. (Teacher from a rural, not chosen school)

In contrast, a teacher from a rural, chosen school shared, “My kids, most who take private lessons go to [nearby cities]. There are opportunities there. We have the same with the vocal department…. Compared to the last 30 years, we have quite a few kids studying.”

Music and the course schedule. The teachers interviewed for this study largely confirmed what their administrators reported—that music was faring well in their schools’ daily schedules. In spite of the pressures to allocate additional time to such subjects as reading and mathematics, these districts were not cutting music offerings. A teacher from a rural community made this remark about scheduling:

As far as enrollment is concerned, the priority is getting into the fine arts program. We really build our schedule around a fifth hour chamber choir so we are not offering things…. that will keep kids from being able to perform in the choir.

Another teacher from a suburban community said, with regard to scheduling, “Our music program is such that every child has music at least one time a week and some will have it twice. This has not changed at all…. They are not pulled out of music.”

Parents. With the exception of a teacher in a particularly challenging school, music educators felt supported by their parent groups. Some schools, typically high schools, have organized parent booster clubs. Others rely on an informal group of volunteers who regularly assist the teacher. A teacher in an urban community said, “We have no parent involvement at [my school]. It’s not just in music; it’s across the board. The PTA turnout is very slim.” In contrast, a teacher from a rural community said, “I have a strong booster organization that raises money when we need it and they’re pretty good. I’m pretty non-demanding with budget. Boosters help with stuff like that. They’ve never been shy about helping out. Another teacher, from a suburban community, added, “Monetarily, I had parents come in when the building was built, [asking] “What is it you are not going to get from the county that we can supplement?”

Scheduling. Teachers were acutely aware that their ability to achieve musical excellence hinges on a large degree on their access to their students, and that access is dependent upon how their building sets the daily course schedule. According to these teachers:

Here is where our community thrives above most. You want the secrets of… Our best kids—we make it so our best kids can be in band and choir…. I tell them why, because I teach you to read, you have to read to be in my program, and she teacher you to listen, you gotta listen to be in her program. If you can read and you can listen, holy schnickles. There’s a full musician we are talking about. (Teacher from a rural community)

Additionally, a teacher from an urban community said, “We are also fortunate to have administration that understands the situation and supports our needs. The music schedule drives the whole building, it really does.”

Community relations. One important way that music educators define program success is in their relationship to the community at large. Whether or not people beyond parents attend their performances, or even just come to the school, is one tangible measure of community support. The following comments from teachers underscore the importance of community support:

I think they are very supportive. We have numerous opportunities to perform out in the community…. And they are so supportive. They just love it. We have people come to our concert who in some cases don’t even have kids who go to this school…. For our evening performances we had sell-out audiences of more than 400 packed into our cafeteria. So that’s not just parents coming, it’s the community who hears about it and comes out to support. (Teacher from an urban community)

A teacher from a suburban community shared:

In this building the county has looked at the school as being a community center. With the way the economy is going and people’s lives are going, how can we service parent and family needs? Can we give them opportunities that they might wish for by allowing some of these things to happen?
Why music? Music teachers had a number of thoughtful responses to the question regarding the importance of music education. Most would have little difficulty in defending the time, attention, and resources that schools allot to their music programs. According to teachers:

Music is its own body of knowledge. We don’t need to leave that out either—the importance of the subject for itself. Sometimes we try to defend outside our area. Really, we all truly believe that music is important by itself. These other things are just benefits to the side. (Teacher in an urban community)

A teacher from a suburban community said:

Obviously, we can throw statistics at them left or right, about music does this for a kid, music raises a team, music does this and that. But there is nothing that beats the hands-on experience of seeing what these kids are going through and what they do every day. Really powerful.

Another suburban teacher said:

In the climate in which schools function now-days, with accountability and all this, I would probably need to resort to information that I would rather not resort to. That would be festival ratings, and so forth. Generally, I probably would point to children’s experiences, the value of these experiences for building student efficacy, for the development of teamwork, discipline, autonomy, self-regulation, a whole variety of things that are happening as a result of their involvement [in music].

Assessment. Most of what teachers had to say about their student assessment practices was expected—they follow their state music standards and do their best to evaluate significant numbers of students on a regular enough basis to be able to note progress (or the lack thereof). One teacher from an urban community, however, had something more profound to say about student assessment.

Several years ago, when I was teaching elementary school, [music] was eliminated from the report card. I fought it because I was afraid that to lose a piece that was assessed for music would demote the importance of music in the student’s life.

CONCLUSIONS

After we analyzed the transcripts, several overarching themes emerged across the different constituencies and groups. They illustrate both similarities and differences among the groups, but also point to some of the factors that separate the sites from one another. Those factors are noted as follows.

Applicants came from a narrow portion of the spectrum. Perhaps the most important finding from this study is that little difference merged between the communities and school districts that applied and made the “Best Communities” list, and those communities and districts that applied but did not make the list. If one were to think of music education as lying on a continuum, it appears that only schools at the upper end of that continuum even applied to the competition. Communities that do not support their school music programs apparently are unlikely to apply for consideration as a “Best Community.” To demonstrate this point, one of the districts we interviewed that had been unsuccessful in 2008 was selected for the award in 2009.

We had been tasked with uncovering what characteristics separate successful from unsuccessful programs. The narrow spectrum of applicants, however, meant that the differences between those communities that were selected and those that were not, were not as large as we had anticipated. When differences arose, they were noted, but in general, data from all six communities were considered together.

Music versus athletics. One difference that emerged between successful and unsuccessful applicants concerned the tensions between music and athletics in the smaller communities. Perhaps because resources and student numbers are more limited in small districts, the competition for those resources between music and athletics programs is felt more keenly. Interviewees from the rural community not chosen expressed that sports seemed to get more of the funding and attention in their district, and in the conflict over student time, athletics often pulled students away from music. Participants from all groups in the unsuccessful school reported that athletics seemed to be closer to the center of the attention in their district, while successful schools reported more of a balance between music and athletics.

Music and money. A second finding regarding successful and unsuccessful applicants, and not a surprising one, is that funding mattered. Districts that did not have the resources to provide an array of quality music experiences did not fare as well among “Best Communities” applicants. But the funding picture goes beyond school-sponsored activities. Community wealth also played a part in whether applicants were successful. For example, one teacher reported that every member of her orchestra took private lessons. Not surprisingly, that district was a successful applicant. Another teacher charges students to participate in his afterschool chorus, generating nearly $6,000 in additional funds for his elementary program. If families have the resources to supplement what the school can offer, be it private lessons or participation in community-level music opportunities, the school groups clearly benefit.

Communities and schools. While the survey was intended to identify the best communities for music education, invariably the applicants were school districts and, sometimes, individual schools. In the smaller communities, the distinction is minimal; as the school often serves as the central point of activity and identity in a small town. However, in larger districts and communities, the lines are more blurred. One large district visited by the researchers was 90 miles long. Another was so large it was divided into boroughs, each displaying different levels of growth and decline. Making sweeping generalizations about program quality or opportunities for music across such large programs was not always meaningful.

Music versus No Child Left Behind. We were interested in determining whether the current climate of high-stakes testing was having any noticeable effect on both music
offerings in the schools and student participation in those music offerings. All communities reported, however, that music scheduling was holding steady in their schools. Administrators acknowledged the difficulty of assuring that a student’s need for remediation did not interfere with their ability to take music classes. In spite of that, many administrators expressed the importance of guaranteeing that all students have the opportunity to find success in the arts.

Music and children with special needs. Interview participants from all categories spoke to the importance of opportunities for students with special needs to take part in the arts, particularly music. Some of the most compelling anecdotes told in defense of music education were of students who otherwise did not speak, or who were experiencing very little success in school, but who were able to perform solos in school performances and make considerable learning gains in conjunction with their music activities.

Music and “the research.” When asked about the value of music education, participants in all categories regularly stated the benefits of music education to brain function, discipline, standard achievement tests, and myriad other positive effects to student learning. Parents, teachers, administrators and community members were all under the impression that they knew “the research” about the importance of music to learning. This finding is important for two reasons. First, it shows that music education stakeholders across the spectrum value having what they perceive as hard data to support their opinions and impressions regarding the importance of music education in their students’ lives. Second, it would also indicate that more research in this area would be most welcome in the field.

Music as a life skill. More often than not, when asked about the benefits of music in the lives of their children, participants commented on benefits that were non-musical (e.g., academic gains). However, when they discussed the value of music for its own sake, participants praised music education for teaching children a “life skill.” When asked to defend music education, many participants mentioned that gaining skills and appreciation for music is something that people can use their entire lives, through participation in regional theatre, church choirs, and other community-level opportunities. They were quick to point out that skill in music was more likely to provide enjoyment and enrichment across the lifespan than, say, playing football or other team sports.

CALL FOR MORE RESEARCH

The present study attempts to isolate the factors that make for a strong, successful school music program. As we suspected when we began the study, it is fruitless to study schools without contextualizing them in their communities. Schools and school music programs do not exist in isolation. They are an important part of, and reflect the values and culture of, the community in which they are located. This study is one of only a handful that has focused on the relationship of school music programs to the communities in which they are situated. One theme that emerged from the hours of interviews and focus groups is how closely the views of administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members align vis-à-vis the centrality of music and other arts programs in their schools. Much more investigation needs to take place regarding the intersection of school, music, and community. However, the ultimate aim should be a more complete description of community members’ and educators’ views toward the place of music in the schools and its continued support.

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Being a Musician: Musical Identity and the Adolescent Singer

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated six adolescents’ (ages 12-14) perceptions of musical identity as influenced by participation in a community children’s choir. Research questions focused on the role of the conductor, peers, and ensemble participation on students’ musical identities. Data collection included focus group interviews and individual interviews with choristers, their parents, the choir conductor, and one former choir member. Through an embedded analysis of student definitions of musicianship, an interesting dichotomy emerged. Despite participating in a rich musical experience, choristers did not equate these experiences with improving their individual musicianship. Additional emergent themes included the chorister’s strong opinions on the connection between external (e.g., facial expressions) and internal (e.g., feeling the music) expressions of musicianship, as well as their desire to be perceived as “normal” while maintaining their emerging musical identities.

INTRODUCTION
Most music teachers strive to provide rich musical experiences for their students. They hope that their students are influenced in positive, lasting ways through these experiences. Throughout this process, teachers often encourage their students to assume musical identities (i.e., to perform and think like musicians). Researchers have explored the connection between identity and music from a variety of psychological, sociological, and social psychological perspectives. James (1890), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934) laid the early foundation for research highlighting the social construction of identity. Later, social theories, including Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparison and Tajfel and Turner’s (Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, 1982, 1985) theories of social identity and social categorization, emphasized the ways in which individuals compare themselves to others in order to further differentiate their emerging identities.

Research connecting social theories of identity and music often focuses on adult constructions of identity. The increasing amount of research on music teacher identity construction (Colwell & Richardson, 2002) is one example of the focus on adult identity construction. Important contributions include Froehlich’s (2007) many applications of a variety of sociology perspectives—especially interactionism—to teaching music; Paul and Ballantine’s (2002) discussion of connections between the sociology of education...