Editors' Note

Olivia Cercone's persuasive essay on music programs in California's public schools begins with a quote from Greek philosopher Plato on the importance of music. Do you think this strategy effectively introduces the essay? Does it set the tone and motivate the reader to pay attention to what follows? Late in the essay, we discover where her passion originated: she is herself a musician who had positive experiences in high school band. Does knowing this personal information add to her credibility (ethos), or does it make her seem biased by an emotional connection to the topic?

Cercone employs logos through examples, statistics, and assertions from various authorities. How does the essay's organization prevent the logos from becoming overwhelming? As Cercone points out, in times of tight budgets, extracurricular programs like music are often cut in order to preserve "core" subjects like math, science, and English. Do you think the essay convincingly explains the particular benefits of music? How would the essay be different if it compared the learning opportunities provided by music with those offered by drama, art, or sports?

Writer's Note

I have been playing music for over half my life and I do not know if I would be the same person without it. Music education in California public schools has made this possible for me; however, with the state's budget cuts many students will be deprived of the opportunity for music education. I wrote this essay with direct passion, and I hope my argument opens the eyes of those who do not understand music's importance to students.

Music Education: A Gift to California Public Schools

Olivia Cercone

Plato once said, "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything," and coming from a great philosopher like Plato, it proves music is more than just sound. Throughout time, dating back to 1100 BC when the first forms of music were documented, music has had the ability to be powerful, influential, and inspiring. The root of music for each human comes from education. Our society subconsciously starts educating our youth in music from day one, birth, by simply having the sound of song in the background of everyday life. Music education is proven to have a positive effect on a child. Whether it be the early practice of the choir or the first blow into a flute, music education is a fun and beneficial subject for young kids. Unfortunately, because the California state's budget is reducing $2 Billion out of education, state public schools are cutting music programs out of their system's budget, depriving willing students the ability to learn and make music (Knutson). Music programs should not be taken away from the students of California public schools because it provides valuable benefits in both academic life and greater society.

Music education and academic success go hand in hand. Many people, unaware of the benefits of music education, argue that supporting music programs in school is a waste of time and that school funds should be put toward more quantitative subjects such as math, science, and English. However, studies show that this argument is false and that music education is extremely

beneficial to a child's academic performance. For instance, in a 1997 study conducted by Peter Wood of The Comparative Academic Abilities of Students in Education and in Other Areas of a Multi-focus University, elementary students in arts-based programs, such as music, concluded that students' math test scores rose as their time in arts education classes increased. This is evidence that ongoing music programs throughout grade levels can only benefit children in their learning process, test taking skills, and overall achievement in mathematics (Wood). In addition to mathematics, music students excel in the English department as well. According to a study conducted by the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Council on the Arts, students involved in music were found to score higher on their reading, writing, and science than those students who do not participate in music, proving that a student's involvement in music and success in reading and literature corresponded positively (Fehr). However, music students will not achieve this academic success unless they approach learning with a positive attitude.

Involvement in music not only promotes outstanding test scores but also fosters a positive and cooperative attitude toward learning. Although this may seem unlikely, suddenly having a sense of cooperation and a positive attitude just from playing music, it is true. Studies show students were found to be more optimistic about learning and excited to connect with peers when arriving at school. According to study project directors, Pamela Aschbacher and Joan L. Herman, for the 1991 UCLA Humanities Program, students in schools with arts-focused curriculums reported significantly more positive perceptions about their academic abilities than students in a comparison group (Aschbacher and Herman, 2002). Working in a classroom with twenty students all listening silently to a lecture is very different than sitting in a music room with fifty students all working with each other to put together a musical puzzle. Having to be aware of other student's instruments and personal parts in music forces the individual to be more aware, focused, and cooperative with their peers. Aschbacher and Herman's study supports the idea that working together to create a musical masterpiece can force a sense of cooperation and positive attitude toward the task.

Where there is cooperation and positive attitude, there is discipline. To work together with a large group of loud, energetic students, one has to know how to keep him or herself together. Fortunately, according to the American Music Conference of 2000, 73% of respondents agree that teens that play a musical instrument are less likely to have discipline problems and can more easily conduct themselves properly and cooperate with peers more easily (American Music Conference, 2000). That being said, in a 1999 Columbia University Study, "students in the arts were found to be more cooperative with teachers and peers, more self-confident, and better able to express their ideas," all of which support the fact that music helps for healthy and happy learning (Arts Education Partnership). As shown so far, academics and attitude go hand in hand as well by helping a student create a positive atmosphere and a comfortable learning space.

With academic success, positive attitudes, and cooperation, music benefits other parts of society, such as the workplace. One can argue it is pointless because he or she cannot see a direct connection between the job market and economic benefits to music participation and programs. Since very few individuals go into music-based careers, the connection between music involvement and economic benefit is not obvious. However, according to Newsweek journalist, Sharon Begley, the part of the brain responsible for planning, foresight, and coordination is substantially larger for instrumental musicians than the general public, all of which are key elements in the work force (Begley). Whether it may be planning for an engineer, foresight for a police officer, or coordination for a Safeway checking clerk, all three elements Begley mentioned are important in sustaining a proper work environment. Based on Grant Venerable's

study, "The Case for Sequential Music Education in the Core Curriculum of the Public Schools," it's unsurprising that "a majority of the engineers and technical designers in Silicon Valley are also practicing musicians" (Venerable). The use of an instrument and reading music can help students with good rhythmic ability, thus making is easier to detect and differentiate between patterns in math, music, science, and the visual arts, which are all characteristics of the work force (Professional Resource Center, 2000). Each technical detail of musicianship in children and adults carry out to the benefits in academics, positive and cooperative attitudes, and even extends to the work force.

In addition to the many benefits of music, the connection a student acquires with the instructor and with peers in a music class is stronger than most other academic subjects. The bonds students make with each other and with their teacher through music programs are irreplaceable. With peers, such as a partner in a duo or a stand partner, music students all share the common interest of making music, which helps support a solid connection. As well as forming this connection with peers, a music student can form a connection with their instructor. In fact, according to the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, "more music teachers are role models for students than teachers of any other subject. 36% of surveyed students identified music teachers as their role models, compared to 28% for English teachers, 11% for elementary teachers, and 7% for physical education teachers," and I, too, can vouch for this (D.L. Hammon and L.M. Walker, 1993). My high school band instructor, Mr. Handley, helped me through my high school career by motivating me, inspiring me, and believing in me, as he did for every student. A music teacher is more than an instructor; they are a friend, mentor, and role model. Music education helps students connect with adults, such as their teachers, better, and help them create a strong connection. This connection corresponds to academics, willingness to participate in school, and the work force. Sharing a bond with an instructor can influence the student to want to come to school, learn, and participate.

The recent budget cuts on California public schools will negatively affect their student's advancement in education. The importance of music education on children is grossly overlooked by public school systems. When the school board does not take into consideration that music benefits a child academically as well as in greater society, they lose the foundation to a student's well-rounded future. Test scores show it, attitude and cooperation show it, and the work force shows it–music education affects not only a child's scholastic career, but also his or her future. It is wrong to take funds away from public school music programs; however, it is more wrong to be taking away funds for education as a whole. The California state budget cuts focused on specific targets in the economy, education being one of those targeted. Funds taken out of music education as well as general education will only negatively affect a child's life as well as California's future as a state. A child's education is like a seed, when it is planted, it can grow. If the government takes away this seed, California will not grow. Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," and that is the weapon every child should own.

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